

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

Steven Brown
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

February 6, 2008

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

Steven Brown: Narrator
Tami Albin: Interviewer

ALBIN: Okay. So today is February 6th—

BROWN: Yes.

ALBIN: —2008. I'm here with Steven Brown. Do you prefer Steve or—

BROWN: Steve.

ALBIN: Steve. Okay. Steve Brown. And I will start off the way that I start off all my oral histories right now, which is, where were you born and when?

BROWN: Born in 1949 in Omaha, came to Kansas City when I was three-ish. Grew up in—on the Missouri side along—right along state line, went away to school. I'm a Cornhusker living in, you know, KUK State, Missou territory, moved to Prairieville, age— in 1981, '82 and have been in this house since then. So—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah. Spent almost as much time as a Kansas resident as a Missouri resident.

ALBIN: Uh-huh, mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: So what was your child—childhood like, growing up on the Missouri side?

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BROWN: It was interesting. I was the oldest of three and, you know, this was growing up in the '50s and going to a, at the time, suburban school. I graduated from Center. And when my—our first—my first time in Kansas City was in Presida Gardens, which was on the east side of town. It was a—looking back, it was a—when I was—when I was growing up, it's a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. It was where all the young Jewish couples were living. I have one classmate who—she and I go back to kindergarten. The apartment complex had so many kids my age that it could handle an afternoon and a morning kindergarten without having anybody from outside the apartment complex.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: I mean, the school—the school sent a teacher over. And then it seemed like everybody moved from there to the next neighborhood. So we all just stayed together. But when my parents bought the house, Kansas City school—Kansas City city limits ended on 85th Street. And we were on 85th Terrace so we were living outside the city. And the old Kansas City city limits are also the limits for the school district. So we were in a suburban school district. And I went through elementary school, junior high and high school, and the school had never integrated. I mean, the school didn't integrate until, I think, 1969, they had their first black student. My drama teacher used to fret that he—he wanted to do *Finian's Rainbow* and he couldn't, because he refused to do it in blackface, thank God. And (laughs) he didn't want to go outside to find a—so he had to wait until the day that he had a talented black man coming into the school. And the day that he got him, I mean, I got a phone call, We're doing *Finian's Rainbow*. (laughs) I says, Oh, you found your person. So, yeah, it was strange growing up in a lily-white school, not realizing it was a lily-white school.

Went away to school and I was—Lincoln was the liberal center of the state of Nebraska, just like Lawrence is the liberal center of the state of Kansas, went through student strikes and student protests and all of the things that everybody did in the '60s. But I basically did it to get away. I was (laughs)—the question is, When did you realize that you were gay? I don't know. But I knew that it was—I needed to figure out what I was doing. I had been in a youth group in Kansas City. So I had spent all this time with all

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these, you know—of my peers. And my peers were going to KU and my peers were going to MU. And I knew as long as I went either place, I couldn't get—I couldn't be comfortable trying to figure out what I was doing.

So at the—about the same time—I have—I have to laugh. There was a day when Nebraska did not know how to play football. And it was the late '60s. So Nebraska was going through this issue where they couldn't keep their state—their graduates in the state to go to school. So they came up with an admittance policy that, if your—if you were a legacy to Nebraska you were accepted to Nebraska as a Nebraska resident, not for tuition purposes but for acceptance purposes. And at the time, I think Nebraska was one of the few schools left that had to take anybody with a high school diploma. Of course, then they spent your freshman year trying to flunk you out, but it was open enrollment. And this was—I graduated high school in 1967—when your choices were going to, you know, university of something or university of Vietnam. So everybody went—anybody who could get into a school got into a school. And there was never a question of whether or not—there was no, I'm going to take two years off and find myself. It was, No, I'm going to find a school real quick to get my student deferment, because it wasn't until, I think, my junior year that the lottery came up.

So we were all, you know, draft-card-carrying 18- and 19-year-olds. But anyway, so I went off to Lincoln to find myself. I pledged—I was a legacy to my dad's fraternity there, so I ended up pledging the fraternity, spent three years living this half-lie in the fraternity house. My sophomore—freshman and sophomore year, I think I was actually dating. I was dating a couple girls and (laughs) looking back, it was so funny. I don't know how these girls couldn't figure out something was going on. I would drive into Omaha to take them out—to take somebody out. And it didn't matter what time her curfew was. She was home by midnight because the bar closed at one and I had to get back down—I had to get downtown to see—you know, to be there when the bar—when the bar closed. By my junior year, I was getting a little bit more brazen and I would walk out the door on Friday night and just go to Omaha and then come home on Sunday.

And by my senior year, I decided I was tired of playing the game. Years later, I'd been running into my fraternity brothers and we've—you know, we've talked and it's like, (laughs)—and not since, you know, when I came out it was, you know, not a quiet thing.

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I did it on the front page of the *Jewish Chronicle*. You and I talked about—so it was like everybody knew. So now I was comfortable talking about it so I would talk to my fraternity brothers, who had had friends who, you know, spread the word. And they said, you know, We all knew what was going on. And I would say—I started saying, Well, then why didn't you tell me so I wouldn't have gone through—and then I thought, you know, it was probably better that I didn't know that they knew. I—I joke when I—when I finally did my—my coming out, to find out that I was the last person to know that everybody knew. And this is how my fraternity brother—my fraternity house was. Everybody knew. We just—it was the—you know, it was that period of time where you just let it go and didn't talk about it.

So I finished up four years there and then came home and never got away. I mean, I thought about it. I was unemployed for two and a half years, and I kept having people say, you know, Relocate, relocate, relocate. And I kept going, you know, it's—I've been here too long to—I've been here too long. I've made too many inroads. I've gotten involved in too much stuff. I'm not—I'm too—(laughs) I don't want to say—I'm not at a point where I want to start all over. I mean, it took me, in some cases, 15, 16 years to get to where I'm at. And I don't have—I don't want to have to spend another 15 or 16 years doing it again. And I can't—I'm not one of those people who can walk into someplace and just blend into the crowd. I try it and I can do it for one—you know, one organization. I've gotten involved—I belong to Network. And the thing that I like about NetworQ is I'm not a Lawrence resident, so there's no feeling of obligation that I have to do anything, other than participate. You know, I write a check. I show up to an event but I'm just there. I want no leadership role. I just want to, you know, melt into the—into the woodwork. And it's so nice because it's someplace that I can just go and let—Okay, you do it. You know, and—and it isn't so much, You do it, but nobody's coming up to me and saying, You do it. You know. And I've been there too many times where it's, Okay. We want it done and you're the—we want you to do it. Or I step in and do it because nobody else has stepped in and done it. So anyway (laughs)—

ALBIN: So tell me what the bar scene was like in Omaha.

BROWN: Oh, Oma—

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ALBIN: This is a gay bar, right?

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: (unclear) to the gay bar and—

BROWN: Yeah. Omaha had some really—the—in that period of time there was really interesting bars. Number one, the—the—the two—the three standards, the ones that lasted—I was there for four years and in those four years, three bars always were there. Yeah. Maybe two and—depends. One was the Piano Bar at the Blackstone Hotel. The Blackstone Hotel in Omaha and the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln were the notorious gay spots. I mean, Gameron—back in the '60s, the Cornhusker and the Blackstone. But it was a piano bar and people would gather there until it was time to go to the other bar. Now, this was—you know, keeping in mind—this is—bars—number one, bars closed at 1:30—1:00 or 1:30. I was in—lived in Nebraska for four years. In those four years, the drinking age went up and down, up and down. It was either—I was either over the age or under the age. I was never the age of—it was always something.

And so there was the Blackstone, the Diamond, which is still there today. It's the only one that survived. It's the oldest bar in Omaha, gay bar. And the Cave, which was the basement of the Hill Hotel, across the street from the police station. I think it's about where the Max is now. But—and it went through periods. And again, this is the '60s so it was the Peppermint Cave and the Cave in the Hill. You know, but it was always that—it just change names. And it was—it was an experience. Number one, Omaha is very close to Offutt. Again, it was the '60s. Offutt was having witch-hunts on a regular basis and they were always going after—never went after the male officers. They were going after the female officers.

ALBIN: Okay.

BROWN: And not to come off—not to come off as really prejudiced, but it took me a long time, after four years in Lincoln, to feel (laughs) comfortable around a—any of the lesbians because there's nothing meaner than an officer. An Offutt officer.

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ALBIN: Okay.

BROWN: And you would hear glass break. I mean, this is, like, stereotypical. You would hear glass break in the bar and you would scatter because it meant that the girls were ready to go—were going at it with beer bottles.

ALBIN: Wow. (laughs)

BROWN: Yeah. (laughs) So—and it—for years, I mean, I would go into bars and I would hear glass break. But I remember we had—I mean, there were so many fun—fun times. I was underage and not only was I born in Omaha but my mother's whole family was in the Omaha area. And my dad—my folks had lived there. So between their friends and their college friends and my mother's family, the last thing I wanted was to get busted in the—in a gay bar for minor in possession. So whenever I was in there and I was underage, I would never drink. And the bartender knew and the bars had rent-a-cops, security guards. And the security guards knew that I was underage. And there was a back entrance, a back stairway that led up to the hotel. And I would stay close to the back stairs, so if vice came in—you know, these were the days when—when the bars were being raided. I'd get such a kick out of dealing—working with young kids who don't—you know, weren't around with the ring—you know, the buzzer on the front door and the cops coming in just to hassle you.

And the—this was a period of time when the Nebraska Legislature couldn't figure out what to do, so they were passing no same sex dancing laws, which only worked long enough until the old ladies, who liked to go out—you know, who are—you know, the straight older ladies who liked to go out and dance together were told, We're sorry. You can't dance because it's against the law, so they would repeal the laws. But everyone knew that I was there and if anybody came, it was up the back stairway. And the security guards were always fun. We had—at one point we had, like, Stan and Ollie or Mutt and Jeff. It was one little short guy and one tall guy. And I remember they had no authority. If something happened, they had to get the person out of the bar, up the stairs and onto the sidewalk, and then the police could come get him. But they couldn't—they had no authority to arrest.

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And there was a fight one night and they're chasing this woman up the stairs. And she keeps turning around and smacking the cop and he—you know, he's pushing, she's smacking. And he basically opened the door and just pushed her out on the street. And he had—one—somebody had already called the police and they just took her away. Just like—you know, it was—sometimes, it was—it was a comedy night. But you know, dancing to Michael Jackson and so—but that was—that was there. And then a few bars came and went. But the four years that I was there, those were—and I think—I can't remember—I was still going back up to Omaha every once in a while. And I—I mean, I still go to Omaha because I've still got—my mom has friends and I have friends. I don't remember when they tore the Blackstone down but, you know, the piano bar—but I remember, you know, you would sit around. Ten o'clock, it would be packed. You'd have everybody sitting around the bar, you know, singing. And it was like, Okay. Ten o'clock.

And same thing happens in Kansas City, you know, except in Kansas City now with three o'clock closings, it happens in the bars at midnight when all the bars vacate and head down to—well, I don't know where they're going now. It used to be go down to the Dixie Bell. But, yeah, and there were—so there were—there was always a gay life. And again, it was the '60s and things were different and the bars closed at 1:30, and nobody wanted to go home. So it would be your turn to say, Everybody over to my house. And you'd get—and you know, I mean, these weren't 500-occupant bars. These were—you know, there were probably—oh, I never counted but I bet, on a good night, there were never more than 30, maybe 40 people in the bar. And on Saturday night, it was, Okay, it's your turn to host the party. So everybody would go, and you'd get 40 people in your house, you know, in your apartment.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: Sitting around, drinking and talking and there was never any incidents, never any fights, never any calls—you know, things you just can't do today.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

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BROWN: I mean, I—I know a couple guys that live north of the river that used to throw a Halloween party. And they would send out 300 invitations and tell everybody to bring their friends, because they had a house that could handle—and they would get 500 strangers in the house. And they did it for years and never had anything happen. And I think the first time something disappeared was the last time they did it. But they did it for years before anybody bothered to take advantage of it. But you know, when we were in school, we just—you just don't think about that. I remember, I think the only damage I ever caused was a bunch of us were sitting in the kitchen. And I—me, who didn't grow up with a gas oven or a gas stove, didn't know any better. And I plopped myself up on the top of the stove. All of a sudden, (laughs) somebody said, There's something burning. And I went, Oh, it's me. I had sat down on the pilot—above the pilot light. (laughs) So you know, but, yeah, it was—it was a fun time. And it was, you know, a crowd that ran around and was—everybody knew everybody. So it was just a—a great big social situation. But, yeah.

ALBIN: So did you date at all when you were an undergraduate?

BROWN: I was—I wouldn't say I was dating. I was sleeping around a lot.

ALBIN: Okay. But you—yeah, because you mentioned that you had these girlfriends—

BROWN: Yeah, I was—yeah, I—yeah, I was—I—I wasn't really dating so I wasn't looking for a relationship because I knew I was leaving. And I knew I didn't want to stay there. And so—and you know, and the college town's such a tran—you know, college towns, for the most part, are transient towns. I mean, Lawrence—Lawrence is probably more of a permanent atmosphere than Lincoln is, because if you take—we were—during the strike times, we were talking and I think if you took away the faculty and the students of all these colleges and universities that are in town—because besides the University of Nebraska, Wesleyan has a college; two or three other church school—you know, church colleges. If you get rid of the academia and then you get rid of the state employees, there's really—nobody lives in Lincoln. So the thought of staying there in Lincoln was out of the question. Because of the smallness of Omaha, I had no intention of going to Omaha. So I really wasn't looking for a relationship so I just, you know, had a good time. And you know, we went through these things of—

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ALBIN: Oh, hang on a second.

BROWN: Okay.

ALBIN: The tape has ended.

BROWN: See, my drama teacher told me to quit fidgeting but that's okay. (laughs)

ALBIN: Well, actually, now—where did you go? There we go. (unclear). Okay, great.

BROWN: Okay. Yeah, looking back, I mean, we did some really bad things. The cruising spot in Lincoln was the capitol building. I don't know if you're familiar with the nickname of the capitol building in Lincoln.

ALBIN: No.

BROWN: It's the Penis on the Plains. It's got the same shape as Liberty Memorial and you can see it for—on a clear day, you can see it for 20 miles out, just rising—

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: Anyway, so that, of course—you know, I don't know what it is with gay men and phallic symbols, and that's the cruising spot. The mall at—in Kansas City and the capitol building in Lincoln was the cruising spot. And you would just drive around the block and around the block, or else you would walk the block, you know. And we would do, you know, really great things. The governor happened to have a young son in his—you know, a high school son. And we would stand on the steps and yell for the governor to send his son out—

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: —to play. Monday nights were Greek night, Greek where the house—the houses had their meeting nights. And that was the night to go prowling. And of course, the game in those days was, who could take home the straight fraternity guy, which is a

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fun game to play, unless you play it the way we did, which was take him home on Fri—on Monday night and then get together on Tuesday to compare notes. And then you would—you know, you would—had targeted—we had targets. And it was like, Okay. How many times is it going to take for us to take this guy—for one of us to take this guy home before he finally realizes (laughs), you know, that he's not as straight as he thinks he is. You know, the rumors that one of the fraternity houses had a casting—had a casting couch. And I think my—my favorite—I was—I wasn't dating. I was sleeping with one of the guys at the fraternity house next door, across the street. And we only, you know, were doing this for maybe a month.

But (laughs)—but we spent—I would—I don't—I—I—looking back, I can't remember how we got into the house, but his room—they had so many people in the house that they had sleeping rooms in the basement. And his was in the basement. And there was a back door so we would come in and we would spend the night in the room. And then at, like, six o'clock in the morning, I would get up, get dressed, go out the back door, walk behind the houses to the corner, come back up the street on the sidewalk, so that if any of my fraternity brothers were looking out the window, they had to see me walking back from campus. They had no idea that I was really just across the street.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: But I couldn't go through the front door of the fraternity house. (laughs) I remember I was—well, you know, and this was—again, this was the—the—the free love days when the—the bad picture or the stereotypical picture of a gay man was built on the lifestyle in the '60s. There were—no one was in relationships. I mean, it was all—everybody was just sleeping with everybody. It was just—you know. And you met somebody and you slept with them and then you were—you know, you ran around with them and—and I remember meeting somebody in Omaha who was—had grad—had gone to high school with several of my pledge brothers. And we hooked up and (laughs)—and he was going to the University of Nebraska Med School and was living in the Med—in one of the fraternity houses, takes me home to the fraternity house. We spend the night in the fraternity house. The next morning, I walk out of the room in nothing but a towel and ran into three of my fraternity brothers (laughs) who had graduated the year before. And it's like, no. So being in the closet was impossible. But

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again, like I said before, nobody talked about it. So—oh, yeah. That was—the look on—(laughs) the look on this one person's face when I came out—because it was obvious. I mean, it's—you just can't hide the fact, what you're doing. And—but again, it was like, you know, Too bad. Get out of my way. I need to go to the—you know, go to the bathroom. So—

ALBIN: So you moved back to Kansas City.

BROWN: I did.

ALBIN: And so was that the point where you were unemployed for a couple of years?

BROWN: Oh, no. I—

ALBIN: Okay. So what happened when you—when you got back?

BROWN: Okay. I came home. Yeah, and there—before I came home, you know, we all have these, If I would have done this, what would have happened? moments. Well, I've had several of them. One of them was the family that owned the largest independent jewelry store in the United States, who sold out to Buffet a few years ago, was a family friend. And the owner of the store came up to me, called me before I graduated and said, Do you really want to go back to Kansas City? Because if you don't, I'll put you to work. You know, I'll teach you the trade. And because I didn't want—I was still at that coming-out period, I didn't want to do in—I didn't want to do it in Omaha because it was too small town. And I could—I was having trouble enough (laughs)—I'm—I have—the curse—I explain this sometimes as it's a curse—I'm a second generation Kansas City Jew. My—my dad grew up in Kansas City, went away to school, went to Nebraska, met my mother, came back home. So when he came back home, he had his whole network of friends, and he maintained that network. And I grew up with that network and I grew up with my peers of that network. And in some cases, I grew up with the kids of my peers. But I used to have friends who would come by the fraternity house on Friday night and they'd go, Come on. We're going on a road trip. And I'd say, Where you going? We're going to Kansas City. I said, No, no. We're not.

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ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: I said, Because if I step foot in Jackson or Johnson County, my parents will hear about it. And I felt the same way about Omaha. So I came home. I graduated with a major in English and a minor in theater, and you know what you can do with that.

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: So I decided I was going to go to graduate school at UMKC and get my—my doctorate in English. And I tried and I tried and I tried to get into the graduate school, not realizing until the third time I took the entrance test. And I'm—I have no why if they've changed their policy since then, but back then UMKC basically did not want anybody in their graduate program who didn't get their undergraduate degree from UMKC. So the way—but you can't just say that; you have to prove that. So you had to test into the graduate program. What I found out from talking to one of my high school teachers, who was in the graduate program, the entrance test to the University of—to UMKC School of English was their graduate test. So they wanted to—I mean, if you could get in, you could basically do nothing and get out, because you'd already passed the test to get out.

So the last time I took the test, the English Department was on the one side of Holmes. The Education Department, School of Education at the time, was across the street in the school—in the elementary school. I walked in. I sat down with an advisor. And his first words was, Hmm, must have given the English test again this week, didn't they? (laughs) I said, Yeah. How do you know? He says, Because we get all the—you know, this is how we know when—you know, we keep track. So we sat down and we opened up, basically, three books, the UMKC course catalog, the list of certification courses required by the state of Kansas, and certification courses required by the state of Missouri. And we compared the three and we put together a graduate program where I—I got my teaching certificate for graduate credit. It was a fun experience. UMKC doesn't let you take education courses until your junior year. And my—so I'm now a first year graduate student. Juniors in college are the equivalent of me being a senior to them being a sophomore in high school. And that's the year span between me

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and my next youngest sister. So here I am in graduate school at UMKC with all my sister's classmates. (laughs)

ALBIN: Oh, my. (laughs)

BROWN: I mean, it—it was a real—I mean, it was like back in high school with—with my sister's friends. So I got out of there and I went and I started—I started teaching. I had a graduate course with the woman who is currently the president of the teachers union in Kansas City. And we were talking one day and Judy says, you know, Well, what do you want to do? Where do you want to go? And I said, I don't know. What do you suggest? And this was right when Kansas City started its whole deseg operation. And the first thing that they were going to do was desegregate the faculty, because not only were they running segregated schools, they were running segregated faculty in those schools. So the black schools had black faculty. You know, (laughs) there was no segregation in Kansas City. Right? Right. So Judy says, Here's—she says, Here's the secret. If you want to work in Kansas City and be guaranteed you've got a job, call the superintendent of—that's hiring and say you want to teach in either Lincoln Junior, Lincoln Senior, Central Senior or Central Junior. And they'll hire you on the spot. So I did and they did, because they wanted white teachers who were volunteering to teach in the inner city.

So I spent three years at Central. It was the best time—looking back, it was the best time I ever had. The very first day—what they had done in the interim that summer was they paired an inner city school with a suburban Kansas City, Missouri School District school, or a less integrated—a less segregated school—or less integrated school, rather. Okay. And they just—for example, they paired Central with Van Horn, which is in Independence. And they—the first thing that they did was they took 50 percent of the faculty from Van Horn and transferred them to Central and transferred the other 50 from Central to Van Horn, so at least the two faculties were integrated. And then, of course, what happened for the next year was that the teachers who had gotten transferred fought to get out, to get back to where they want—they were the year before. But those of who walked in saying, This is where—you know, (laughs) we were—we were the gift horse.

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And I remember the—the first day, the principal—we were having an all-hands meeting—the principal says, Number one, you know, we've got to dispel these rumors. He says, You understand that this school has—gets a bad rap. And he says, I'll give you a good example of bad rap. He says, We were having a junior varsity—it was Central against Van Horn—junior varsity football game. Middle of the second half, here come the police, the fire department, the SWAT team. (laughs) I think the National Guard. And the principal goes up to them and says, What's the matter? And they said, Well, someone called in a riot on this corner. And the principal says, I stepped back. I says—I pointed to the two teams. I says, Do you not know what a football game looks like? He says, And that's—you know, that's what happens around here. So just be aware of that. And I found that to be true. I mean, incidents would happen at Southwest that no one ever knew about. Incidents would—nothing would—it would be nothing at Central and it made the news that night. The other thing I was told to make—to fit in was never one that—when you're in a completely segregated school, the color of the skin of the faculty has nothing to do with it. If they're going—if they hate you, it's because you're a teacher; they don't care. And the other thing was to get involved. So I became sophomore—one of the sophomore sponsors. And the sponsors stayed with the class. So by the time the class of '76 walked across the stage, I knew every one of them by name because I had taught them sometime during the three years or worked with them and knew half the—half the—the junior class, which paid off greatly when I left the—the inner city.

What happened was my third-year teaching, somebody made this revelation that no one was paying attention to the number of teachers they were hiring. And finally, they realized they had 900 more teachers than they needed, so they started getting rid of them. And there's—high—teacher have no seniority over anybody else who was hired that year, because you all started on the same day. So they got rid of the first-year teachers and that wasn't enough, and they got rid of the second-year teacher and that wasn't enough. And they started into the third-year teachers, and that only seniority you had was you—where you were on the alphabet. And somewhere between MA and MC they found—they hit 900, and everybody above that line got laid off. So I went looking for a job and I had a friend who was teaching radio and TV at Raytown in a nice white flight neighborhood, who convinced me to apply for a job and, of course, you know, I got it—biggest mistake I made. I rue the day because I probably would still be—would have

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still been teaching. It was—it was that suburban attitude that I just couldn't deal with. I—I joke—and this is where the lawyer will come in—Valley girls were not invented in California. They attended Raytown. Carol Burnett knew what she was doing when she put Mama's Family" in Raytown. It was an experience. There were drugs in the city schools but nobody talked about it. There were drugs in the suburban schools and that's all they knew. And it was a situation where, here's a white flight school district, or in a white flight community, who is no longer a white community who just doesn't want to think about it.

One of the feeder schools to the high school was majority minority on—but they didn't want to think about that. We had an all-hands—an all-hands day the first day that I started teaching. And this black man walks up to me and says, Hi, I'm the token. And I said, What you talking about? And he says, Look around. He says, And not only look around at the faculty. He says, Wait till you go into your building tomorrow. There isn't a person of color in the cafeteria, on the janitorial staff, driving a bus, beside teaching a class. He said, I am the token for this district so they can say that they're—they have integrated their faculty. And that was the attitude. And I remember, probably about my second month teaching, the first year. And the principal and I did not get along. Number one, I swear he was a neo-Nazi anyway. He and I had some real issues on religious holidays and stuff like that. So I managed to just leave him alone.

But about the second month I was teaching, one of the kids that was causing so much trouble in school—in the building bopped into my classroom and started his little routine. And the one—I learned lots of things when I was teaching at Central. I learned what I could do and what I couldn't do. You know, rules were, Don't accuse unless you—you know, if you don't know for a fact that it happened, you can't accuse. But if you—you know, if caught in the act, you can punish. This is before the day of you can't touch the kid. (laughs) I had—was sitting at my desk at Central one day and something was going on in the hallway. And I was sitting there and I—I had a student sitting over here and the hallway was on the other side of him. And I would lean forward and he would—he would move forward; and I would lean back and he kept—and finally, I took my hand, you know, open hand and just popped him in the stomach. And I said, Are you going to stand still? And it's like—there was never any, you know, fear that he was going to—

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that I was going to start something, because I knew that basically I had smacked him for getting out of line, and he knew he was out of line.

So this kid pops into my class in Raytown. And I grabbed him by the shirt and put him into the corner and put my finger in his chest, and I said, I know who you are. You don't know who I am, do you? And he said, No. I said, Let me tell you. I've got three years of Central High School under my belt. If you think you're such hot shit, we're going over there right now. I said, Beside the fact that I, you know, know the entire class of '76, I know 90 percent of the class of '77 and I'll throw you to those wolves. And all of a sudden, his whole demeanor changed because I—you know, I basically called him on it. And I said, Here's the rules. You know, you're more than welcome—you know, if you need some place to go, you know, you can come into—into my class. If you want to say hello, fine. I said, But you are not allowed in here to disrupt. But I'm only setting rules for my class. And as long as I don't hear you disrupting anybody else's, that's out of my concern. So he would come by and he would knock on the door and he would wave and, you know, I was giving him rides home and the whole thing. And I would hear him down the hall, just disrupting the hell out of the next classroom.

So I walked up to the principal and I said, You know, I finally figured out what the problem is here. I says, Number one, you're all ignoring the fact that it's an integrated school. And you're so afraid to say no that you're letting the kids run wild, and they're waiting for somebody to put their foot down. And as long as you don't put your foot down, you deserve what you're getting, which of course pissed off the principal. But this was a man who was in his 22nd—when I started, was in his 22nd year of teaching. His goal was to retire. Now, one of the other things that I learned at Central is what goes around comes around. And I'm a firm believer. During Christmas break of his 25th year, he and his wife were in Florida and he dropped dead of a heart attack on the beach.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: They—he was so beloved by his staff that, when they tried to have a memorial service after school for him, the faculty refused. They said, If you want us to attend a memorial service, you'll pay us to be there. So this is—this is who I worked with for three years. But you know, I learned—it—it was one of the things. You know,

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you just—and it was—I used to swear that—I was living in Hickman Mills and I would cross 87th Street and it was time warp. I went from 1977 or 1978 to 1957 and there was days when I wasn't even sure if Brown (laughs) versus Board of Education even come to court yet. Be—it was just—it was just a culture shock for me. So after three years I said, You know what? I'm tired of this. So I left that and started doing a whole bunch of odds and ends, getting back to my—where I got to be unemployed. I was going to graduate—went back to graduate—the only good thing that came from my time at Raytown was I was in Kansas City, Missouri when the teachers went out for the very first time. We walked the picket line from February until May. It's where I learned how to put a pair of pantyhose on under my jeans when you're walk—during the winter because they keep—every man on the picket line was wearing panty hose. But because we were picketing all spring, we went to school all summer. I mean, we got out of school the first of August and took a two-week break to start all over again. But one of the things that came out of the strike, one of the minor things, was they dropped the periodic study requirement that teachers always had. Well, Raytown had it.

And so I went back to—started graduate school. Well, I don't do anything half-hearted. If I'm going to take a class, then I'm going to get into a program. So—you know, and I had this master's degree in—my first master's is in—I think it's in secondary education with an emphasis in curriculum, which is a fancy way of saying I got my certificate. And like the superintendent at Raytown told me, if—they never would have approved that. They had to accept it. I had a master's degree because I had a diploma. But they—it wasn't something that they would have giv—wanted me to get. So I started a graduate program in counseling. And I got my master's in counseling and was having such a good time, I started working toward acceptance into the graduate program. And I was—I'm 30 hours in a—30 hours, a dissertation and acceptance into the graduate Ph.D. program away from a doctorate. What happened was when I started, counseling and guidance was under the auspices of the School of Education, and it was geared for teachers. So class—all the classes were in the evening or during—they were all shortened-period classes. I took two wonderful classes at UMKC. The—there was Sex1 and Sex2. They were concentrated courses. (laughs) If you figure it out, a three-hour course in college, time-wise, is equal to six eight-hour days. It's only, you know, 48 hours. So he would do a 48-hour class. We would meet every day for a week. And it was primarily—it was a lot of, you know, sensitivity training and desensitization. It was

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geared for people who were doing couples counseling, just to get over all the “icks.” (laughs) But he was so—he was so much fun because—I don’t know if he was really out, but we all knew—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: —that he was family. I mean, you know, he and his partner had this elaborate house close to the campus. And he would do exercises and it was like—we were in the basement of the—the first floor of the Education Building. One day, he says, We’re going to do a exercise, and he turned off all the lights. And he says, Now, I want you to all scrunch together and do this and move around. And he came up to me (laughs) and I said—he says, Well, what was it like? I says, Well, like the orgy room at the baths, you know. (laughs) Which is what he expected me to say. But he—he had this—he would walk up to you on the street or at the most inopportune—his favorite was elevators. And he would wait until the elevator was between floors and he would look at you, My God! I haven’t seen you since we had sex last summer. You know, so went ahead and I was—that was—that was a fun course and I worked on and got my master’s degree, got my doc—my—was going on.

And then the School of Education decided to dump the counseling program. And the Psych Department decided to take—was going to take it over. UMKC’s Psych Department at the time was all behavior science, was all behavioral science and they were expanding. And the first thing that they were going to do was they were going to screw with the residency. While in the School of Education, residency was the summer. So you didn’t have to quit teaching. The Psych Department immediately said, That’s out. You have to do a full semester of residency, which meant anybody who was working in educational setting had to quit their job. Well, sorry, you know. So a lot of us did, you know, what—did the same thing. We went ahead, and the nice thing about the School of Education, because it was still in control—School of Education’s, I think, the only school that has a educational specialist degree, which is 90 percent of a Ph.D. And it’s for people—it’s sort of to reward you for getting this far, but you didn’t go the whole way. But we don’t want you to feel bad so here’s another diploma, and if you really want to, you can go through another graduate—you know, graduating exercise.

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So I got my EDS [Education Specialist] in counseling and guidance. Again, what are you going to do with it?

So I went through a period of time when I was doing—I worked for the Bureau of Prisons. I worked for Missouri—I worked for an agency that was contracted to Missouri Probation and Parole, so I did in house—inpatient, outpatient drug counseling, employment counseling. And then I got into a relationship and my partner was an elevator mechanic who always had to do something as a hobby. His previous partner and he started a typesetting and printing business. And when I moved into the—they—after they—they broke up and we got to—we met and got together. When I moved in, we had—one room had an offset printing room—printing press, because he was still running the printing business. The partner—they had finally moved the copy graphics typesetting machine, which is an old—I mean, the old, basic—the discs on that were like this. That was in one of the rooms in the house. They moved that to an office building. But we—we went through the printing business and then we had a shop in Westport. And while we had the shop in Westport, his—he opened up his own elevator company and I went to work for him. He used to say he was the service and I was the office. We were a union shop and sometimes we only had two employees. That lasted for about—for six years.

In fact, I used to joke, six was my—was my magic number. I taught school for six years. I did odd jobs for six years. I was in the elevator for six years—in elevator business. When I started at—when I got to my seventh year at Sprint, it was—you know, it was monumental year because I'd actually been there for more than six years. I was at Sprint for almost 13 years when I got laid off with—you know, me and 19,000 other people. So—and in that period of time, I lost my partner. And that's when—he was diagnosed in '92 in—he was diagnosed in August of '92 and gone by February of '93. He died of PML [Progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy], which is—I don't think they still have a cure for it. PML is the disease that destroys the insulation of the brain. So basically, all your nerve cells short out because there's no—nothing to stop them. And the way it was explained, it's like every day is like waking up to another stroke. And it just gets worse and worse and worse. When he was diagnosed, basically the doctor said, Well, the good—you know, the bad news is it's terminal and it's only going

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to be ugly and you're not going to—all of these things—but the good news is it has a life expectancy of 90 days.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: So it only takes 90—I mean, it took—and he—he was diagnosed with PML, I think in November and gone in February. So—

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: And it was—I mean, it was—it was not pleasant. And of course, you know, this being a not-recognizing-gay-relationship situation, my saving grace was that we had a very good friend who is a lawyer. And the day that Bob was diagnosed, Mike came over and started drafting up all the paperwork, the will, the power of attorney, the living—the living will, everything that I needed so that at no time was there ever a question that I was in control.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: (laughs) It was—looking back, I mean it was interesting. We didn't write his father out of the will because, in order to write them out of the will, you have to mention that they're not going to get anything. We took it one step further. We never even—there was nothing in the will that ever recognized the fact that he had a father, a living relative. I was the sole heir listed in the will, which pissed his father off to no end. The fact that I had become the beneficiary of all the life insurance policies pissed his father off to no end. (laughs) I remember sitting—after he died, sitting in the house and his dad said, Oh, by the way, I have such and such in the garage. And I said, Oh, that's too bad because it's my garage and you're not getting anything out of this house. He was such a pain and such a trouble.

What had happened was—you know, I mentioned that Bob had started this elevator company. Well, he did it on money that his parents gave him. And when he started the business, there was a partner. So to protect their interests, every—all the money that changed hands was done above board, promissory note signed, promissory note

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guaranteed. Partner, two years later, was bought out, released from all his liability. Bob's mother at the time was alive and we—and I—I swear to this day—(laughs) I swear two things. Number one, if she were still alive today, we never would have stayed together. But if she were alive today, he wouldn't have to go through with his father what I had to go through with his father, because she never would have come after those notes. But they were forgotten. So there's notes sitting out there, promissory notes that Bob had guaranteed. They were due—they were 10-year payable notes. The day—the night of Bob's visitation, his father shows up, notes in hand, demanding to see the executor—and it wasn't me—of the estate, because he wants full payment for these notes, plus the interest that they had accrued for 10 years.

There was a life insurance policy set aside that Bob had made plans to do with that would have covered—that covered the notes. There was nothing there to cover the notes and the interest. So for the two years that it took for him to—for us to finally settle with him to give up his claim on the interest, everything sat in limbo. I inherited the house but I couldn't inherit the house until this was settled, because if he would have won we would have had to sell the house to pay him off. So he was—you know, this is not my favorite—(laughs) my favorite person at all. And—but he was such a jerk. His—Bob's mom died and 45 days later, his father remarried. And the way that we found out that his dad remarried—Bob was an only child—he gets a phone call from his father, Congratulations. You now have six stepbrothers and stepsisters. His dad had married his mother's first cousin. His mother's family, between—with—between the grandparents, parents and kids, in those three generations there were over 150 people. His great grandfather had two wives. The two wives gave him 22 children between the two of them.

ALBIN: Wow! (laughs)

BROWN: Now, these weren't—these were—one wife died and then—you know, it wasn't two wives at the same time. It was two separate wives.

ALBIN: Right.

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BROWN: And two different marriages, 22 kids. And those 22 kids—you know, so we hosted 150 people in our back yard of just his first cousin—basically, just his first cousins. So his father was very close to the family so, you know, he ended up—he didn't want to leave the family. So he married this woman who had six kids. I remember we were at home one Saturday morning, and the neighbor across the street—Bob's folks lived five blocks away. Like I said, if his parents—if his mother was still alive, we never would have survived the 13 years we were together, because she would have driven—I—I couldn't put up with her. She—the—his parents were on—everything was joint. It was a joint checking—sav—you know, joint account. The car was—was titled to—and I walked in, of course, and stopped all of this. They had keys to the house. That lasted the first time—until the first time she came home and pissed me off. And I grabbed—she left and I said, Get in the car. We're going for a ride. He says, Where are we going? Said, The hardware store. He said, Why? And I said, We're changing the locks. I said, I'm sick of your parents coming in unannounced at all hours of the night, thinking that they have—and I was real—honestly, I was surprised when we finally did a title search. And I was concerned that when they did a title search they were going to find out that his parents owned the house. Luckily, they didn't.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm. How did—how did his parents react to your relationship?

BROWN: She—well, he was an only child. He was very spoiled and nobody, male or female, was good enough for her son. And I mean, that—that's what it was. And she made it clear. I mean, she would tell my mother how nobody was good enough for her son. So—but she was just a—I mean, she—all the stories you—of domineering mothers. An example: we—we had hotel reservations, plane reservations, and tickets for IML one year in Chicago. The plane was leaving at three o'clock. At one o'clock in the afternoon, his mother called and said, You are not going to Chicago. You have to stay home. This was before we had the reunion. This was Labor—IML is Labor Day. So this was the Labor Day before we were going to have the reunion that summer. And his mother says, You're not going out of town because we want you to be there to help us start fixing up the house. And he said, Okay. So we—luckily, we could—we could sell—this was before you were penalized for canceling reservations. So we canceled the reservations. The hotel didn't—had a waiting list so they were happy. And the people at IML had a waiting list so they were happy. But I said—I said, Okay. She did

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this once. She will never do this again because I won't put up with her. I mean, I'm not going to let your mother control—and no matter what—how much I, you know, feel for you, I won't put up with her. She died two years into our relationship. (laughs)

Which was another—Bob—when Bob got sick, he would—for a while, he was able to get around. And we had somebody living with us that was, you know, taking him where he—would want to do. And what I didn't know was going on was I would go to work every day, and he was doing things like planning his funeral. I mean, God love him for doing this because when it was all over, I—I sort of joked with the funeral director—my choice—the only decision I had to make at the funeral was what color the gladiolas were going to—I mean, it wasn't even what flowers. It was, What color do you want the gladio—and what do you want to do with the flowers after the funeral? Okay. Which I still screwed up. (laughs) But, no, he was planning his—made all the funeral arrangements.

He bought a cemetery plot. And I remember going—he wanted to show me the plot and he's buried at Corinth Cemetery in Prairie Village. And we're standing there and off to the side is this hedged-in area. And I said, Oh, you know, whose family plot is that? And he said, That's the Crow—the Crow family. Well, the Crow family—Crow brothers is the family who developed Leawood. And when I was growing up, Leawood had a white Christian clause. It was the—(laughs) you couldn't—a Jew could not buy property in Leawood. And Prairie Village was developed around Leawood so that—so that the Jewish families could move into Johnson County. The irony was that when the synagogue I grew up in sold off all of its land, it sold it to Crow, and I hope to God that they screwed him royally when they sold him the land. And the—and of course, again, goes around comes around. It wasn't too much longer after he bought that land that the whole company went bankrupt. But anyway, so here's old man Crow, this, you know, anti-Semite—anti-Semite laying here. And I said, Bob, I need to buy the plot next to you. And he says, No. He says, I don't want you to make that kind of a commitment. You know, wait till—you know, when you get ready to buy a plot, buy it where you want to. I said, No. I said, Forget—I'm not thinking about you. I said, That old man spent his life making sure he never had a Jewish neighbor. I want him to have one for eternity. All right. Well, so we decided we're not going to do that. All right.

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Jewish—Bob was Lutheran; I'm Jewish. We did a Jewish, Lutheran funeral because he wanted my rabbi to participate, because there's no—I guess there's no eulogy in the Lutheran liturgy and he wanted a eulogy. So my rabbi agreed to do it. And the first—(laughs) I remember sitting there the night that Bob—after Bob died. And I've got the rabbi and the minister—sounds like the beginning of a joke but it isn't—and we're talking and going, Okay. We've got to get some things. I said, All right. Out of respect to Lutheran tradition and I know that—you know, gentile tradition, we're going to do visitation. My first question to you both is, open or closed casket for the ceremony? Knowing that I don't do open caskets and being pretty sure that the rabbi doesn't do open caskets, because open caskets is not a Jewish tradition. But I wasn't sure where the pas—where the minister was. Minister says, I don't do open caskets. He says, If the casket is open when the funeral starts, the casket is closed before I come in. I went, Thank you. You know, one down. And we figured out where to pass off the service. But I said, Okay. We'll have a open casket because visitation is traditionally open casket. But I demand that the casket be sealed when I leave. And the minister said, Well, why? And I said—and (laughs) I'm one of those people who sort of goes into places and wanders. And I'd gone to enough visitations and wandered to funeral homes. And again, this is going to be a cultural and ethnic difference; in orthodox Jewry, once the person dies, it's tradition not to leave the body alone. Someone sits with the body until the burial. Growing up in that tradition—my grandparents were orthodox—my—actually, all four of my grandparents were orthodox. My mother's parents were more practicing orthodox than my dad's parents. But growing up in that tradition, to wander through a funeral home, a Newcomers or a McGill or whatever, and find empty rooms with open caskets—I says, You're not leaving him just sitting out here all night. So we had visitation and I made—and we sealed the casket.

So, anyway, we had talked about the funeral and he says, Okay. I want this and I want—oh, and by the way, the music that I want—he says, I want a tenor to sing, I Walk with God. And I said, What? He says, I want a tenor to sing, "I Walk with God." It—Mario Lanza sings it in *The Student Prince*. I says, That's all—okay. So (laughs)—so Bob dies and I'm now looking for the music for the—for the funeral and the tenor. Well, the first thing I realize, his ex was a tenor. So when I called Press to tell him that Bob had died, I said, Okay. This I have to tell you. A couple of other things I need to tell you, and I need to tell you that he was—was hinting at the fact he wanted you to sing at

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his funeral, but I'm not going to ask you to do that because I know you don't want to do that. Because I knew he didn't. So I called the only place I knew. The synagogue didn't have a choir. The only choir I knew was Heartland Men's Chorus. (laughs) So I called and left a message on the answering machine. I said, You know, guys, I've got a funeral.

Oh, and the Jewish part of the funeral was—Bob had joked through his illness, Okay. I don't want a funeral during the day because people have to take off work. So I want it on the weekend. I said, Bob, when are you going to have a funeral on the weekend? You want a rabbi who won't do Saturday, and you want a priest—a minister who won't do Sunday. I said, Looks to me like you just can't die, you know. So it came down to—when he did die, he died on a Wednesday and they said, you know, When do you want to do it? And I said—not as much in Jewish tradition of in the ground within 36 hours as it was a good time period, because I could bury him on Friday. I could still sit shiva on Saturday. People could come in for the weekend, and Sunday night, they'd all be gone and I could start dealing with it on Monday morning. So we did. We buried him on Friday. The rabbi delivers this fantastic eulogy, and about three weeks later after the funeral I'm in the office at the synagogue.

And we're—the administrator was talking about, you know, how—how nice it worked, because we—we didn't realize that you could blend two different religions into a service. And the most touching moment, I think, in the whole service—one of the discussions we also had with the casket was not only in terms of open and closed, but—and I—I had to—I led into this with the pastor with, In relation to the whole, the bottom of the whole, where does your funeral end? And he says, The casket is at ground level. I said, Then will you have a problem with the rabbi stepping in at that point and finishing the burial for me? And he says, No. So that was the pass-off. And we're getting ready for the pass-off and I hear the priestly benediction. And I realize it's not the rabbi giving it, that the priestly benediction is, you know, May God bless you and keep you. All right, that's in every—that's in more than—I mean, it's my tradition but it's also in other people's tradition. And it was the minister. The minister was leading it and all of the congregants from Beth Torah were—were doing it. And that's when they passed it off, because we finished, you know, lowering the casket into the ground, putting the dirt on.

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And that was another—when the decisions came—okay. Here I've got this funeral, this floral lay of—on the casket, which is not—flowers are not Jewish tradition. I mean, if you've ever been to a Jewish funeral, there are no flowers. I mean, it's the most—it's the plainest—there's a casket at the end of the room. And I've got this big thing of flowers and the—they said, Well, what do you want to do? And I said, Well, he loved them so much. Leave them on the casket. So the casket went down; the flowers went down and the top of the vault went down. Then the funeral director says, Now, what do you want to do with all the flowers? And I said, Well, what do you want to do with all the flowers? He says, Here. He says, My suggestion, take what—take a couple. He says, Well, then what we'll do is we distribute them to nursing homes and hospitals. He says, you know, The good news is they get new flowers. The bad new is they know why. Yeah, they know—like, Who died?

ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: Like, We're getting flowers. So—anyway, so getting back to this, we're looking for—so I called the chorus and I'm looking for a tenor, and then I'm looking for this music. So I thought, Okay, all else fails, I'll run to the library. I'll get a recording of Mario Lanza singing the song. Well, as soon as I got the tape, I realized, number one, I was not looking for "I Walk with God." It's "When I Walk with God" or something. I mean, he had only given me—he was good about do—I told—he gave me cryptic answers to things. And this was one of them. I was going out looking for the wrong music. All right. So I get the tape. I find the tenor, who happens to be the two-step partner of the guy that's living with us. I mean, small. I went down to the music store. I found the sheet music, found out that the person who sold it to me lived in the next block over, and if I would have known all of this I could have just had her bring—okay. All of this for this song. All right.

After the funeral, we're in the car and I've got—it was a major meltdown getting into the car to go to the funeral, between his—his dad, his dad's wife, his dad's mother, his dad's mother-in-law. But we're in the funeral car on the way to the cemetery. His dad leans over to me and says, It's so nice that Bob used the same music as at his mother's funeral. And I went, What? And I went home and I dug out the box from his mother's funeral, and here's eight copies of this song that I spent three days—of course, you

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know, the good side was it gave me something to do. (laughs) But the fact that he was so specific of what—but he didn't say, It's the same thing that my mother had and we have copies of it. Don't worry about it. Wanted me to have something to do. But now I have multiple copies of it, so if anybody needs it—

ALBIN: That's good to know. I'm just going to change the tape quick.

BROWN: And I'm going to go back up to the bathroom.

ALBIN: Great. Don't forget to take your mike off so—

BROWN: Oh, that's right. This is why I don't put a headset on.

ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: (laughs)

ALBIN: I'll stop it. [tape turned off/on] Put the cord on this.

BROWN: Okay.

ALBIN: So—so how did you meet Bob?

BROWN: I was at a party with somebody that I was out with and met him and it just—I mean, you know, something clicked and I don't think we even exchanged phone numbers. But I ran into him a couple weeks later at the bar. (laughs) And we got together and then we went to—out of town together. And it was like, I had a—I had a three-bedroom house, fully furnished house. He had a three-bedroom, fully furnished house. We went out of town and I never went back home. You know, maybe there's a little bit of lesbian in me. (laughs) The only difference was I didn't have the U-Haul.

ALBIN: Right. (laughs)

BROWN: I—(laughs) I'm sorry. I've been out long enough; I can say that.

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ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: I—what I ended up doing was my sister—I let my sister—my younger sister lives here. My older—my middle sister's in New York, in Rochester. She moved into—into my house in Hickman Mills and then her—now my brother-in-law moved, and they lived in the house until they got married. And then (laughs) my furniture sort of went everywhere. My mother took some. They took some. Because there was no point in moving more furniture into the house that was, you know, fully furnished. So that was—but basically, we went out of town and I just never—never went back home. So (laughs)—which is interesting because I know when that's happening—you know, having done that, I know what to watch for. Bob had a friend who used to come and visit and showed up while I was—while—after I'd already moved in. And I could—you know, I just got that vibe. (laughs) I pulled him aside. I said, This one's not moving in here. You know. When he got sick, we moved somebody in. We got lucky. A friend of ours was having major health problems and couldn't live by himself but was still—you know, was still functional. So we let him move in and he turned into my day—the day nurse. I couldn't have made it through the period that Bob was really sick without the help.

And it was so interesting, because Sprint would offer—you know, offered me FMLA. And I said, Uh-uh. I said, Because my life is—my life is crazy from four o'clock—from five o'clock in the afternoon till eight o'clock in the morning. And it—as crazy as this place—as you all think this place is, it's sanity for me, because it's structured. It's the only—I know this is going to—you know, just—and I need this. So, no, you're not—I'm not taking any time off. It was also interesting that I got—and this is before the new change at Sprint—I got family leave—I got funeral leave for him, no questions asked.

But when I came back to work, one of my co-workers said, We hope you don't mind but we think we just made you the center of a point of contention with HR. And I said, Well—never one to shy away from a good fight—what did you do? They had requested—they had ordered flowers for the funeral and were told by HR that they would—because he was not a family member, they wouldn't send flowers. So they gave me funeral leave. They recognized the relationship for funeral leave for five days,

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if I wanted it. But they wouldn't recognize the flowers. So the department, I think, ended up, you know, actually buying them themselves and sending them. But it was that sort of two—you know, double tongue that Bill Esrey spoke for so long. You know, it wasn't until he left that partner benefits came on—stayed on the table. And I found out from talking to HR people that domestic partner benefits at Sprint were a—brought to the table every year. And basically, with a swipe of the hand, Bill Esrey said, Over my dead body, and would go on, would refuse to talk about it. Of course, there's rumors about why. But (laughs) you know—anyway. So I was, you know, going—was talking about the funeral, one of the other things. A couple weeks after the funeral, I was talking to the administrator about, you know, how nice this all melded together.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: And she says, But—she says, I got to ask you this. She says, What did the rabbi say during the eulogy that upset everybody? And I started to laugh. I says, You mean the point in the eulogy when Bob almost sat up out of the coffin and said something? (laughs) And she said, Yes. And I said, Mark used the S-word. And she looked at me with that look and said, Well, what's the S-word? I says, Well, now, remember. Bob's mother died and his father remarried. And for all the years that he was alive, that woman that his father married was, That woman my father married, that bitch my father married. (laughs) You know. I said, What Mark used the word stepmother, which none of us who knew him ever used in his presence or out of his presence—we never referred to that woman with this—there was a—I mean, it was like someone had said the most offensive thing to the—to a group of 90-year-old women. And it caught the rabbi off guard. Don't worry about it, I said. It's a basic—private joke, and—but (laughs) it really was—I mean, it was a showstopper.

And what had—and I sort of felt a little guilty. Mark does his eulogies by just sitting around, letting the family talk. And when he showed up at the house, I decided, You know what? I have no interest—people who know Bob know him and Mark knows him. And anything that his father has to say is just going to be hot wind. So there's no point in me sitting here and contradicting the man constantly. I just basically walked away and said (unclear). And it was—a lot of it was—the two of them never got—after the marriage, never got along. And I was—had—was so frustrated and upset. His dad

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lives—lived—I don't even know where the man is now, or if he's still alive—but was living—they moved from the house in Overland Park to Mesa, Arizona.

And I think I started to say this earlier—we get a phone call one Saturday morning, because they were living in the house here. And it was one of the neighbors called Bob and said, If you want anything that belonged to your mother, you better get over here now, because that woman is putting your mother's possessions on the curb. So we went over and Bob said, Fine. Call me when she leaves. And the moment that his—that they left, we went over to the house, went through what he—she had thrown out and then immediately went to the safety deposit box. There are times when it is good to be on the signature card—and emptied out the safety deposit box and moved everything, so that she had—because all of his mom's good stuff was in—all of her—not only—not just jewelry but—you know, things that meant something to her were in the safety deposit box. So we got that—all of that out of—out of her way. They moved to Mesa. The last stop on the way out of town was at the end of our driveway when they proceeded to dump everything that they didn't want to take with them on us. And it's still—you know, it's still there. I haven't gone through yet to throw it out. But it will get thrown out. I—although now, I can do what I wanted to do. When that happened, UPS would not ship collect from residence to residence. Because I swear, I was going to pack it all up and ship it to him and make him pay for it. Now, I may do that. Otherwise, it's just going to go. But one of these days, I've got to get to it. And they left town and that was it. And it was like no contact at all.

And he would come to town and he would—we'd—he'd see him for, you know, an hour. His—Bob's uncle lived in Overland Park and, you know, they'd stay there. And then when it really got close to the end and I called him and I said—you know, trying to be as nice as possible—basically, I told him, You want to see your son alive again, get your ass to—back here. Well, okay. We're leaving now. And they decided to drive. And he—they drove from Mesa to Kansas City. And he would call me every couple hours—and this was the morning that Bob died—for an update. And again, goes around, comes around. Bob died at 5:30; his dad showed up at 6:00.

ALBIN: Oh.

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BROWN: And I said—you know, his dad was all upset. I said, you know, Whose fault is it; you didn't get on an airplane. You know, you could have been here yesterday. And I mentioned the—the meltdown in the—in the kitchen at—going to the funeral. In comes that woman's mother. (laughs) Okay. Not only did we have the wife of his father, who has no business in my house as far as I'm concerned. She brings her mother in, who starts this scene about, Oh, my God! I didn't get a chance to see my grandson. I said, Lady, you couldn't pick your grandson out of a crowd of three. So don't get on my case about sealing the coffin. You know?

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: And I really—what finally happened—I mean, I was—had just had it with them—the limo pulled up. And I says, You know what? The limo's here. I am walking to the limo. Whoever is in the limo when I get in is going to the funeral with me, and the rest of you can get there any way you want. And they all stopped and got ahead of me because they knew I wasn't kidding, and I wasn't kidding. I was going to have this single limo ride and just leave—and it was so ridiculous the way that whole—they were carrying on. I—one of the things that I realized after all of this happened was—you know, I mentioned these notes—we were sure (laughs) that Bob's dad had told this woman that he owned the company. And we were sure that the day his dad dropped dead, that woman would show up on our doorstep and demand to take it. So it was very advantageous that Roy Abernathy and Robert Abernathy can show up on the—on the ledger books as notes to R. Abernathy, which is what I did. We got him off—we got—we went through and officially took him off of everything and unofficially took him off of what didn't—we couldn't do officially. And the downside was, in doing that, when his dad got married—by the time Bob got sick, I forgot they were there. I forgot that those were really notes to Roy. But we knew—I mean, she was going to come—she would do it. So, no, she was—it was a—it was a interesting thing. But the highlight was when we were sitting there. He says, Oh, by the way. This is mine and this is mine and this is mine. It's in the garage. I said, Yeah, my garage.

ALBIN: Right.

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BROWN: And I now own that house. So—and he left town. His brother died a few years ago, and from what I—and I went—I did—went to the visitation, just because I had become close to the family. And his dad wasn't there and I said, So where's the brother? Just as a—he had absolutely no common sense. Bob's mom used to say—and when—the reason we think he went off and got married was—his mom used to say, The man has no common sense, that—if—he has to have somebody take care of him. She says, I—I took—she says, If I die before he does, he's going to be lost, and he was. I mean, for that short period—those—you know, he—it took him 45 days to get married. So for those 44 days—

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: —he was a basket case. He would come down to the office and sit and wait for Bob to come back to the office. And I finally—again, I have, you know, no patience for any of this. And I finally said, Okay, here's the rules. I'm not running Daddy Daycare, at least not for your father. You know, Daddy Daycare in another term, I can deal with. But I'm not running a parental daycare service. If I come to work in the morning and that car is parked in the parking lot, I'm not stopping. I used to—there were days when his mom was alive that I would come home and park at the top—there's a sort of hill across the street. And I would park at the—I'd come to the top of the hill and look down. If that—if his parents' car were in—was in the driveway, I'd stay there. And I was sit in the car and read until his parents left, because I refu—I mean, this is—this—it—they were so overpowering. Yeah. I grew up with two sisters. You know, I wasn't in—I didn't grow up in a situation where I—where my parents' life revolved around me, or my life revolved around my parents. And you know, it's—and he was—he was five years older than I was—I am. He was born—his dad was still in the Army and stationed in Europe when he was born. So he must have been conceived on leave and then—but his mother was—I don't know if his dad came home when he was—but I do know that basically—and then went back, so basically, she was his—the only one around when he was—until after the war. So that—that was a strange bond. But, yes, being with an only child and a very domineering mother—I mean, my mother, who can get along with anybody, had problems dealing with his mother.

ALBIN: Wow.

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BROWN: So—but he got, you know—so that then put me to—in the position of being by myself. And I think I mentioned earlier that, you know, I never had to have the talk with my mother.

ALBIN: Could you actually, at some point, tell the story of—

BROWN: Well, okay.

ALBIN: —the *Jewish Chronicle*?

BROWN: All right. So I had—I didn't—didn't have to have the talk with my mother. I had to tell my mother that Bob was sick and was going to be gone in four months. And at that point the conversation went to, You know, my—your father and I had this conversation. My father, by the way, died four years—five years before. My dad died in '89. Bob died in '92 so, okay. So before my dad died, they were having this conversation about how AIDS was going to affect us. And I all of a sudden realized, okay, my—my parents finally put two and two together. I had been living with a man for 15—you know, for 13 years—12 years, hadn't been out with a woman. The last time I had gone out with a woman was my parents and some friends—my mother knew how to get—knows how to get to me. My parents and some friends were having a engagement party for the daughter of one of my parents' good friends at the Kansas City Club in downtown Kansas City. The only way I was going to be allowed to be there was I had to bring a date. So I was teaching Sunday school at the time and I was teaching with a friend of my younger sister's. And without even telling her that I was gay, I said, Here's the scenario, because this was somebody who would also enjoy being able to say that they'd been inside the Kansas City Club, because this wasn't too much after the—after the fact that they finally changed the—opened up the Kansas City Club to Jews. You know, tangent for a while—I'm involved with the Mainstream Coalition—

ALBIN: Oh.

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BROWN: —in Kansas City. And their annual fundraising brunch every year is at the Carriage Club. And two years ago—I think it was two years ago, David Atkins, the state senator from Johnson County—ex-state senator—was the MC. And David gets up. Here's a packed room at the Carriage Club, which until recently had white Christian-only members, looks out to the crowd and says, When's the last time there were this many Jews and this many Democrats within the walls of the Carriage Club? And it's the only time in the—only once a year does that place fill up with Jews and Democrats. Otherwise, it's white Christian Republicans. So (laughs) anyway, tangential back—get me back on track.

ALBIN: So you—you asked the friend to go with you to this engagement party.

BROWN: Okay. So I said, Here's—here's the thing. We're going to the—to this engagement party because we both want to get inside this—the walls of the Kansas City Club. But I'm never asking you out again. There's just no—you know, there's no future in this relationship. And that was the last date and that was in 19—late '70s. Because Bob and I got together in '81 and he died in '93. So, yeah. Somewhere like '77, '78. I said, I need this token date. So when my mom says, Well, your dad and I had discussed the fact that we didn't—we were hoping that AIDS hadn't—wasn't going to affect you, I knew that this had been a topic. Plus, it was strange. My dad had open-heart surgery in the early '80s, about the time that Bob and I got together, because my sister and brother-in-law got married in the early '80s. And I didn't realize this until afterward. There were, like, five guys in my dad's group and they had a pool. This was when there was—they were not testing blood supplies for transfusion. They had an AIDS pool of which one of them, or how many of them were going to contract AIDS through their transfusion. And one of them did.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: So—but I came to the realization that I had two choices at that point. I could either sit around the house, eat bonbons and feel sorry for myself or get out and do something. So I took the let's get out and do something attitude. The first thing I did was—the Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Committee had just started a committee on gay and lesbian concerns. And somebody called me and said,

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Do you want to become involved? We—I had done things previous to that. Four of us put together a Jewish social group in the early '80s. And it survived for a while and it was great. We got—initially, we were getting together every month. We'd celebrated the holidays together. I remember putting 40 people for Seder in my dining room.

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: We moved the furniture out. I put three 10-foot tables with chairs on both sides. If you're familiar with how the seder works, you know, doing a potluck seder is fun, (laughs) and especially when you have one oven. Luckily, my next-door neighbor was out of town, so I now had two kitchens, three ovens, two refrigerators. And food came in and it either went into my refrigerator, my oven, my next-door neighbor—or next door. And at the point in the seder where it was time to eat dinner, we got the bucket brigade. And we were passing food this way into the house to—for dinner. Afterward, the leftovers went—you know, we did all this. Well, that group survived for a couple of years. It went dormant. A few years later, we started it up again and the people who were on that group—some of the people who were involved in that group were on the committee. So when Bob died, you know, and they knew that I was looking for something to do, called and said, Do this. I got involved with that and one of the first things that we accomplished—we—in the short time that that committee was working, we actually had three major accomplishments. Number one, we got the Jewish group going again for a short period of time. Number two, this was the period when AIDS was really hitting Kansas City, and there's only one Jewish funeral home in Kansas City. And if you want to be buried in an orthodox or conservative synagogue, you have to go through the ritual, the cleaning ritual.

And the owner of the funeral home would not allow that to be performed on anyone who died of AIDS. And we worked with him to the point that we said, Fine. We'll do it. You know, so—so a group of us went through the training, went through and had—we had to be vaccinated with hepatitis A and B vaccine, which he paid for, which was great. But we were on call to do this ritual in case we needed—it needed to be done. But meanwhile, it put us in the rotation. So I remember going in to my supervisor. I was working at Sprint at the time. And I said, Okay. Here's the scenario. This is how this works, so you know what's going on. I'm part of this community that prepares the

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bodies for burial. It's a process that starts the morning of the—of the funeral. And you don't know that you're going to get called to do it until eight o'clock the night before, because it's not—they don't set this up as—because I think—I don't know the real reason but I am sure it has something to do with the whole tradition of it. So I said, On any given night, I can get a phone call that I need to be at the funeral home at eight o'clock in the morning. So on those mornings that I'm not here, that's where I am. And when I come in at nine o'clock, it's because I've done this. And, well, the look I got from him when he realized I was—you know—it's eight o'clock, deal with a dead body; nine o'clock, show up to work—sort of freaked him out.

But anyway, so I got involved in this. And at the same time—this is about the same time the Human Rights Project [HRP] in Kansas City, Missouri was working on getting sexual orientation added as a protected class for housing accommodations and access to Kansas City, Missouri. And the executive director of JCRB said, I really would like you to get involved with HRP so I can—so I know what they're—so I can keep an eye on what they're doing. Not that I want to—you know, I'm just curious as to what they're doing. So he sent me—I started going to board meetings. Well, after I think, four board meetings of HRP, I got on the board. And you know, it's this proverbial snowball. It's like once you start, then this one leads to this one, leads to this one. So I was basically hooked on LGBT advocacy by 1994. Well, must have been while I was on—I was chairing the committee for JCRB [Jewish Community Relations Bureau]. We were working with the rabbis—the other accomplishment that we had is that we reached out to businesses and schools. And it was a two-fold reach. One was to get sexual orientation—and this was before—you know, unfortunately, this was before the days of recognition for gender identity. And you know, all of us that got sexual orientation ordered—added to things in the '90s now were fighting to get gender identity added.

They were working in Kansas City, Missouri to get it—to change the '93 ordinance. It was so great that Lawrence, you know, did this in 2006—2007, so you didn't—you did it right the first time. But what we were working on was getting sexual orientation as a protected class in employment and also getting organizations to change their membership applications and membership entities. One of—I was on the board of the synagogue. What—backing up a little bit, I grew up in a conservative synagogue. I didn't belong anywhere for a long time. And I had—we had a friend who was killed in

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'87—'87, '88. And I remember sitting—it was Bob and this friend of ours, the lawyer that did all of the legal work when Bob died—the three of us sitting in the funeral home listening to canned Catholic funeral number 402 being delivered by a priest who had no idea who he was talking about, had, you know, just basically been assigned, It's your turn. You know, your name's up. You do it. And I turned to Bob and I turned to Mike and I said, The day I die, the rabbi that does this will know who I am. And so I went off and, within a week, joined the synagogue. And I remember sitting down with the rabbi and I said, Okay. Is my being gay going to be an issue? And he says, No, because we're not going to make it an issue. But you know—and—and I—I talked about how miserable my—the relationship—I don't know if it was on tape or before tape—about the rabbi—no. I'll get to that.

My current rabbi is six months older than I am and it is so nice because we're peers. I go in every—every year for my birthday blessing and (laughs) he'll go, And how old are you? And I go, Six months younger than you are. Yeah. I just sort want to rub it in. Anyway, but I joined the congregation. I got—it was a brand new congregation. We were just putting it together, tour-like. Initially, there were 10 families, 15 families. When I got involved, there were 30-some families. I was on the board. I was—you know, I helped write the bylaws of the congregation, which is an important thing to keep in mind. As my, you know, life progresses, remember, those Beth Torah bylaws will come up later. So I was on the board and I had two of my—two of my lesbian friends from the Jewish group wanted to join the congregation. And they said, But you know, it's not fair the way the dues are set up. Jewish congregations have—have set dues. There's no—I used to get so frustrated at HRP board meetings. And I would say this and I'd say, you know, No offense to all of you but you don't run an organization on 'pass the plate' mentality, which is rush out and collect money and spend it and rush—you know, you have to budget what's—you'd have to know that X is coming in so you know—all right. Because—and Jewish congregations are run that way. I mean, there's a dues structure and all the spending is budgeted, knowing that this is going to come in. You know, it's not—you know, maybe somebody's going to tithe for this month and maybe somebody's not going to tithe. No. You're—you are billed every month for your share of the dues.

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So anyway, these two women came up and said, We want to join but the dues structure is unfair. First of all, there is no place—we can't join as a couple. It's man and wife. And we don't want to join as two individuals, because our dues as two individuals is more than they would be if we were married. So we worked and what we did was we created a household membership in the synagogue. And the household was defined as two adults. Basically, it was—it was the definition of a domestic partnership. We left it open enough that if it was a, like, son and mother—you know, a parent and child, adult child, that would work. But primarily, it was to address the gay and lesbian households. And it went through—and it was—it was okay. And they joined under that. Well, we took that definition out into the community. So now if—for example, unless they've changed things, if you want to join the Jewish Community Center in Kansas City in Johnson County, they have a household membership there. The two adults living in one household as a—as a household can join for the same price that a husband and wife join.

The other thing we did was we went into—into school settings, primarily—you know, we went into friendly ones. So we went into the religious school at Beth Torah and said, Let's take a look at your student information sheet. You know, What does—what information is asked for on a student information sheet? Well, typically, father's name, mother's name. What do you do in a situation where you have a same-sex couple with a child? You have got to take father and mother off the form and put parent 1 and parent 2, which they did. (laughs) One of the women on the committee had a Montessori school in Liberty, and she changed it. And I remember the first—she walked into the meeting one month and she's all excited and that. And we said, Well, what happened? What happened? She says, I finally got to use my form. She says, I had two lesbians come in with their child. And I got to say, Here. Here's my form that doesn't ask for a father and a mother. It just says (unclear). So that was another thing that—that we got accomplished. But it brought us notoriety.

So four of us on the committee got contacted by the *Jewish Chronicle* that they wanted to run a story on being gay and being Jewish in Kansas City. So the four of us agreed to do us. Out of the four—two of us had grown up in Kansas City. One was one of the women that had joined the congregation as a household. And another one was, you know, a single man—single gay man. So I—we were approached by the reporter and

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sort of like, you know, I did with you. You know, Well, what do you want to do in terms of identification? And the reporter says, Okay. Here's what we can do. You can make up a name. You can use your first name or you can use your whole name. So just to get—to bounce it off of her, and it wasn't like it was going to make my mind up either way, I called my mother and I said, Okay. Here's the situation. The 'Chronicle' is going to do the story. They're going to bury—this is the other thing we were told. They're going to—this—the point was they were going to talk to the four of us and then talk to rabbis to get the different—the orthodox conservative reform and traditional view. And they were going to start with that and then lead into—so basically, they were going to put the four of us in the middle of—bury us in the newspaper. You know, bury us on page 8 of the 16-page newspaper. And we were all comfortable with that. So I sit down and did a (laughs) probably three-hour interview with the reporter. And we were talking and I don't have a problem discussing lots of things. And we get all done. So we get all done and I've—we've talked about the fact that I'm on the board of the congregation. I'm the social justice—no, I'm a membership chair of the congregation. I'm on this group. I belong—I grew up in this. And I says, You know what? If they haven't figured out who I am by now, I'm going to help. I said, Just put my name on it.

So I called my mom and said, Okay. The story's going to run. It's going to have my full name so there's no question about who's talking. And she puts it to rest. The next morning, I had a panic attack—not big panic. I picked up the phone and I happened to know—I've known the—the editor of the *Chronicle* since he was a little boy. And his aunt and I were in this youth group together, so anyway, I called and I said, Is the story—have you put the story together? Yeah. I said, Would you pl—did you read it? Yeah. Is there anything I need to call a lawyer about? He says, Oh, no. You didn't attack anybody. You didn't slander anybody. You—you don't have to worry about going to court over anything you said. He says, I would have cut it but you didn't say it. So I'm thinking, Okay. This is going to work. *Chronicle* comes out on Friday morning. My mother, who at the time was working at a store that was the challah drop off. The bakery in Westport would bake challahs and bring them out to Overland Park and drop—and they were being sold out from the store, so no one had to drive to Westport. You know, God forbid, we should have to drive into Midtown. And I get this phone call about 11 o'clock in the morning. My mom says, The rabbi was in. I says, Okay. She says, He read the story. I said, Okay. He hated it. I said, What was wrong with the

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story? Well, it makes it look like Beth Torah, because three of the four of you now belong there, is a gay congregation. (laughs) And I said, Okay. I'm going to see him tonight. I'll get to the bottom of this.

Go to the synagogue and, actually, I didn't go to the synagogue yet. Beth Torah was the—was the epitome of Judaism for—for years. We were the wandering congregation. We were a congregation without a home. We rented space from a school building for a while. We rented space from the Jewish Community Center for a while. It wasn't until the mid—the early '90s—I mean, we were formed in '88. By '93, we started doing a building campaign. But for those years, every six months we moved on. So at this point, we were holding services in the Jewish community campus. So I walked up to the rabbi and I said, I understand you read the story. Says, It's a great story. He says, I really like what you all had to say. And I said, (laughs) Well, you know, that's not the story that my mother is telling all of her friends. So I said, you know, Tomorrow when you see her, because we were going to be back—I said, You need to talk to her. So the next morning, I show up at the center for services and I'm sitting there with my mom, and all of her friends are coming up with, Great story! Great interview, really insightful, all—great information.

And my mom fi—it—the truth finally came out. My mom finally turned to one of her very good friends and says, Yes, but keep in mind, it wasn't your son who came out to the Jewish community on the front page of the 'Chronicle' yesterday. So I gave my mom that and sort of let on. But at that point—and of course, the next thing I realized when that happened was that I was the last person to know that everybody knew. It was like, Why didn't anybody tell me? But one—and I use this—one of the things that the community—the Relations—the Relations Committee—Gay Concerns Committee had was, Who put together a speaker's bureau? And we would go out in the community and talk about being gay and being Jewish. And I talked about, you know, having this—the talk with my parents or not having to have it. And I finished it with, And for all of you grandmothers out there who have been trying to fix me up with your granddaughters, send me your sons.

ALBIN: (laughs)

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BROWN: And one of the lesbians basically did the same thing. She said, I get so tired of sitting down and having people automatically try to fix me up. You know, 'I've got a son. I've got a nephew. My brother's got'—you know. And it got to be where I thought, 'Okay, it's—I can stop trying to—having to worry about coming in'—you know, it goes back to what I said about coming to Kansas City what I was in college. I can—I can come to Kansas City now. I can—my mom'll say—you know, I'll talk about somebody and she'll say, Where did you meet them? And I don't have to make up some story and then try to remember. You know, I guess—at one point, I said in my speech, I can even tell her I met him in the park. And somebody pointed out, Don't tell her that. But it—it made it so much easier to do things. I didn't have to worry about where my picture showed up. I remember before this and when I was in graduate school, somebody talked me into entering a drag competition. (laughs) And that's—that's a whole 'nother—regress for a minute.

When I first came home from school, moved back to Kansas City—again, period of time, the social spot—a social spot was the mall. And it wasn't as much for the sex in the bushes as it was a place to go and see people. And as long as you stayed on the driveway, you really weren't—you weren't hassled. It was safe. This was before the days of gay—really days before—of gay bashing. So to get a—I mean, there were days when the whole place was full of cars. And people were out there, you know, (unclear) and the whole bit. If—and that same period of time, if you went to places like Seattle or Denver to the beach, which was the park, you know, it was—it was just—it was a gay—it was someplace for the community to gather because there wasn't any place else to gather. But we weren't—we hadn't started making a statement yet, so people weren't coming to get us yet. You know, this is all pre-Stonewall, or just after Stonewall. But anyway, one of the first people that I met or ran into when I came back to Kansas City was the bartender from the bar in Omaha.

ALBIN: Where you were underage.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: Oh.

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BROWN: Who had—who had come here. So he sort of took me back under his wing and it—it was—he was living in an apartment building with several of the performers at the Jewel Box. And the Jewel Box in its—when it was around, was not a drag bar. It was one of the—one of the prime female—female impersonator shows—showcases in the country. There used to be—just like there was a low circuit, there was a—a female impersonation circuit. There was a theater in Chicago, Finnuncio's in San Francisco, and the Jewel Box in Kansas City would share talent. Charles Pierce came through Kansas City. Skip Arnold, who gave me some of my favorite lines, came through—or was in Kansas City. So this bartender was living in—in an apartment building with three or four of the performers. And at the time, the Jewel Box was at 31st and Troost.

What brought my dad to Kansas City in the early '50s was he brought the paint company that he worked for to Kansas City. And they had a store someplace for a little while, but the store that I grew up in was at 33rd and Troost. So—and at the time there was a barbeque house across the street from the Jewel Box run by somebody my dad grew up with. So I'm—I'm being approached by the—by the performers at Jewel Box. You know, You've got a theater background. You know, you've got acting experience. Let's teach you the trade. And I said, Girls, there's only one problem. Again, going back to second-generation Kansas City Jew—I says, There's no way in hell you're putting me on that stage, because the first time I come out, my parents will know. My dad still works down the street. I don't know that my dad won't come in here. So I said, We're not going to do this. But I still picked up a couple tricks of the trade. I remember I—somebody talked me into doing a drag contest. I never—I talked about never having this conversation with my family. If anybody knew that I was gay, it was my younger sister because she and I were five years apart. But up until she got married and had three kids, she and I were the same size. Very convenient. So when I needed something to—to drag in, it came out of her closet. When I needed a wig, it came out of her closet. You know, and I was—looking back, I was so stupid.

ALBIN: Were you just taking the stuff?

BROWN: I was borrowing it.

ALBIN: You just—were you saying, I'm going to borrow your dress?

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BROWN: Oh, no. Who asked? (laughter) Who asked? I would go in the house when she wasn't there and just borrow it. And I mean, I was only going to borrow it for a night. You know. (laughs) But I remember—yeah, like I said, looking back, I can't believe I did this and actually thought that nobody would—she wouldn't notice. I entered this drag competition with her wig, had it styled, (laughter) and wore it and put it back on the wig stand, styled. And she—of course—and she never said anything. There are a couple times when I actually went out in drag. There were a couple—there was one night I almost got killed when I went out. I was—the bartender at one of the bars and I, after the bars closed went to one of the after-hour places in Kansas City, Kansas in drag, picked up two men. And the men didn't realize that we were men until we got them in the car. And they—it started to get real hairy and I am coming out of my clothes. (laughs) Like, I'm going to tell—I'm going to show you I'm a man. And I just basically stripped down to my underwear in the front seat to—you know. (laughs) But I would—these are my sister's clothes I'm wearing and I would borrow the clothes, and I'd wear them to the bar and I wouldn't even take them out and have them cleaned. (laughs) So here I am—I'm in—she's still in high school and she puts on this skirt and it has to smell like cigarette smoke. It was in a bar. But I don't know why it never dawned on me. And she—like I said, she never said anything about it. But moving back to—after, you know, my—my days of getting involved, and just one thing led to another. And I just—I started—then it got to the point where, because I was open and out, someone would call and say, you know, We really need to diversify our group.

I served on the Kansas City—the Western Missouri, Kansas affiliate of the ACLU on the board for years. I served on the chapter board—Kansas City Chapter Board for years. I was president for years. But what got me started was I'd gotten involved with—with the Democratic Party in 2000 and met some people. And those people—you know, this relationship led to this relationship. But I'd get this phone call from the then president of the chapter board. She says, We really need to diversify our board so we want you on board. I said—you know, so—and I used to joke. I used to walk into situations with two cards in my back pocket. I had my gay card in one pocket and my Jewish card in the other pocket. And it was, at what point am I going to—are we going to slam my cards down? So I walk into the ACLU first meeting, going, Okay. I got my two cards. Which minority am I representing at the table? And I walked in and I take one look at the table

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and I said, Roberta, come here. I said, You don't need me on this board. (laughs) I said, I know who's—who's what. I said, you know—and I didn't say this. You've got a lesbian over here and this is a gay man over here, and you've got two Jews so you don't need another one. So, yeah. But at least, you know, it got me involved in that and that opened up doors. So between '93 and 2000, I was focusing a lot on the synagogue. I was on the board for six years. I was doing a lot of work with HRP because we used to—even after the ordinance was passed, we still—we got to be very—you know, we were the political voice in Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1998, Barney Frank came to Kansas City with a group of 120—and called together a group of 120 people and said, We are going to form a national LGBT Democratic organization. We always joked for a while that the organization was to the Democratic Party what the Log Cabin Republicans would like to be to the Republican Party, because we were respected. We were honored and we were—our opinions mattered. Anyway, so he brought this group to Kansas City. We spent the weekend putting together this organization. And he—he says, I—I chose Kansas City for two reasons. Actually, I think it was three reasons. Two—one reason was Kansas City is centrally located and it's convenient for anybody to get here. The second reason, he said, And there's no organization in this town. And the third reason, (laughs) I'm sure, is Kansas City is one of the few cities in the country that doesn't have a—doesn't have union hotels. And Democrats only will—if there's a union hotel in town, will put—will use that union hotel. But because there aren't any—none of the hotels here are unionized—but he says, But the other reason is there is no organization in Kansas City. And I challenge those of you that live here to do something about it. So those of us that lived here got together about a week later, and it was the most interesting initial meeting we'd ever—we'd had. HRP was in existence from, like, 1991 and finally died. They buried it in '97.

Okay. So for those six years, there had been a constant flow of people on the board, coming and going and coming and going. We walk into this first organizational meeting of this new Democratic organization in Kansas City, and there's nobody at the table that hasn't sat on the board of Human Rights Project. So we knew we—we knew, you know, we had the right group. Not only did we have the right group, we had the mailing list to Human Rights Project in our control, which was a list of several thousand people.

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We had the—Tim van Sant, who at the time was the sole gay man serving in the Missouri Legislature, and all of his contacts. And within six months, we not only had Four Freedoms Democratic Club up and running, but we were already players in the first—in a city council election. So that got me started. That got the Democratic bug in me started. I went to—I—they were sending a bunch of us from Sprint to Atlanta to job shadow. And they were leaving it up to us. Well, it just so happened that Stonewall was having their first annual meeting in Atlanta. And I said, This is the weekend I want to go. So I flew in on Sprint's expense and flew back on Sprint's expense.

ALBIN: Okay. So on Sprint's expense?

BROWN: And back on—but—and we shadowed on Wednesday and Thursday, and Friday I had them drop me off at the convention hotel on Peach Street. And we went upstairs and one of the activities was they divided us into regions. And we were—we were starting to work on bylaws and we were dividing into regions. And they put those of us that were in this one region together, and there were, like, five of us. And the board had established that there were to be three alter—three delegates and two alternates from every region. So the executive—actually, it wasn't executive director. It—the organization was being run by—out of Barney's office for a while. And his chief of staff came in and said, Okay. There's five of you there. Decide who the alternate is and decide who the delegates are, and you're now on the board.

So (laughs) we—that's how I—I got on the board of Stonewall, immediately got involved in doing things, and we started working on bylaws, and having written Beth Torah's bylaws, brought Beth Torah's bylaws to Stonewall to use as a base. When we wrote Four Freedoms' bylaws, they are Beth Torah's bylaws. I'm a firm—firm believer. There are two—there are two truths in this world. There is only one fruitcake. It just keeps getting passed around. And there's only one set of bylaws and we wrote (laughter)—if you look at the bylaws of Four Freedoms, Beth Torah and a couple of organizations that I've been involved in, the only difference between Beth Torah's and those, there's no rabbi in this organization. (laughs) But—so I got on the—anyway, so I got on the board of Stonewall and this was '98, '99, and we're coming up to the 2000 election. And we're starting to make a presence—our presence known nationally. And I remember—I think one of—one of the highlights, I get a phone call first part of January. Al Gore has

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called and said he wants to meet with the board. And the day I get the phone call, he was in either Council Bluffs or Des Moines, and they said, We need you in DC tomorrow morning. Can you be there? I said, You know, sure. Why not? So I run to—you know, I get to DC and I'm saying, Why are we here when he's there? And he's going to be here tomorrow. And they said, Well, initially, he said, 'Come join me on the campaign trail. We'll just do—you know, press op the whole thing.' And we said, 'If we're that important to you, then you come to us.' And he agreed. And—I need to take a break. All right So—

ALBIN: Okay. So you're going to go visit Al Gore.

BROWN: We're going to go visit Al Gore. So I said—I said, you know, What's the deal? We're here and he's there and—Well, this is where he's going to be. The other thing that was interesting was that—I guess there's a—I'm not from the South but I guess there's something in southern hospitality rules that say that you invite your enemies to your office and your friends home. And the invitation that from Gore, (laughs) the original invitation that came from Gore was, Please come over to my house for breakfast, to which we very quickly responded, No, thank you. We'll come over to your house for coffee and coffeecake.

ALBIN: Now, why wouldn't you—why wouldn't you have breakfast with him?

BROWN: Can you imagine eating breakfast in the presence of the vice president of the United States?

ALBIN: Okay.

BROWN: That was it.

ALBIN: Okay.

BROWN: You know, you don't want poached egg drooling down your—to give you—you know, to give you an example and just, and hopefully to get back, I ended—a few years later, I ended up in Los Angeles at the Democratic National Convention, and I'll

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lead up to that. But the one thing that made—and I was talking to somebody last night at the caucuses. The thing that made Los Angeles—even though it was a contested convention, the thing that made it so fascinating was, it was L.A. It was—it was the star power. I mean, we had parties at—I had invitations to a party at the Bel Air Hilton. We had parties on the Santa Monica Pier. But one of the—and Barbra Streisand did a special concert for just the delegates. I—I sat and saw Barbra Streisand live and my ticket—granted, it was on the 28th row of the upper balcony at Shrine Auditorium, and she was this big—but I paid a hundred dollars to see that woman and Whoopi Goldberg and Julio Iglesias. But that Sunday morning, Barbra Streisand hosted a hundred-thousand-dollar-a-plate fundraiser at the house—her house in Malibu. And she served. And I was sitting out one morning talking to a woman and she—I said, So how's—you know, how's the trip been and how's your experience? And what's your most—you know, your most—your favorite memory to date? And she said, Well, I guess trying to put breakfast down when it cost a hundred thousand dollars, and Barbra Streisand is handing you the plate. She said, The plate—there were like—I don't know how many people showed up. But who can eat? You know, you can't eat in the presence. You're so awestruck.

Well, that's—getting back to—there was no way that we were going to sit there and let the vice president watch us drool scam—you know, poached eggs. So we got together and, you know, looking back, it's just mind boggling. We all flew in and we had him for an hour, which, I mean, considering his schedule, we really appreciated. So we were going to make sure we used our time. So we all met at one of the guy's house to plot our strategy. You know, we have one hour. What do you want to say? What do we want to get discussed? So we thought, 'Well, what are our—you know, what are our issues?' This is 2000. Our issues: AIDS and death. I don't think we were going to deal with Don't ask; don't tell, and immigration. Immigration was important to our community in 2000 because it's—it's heterosexually biased, which, living in a middle-of-the-country state, I don't realize. But talking to people who are in relationships in California and in Florida and in Texas, whose partners are not citizens and who are having their relationships broken up because student visas expire is an important issue. You know, it wasn't the illegal/legal—immigration was not the topic but it was—but—but looking back, it's still—we were talking about things that are still on the table today. Oh, and hate crimes. Even before Matthew Shepard.

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So we're—we're sitting there and we're talking. And then we decided to go out for dinner. And there's—20 of us showed up at the house. I think about 10 of us were sitting around dinner. It's seven o'clock at night. The weather forecast comes on and they're forecasting snow in DC in the morning, and then the school closings, and then the business closings. And I'm sitting across the table from my fellow board member from Minnesota, and we are in hysterics. I mean, we are both from towns where school is cancelled when the school bus tries to make the run to school at six o'clock in the morning before the seven o'clock closing, or getting back to when I was teaching in Raytown, when the school bus—the school bus company owner would make the run at 7:30 and decide at a quarter to 8, after the faculty had arrived at school, that they were going to call off school. But because the teachers got there, you can stay.

Anyway, so we're—we're laughing about this, get up the next morning. There's no—I mean, it's basically a Kansas City dusting. But we go out and we get into the cars and we, you know, get—we get driven to the—to the house and go through the security. And this is all pre-9/11 so it was basically pass the—pass your driver's license up. Pass—you know, get in, sit down and have this wonderful conversation. You know, we told him. We said, We're not—at the time, Bradley was still in the race. We said, We're not here to endorse. We're here because you are the currently serving vice president of the United States. You have an in to the White House. But I remember walking into that house and, I mean, it's just—it was amazing because it's a residence. And I mean, there's a big table in—I can still remember. There's this huge table in the entryway. And I don't know where I was at but I wasn't paying attention to the Gore family. I had no idea that Tipper was a drum player. And sitting in the bay window in the entryway are Tipper's drums, and anyone who plays drums knows if you want to muffle the sound of your bass drum, what do you do?

ALBIN: Stick a blanket in it, don't you?

BROWN: Exactly, or a pair of sweats.

ALBIN: Right.

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BROWN: Here's Tipper's drums with Tipper's sweats. (laughs) I mean, we were in the house. On the—on—this was—you walked in and here's this table. Drums are over here. Dining room is over here. And the family—the living room area is over here. And the house is open to the public—is public area on the first floor and part of the downstairs. The bathrooms are downstairs. But it's living room and you walk through and it's all family picture. I heard something today on NPR about somebody who got into Ted Kennedy's private area, and it's all pictures of Ted and—and Bobby and John and Joe and the family. Well, this is what are out on—on the—on the countertops. So it really—I mean, it was really, you know, a homey feeling. And we sat and talked to him and talked to him and got our issues addressed. I'll never forget. We got all done and he says, Okay, guys. He says, Now, can I ask you a question? And we said, Sure. He says, Can you explain to me the rift between the L, the G, the B and the T communities? And there was this pause. I mean, it was—you know, this man had hit—had found—had found the skeleton. And we talked about, you know, the problems that the communities had and when it's a good time, you know, to get together. And you know, people forget who was there. You know, I've worked with young—with younger people, and it gets really frustrating sometimes when you're dealing with people who don't remember the days of being buzzed into the bars, or there being—bars being raided, or forget who it was that star—you know, what was the basis for Stonewall, and who was it that, you know, basically threw the first punch.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: It wasn't a man in a pair of jeans with a cropped haircut and a beard. (laughs) It was a man in a dress.

ALBIN: Dress, yeah.

BROWN: You know, so to pick on the drag queens and the trans community and all, if it weren't for that community, you know, where would we be?

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

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BROWN: And in fact, I was working with somebody who came to Kansas City a few years ago. And (laughs) I think I—I can't remember if I did or not but I was so tempted to go buy him the book, Stonewall, and say, Read this and don't call me until you've read it. You know, because I want you—I don't know. And maybe—maybe it's heritage. Maybe it's tradition. Maybe it's culture. Maybe it's ethnicity. I—I did the (unclear) Torah, which is basically a short sermon for the interface service at Creating Change last year. Because I could. (laughs) I was chairing the committee. And I did it on social justice and I said, Because social justice is inbred in Judaica. You know, the—the charge to the Jewish community is to fix the world. You know, one of—one of the ten—differences between the two religions is, you know, Judaism is based on, This is your life. Live it, you know, because when it's over, it's over. And—but by the way, when you're here, make it better.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah. There's—there's not the promise of a better place to go. So—so Jews are very socially justice—social justice oriented. And so, you know, you get—I lost my track of thought. God! I went—see, I'm—it's those senior moments. (laughter)

ALBIN: Well, you were talking about how you gave the—at Creating Changes—

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: You gave the talk. You were talking with Al Gore about the rift.

BROWN: Oh, okay. And—yeah, and the whole thing with how important it is for everybody to realize, you know, that everybody had a part in this. But (laughs) we—I remember leaving his residence and I walked over to the corner to one—you know, the one thing about politicians, I've been playing with politics now for—since '93. And I hate to burst anybody's bubble but it's all smoke and mirrors. You just have to know how to work them. And number one, if you—you learn very quickly, you never ask a politician, an elected official their opinion on something because they don't know. You have to ask their legal—their assistant who has researched that, who will tell you what that person's opinion is. So (laughs)—and I remember walking up to one of his staff

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members and said, I don't know who gave you that piece of information but they need a raise. I said, Because of all the—I mean, only somebody who is really keyed into the community would know that that was the one topic that we really don't want to talk about. And—but it was—it was an experience.

ALBIN: So do you feel that you got anywhere with—with going and having this conversation with—with Al Gore?

BROWN: I think if—if it did make any difference to his outlook, it made a dif—it was the beginning of getting the Democratic Party to recognize the fact that there is a LGBT force out there that does need to be reckoned with. I mean, you know, we are four percent of the voters and four percent will carry an election. You know, this being the day after the caucuses, I haven't seen the LGBT numbers yet. I don't know if there was—you know, how much polling was done. But we are—we're—you know, we're a political force to be reckoned with. One of the things that came out of this involvement was, the more I spent—more time I spent working on the lead-up to Los Angeles, I—the bug hit. And I decided I wanted to go to the national convention.

At the time, in 2000—the Democratic Party has a delegate selection plan, and it's how delegates are chosen. And it sets up delegates, alternates and then—and then it also addresses the under-represented—I love the word—it's the under-represented communities in the party. Historically under-represented. It's the African American community. It's the Hispanic community. It's the Pacific American. It's the Asian American. And then there are those—and those community are specifically addressed—each state, when the delegate selection process starts, has to establish an affirmative action committee to address setting goals for those under-represented populations. In 2000, the—also included in group, this was the LGBT community, the young community and the senior community and the community with disabilities. But there was never any push. One of the things that Stonewall took on was that they were going to push to raise the number of openly gay delegates to Los Angeles.

So we started, you know, working on that, and I started getting involved in Johnson County politics and statewide politics, just again because I could—you know, I had the time to do it. I had the energy to do it. Nobody else was doing it. You know, I—I've told

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people, If somebody else wanted to do it—you know, when I did it, I would have stepped aside and said, you know, Fine. You lead. I'll follow. But when nobody else wanted to do it, then I took it on. I have now gotten to the point where I've done it. You know, it's like, Okay. I've been there. It's your turn. There are things that I still want to do but, anyway, so we started working. So I started trying to get to the convention. And there—I ran as an at-large delegate. The at-large delegates are to fill the goals that aren't met. And the way they ran this election for at-large eight years ago was the DNC chairperson on the party would get up and say, Okay. We have set these goals. We have met these goals. We are short meeting these goals. Let's vote. And it was the subtle way of saying, Okay. This—we need—you know, we're short a Pacific American. We're short a Hispanic. Well, with the Kansas Democratic Party, never one—your African American and Hispanic goals are almost set immediately, because once somebody is—(laughs) it's interesting. You fill out a form to run for delegate. And then there's a little section at the bottom that says, Which of these do you—check all that apply. Right. So when you elect a African American woman in a wheelchair, that's three points. Now—(laughs) and a Hispanic man who has a hearing deficit who is gay, that's—you know, that's four points.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: Yeah, okay. So anyway, they would do this and it was basically, This is who we're going to elect. Well, I was running as what was going—what was going to be the first openly gay delegate for Kansas to a Democratic national convention. Well, I had—what was going on that I didn't realize, lots of behind-the-scene stuff. Whoops. And one of the things was I had—the executive director of Stonewall kept calling the executive director of the party saying, We realize you didn't set a goal in 2000 of having anybody on—from the delegation, but we'd really appreciate if—if you would make—you know, make sure that Steve got elected. Because it would be nice if you had, at least somebody from the LGBT community in the delegation. And the response was, Well, we do. We already have X number of delegates who are either gay or lesbian. However, none of them are out. I mean—

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BROWN: It's—it's the insiders now. You know. So I'm running as the—you know, to be the open one. And in the third voting round, I got my seat. So I went—in 2000, I went to Los Angeles as the—and you know, it's—it's one of those things that nobody can—can take away, nobody can—can beat. I was the first person, you know, that represented Kansas who was openly gay.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: And it was just amazing. The next—four years later, I chaired the Affirmative Action Committee. I went from, basically, being shut out of the affirmative action process in 2000 and having to fight to get where I got in 2000 to chairing the committee with—I had a committee of four people, three of whom—two of whom never showed up to a meeting. So basically, a woman in Topeka and I set the goals that we wanted. So from going to no LGBT goals in 2000, we set—and you try to do parity. You try to do gender parity. So makes it even—we did everything in pairs. So it was always even numbers. So we set, like, a goal of four African Americans, four Hispanics, two Pacific Amer—two Asian Americans, two Native Americans, two persons with disabilities, two LGBT members, two persons over 65, two persons under 30 and two persons with disabilities. I think we did have 10 goals.

And in 2004, we met all but one of those goals. And the only reason we didn't meet all—all of them is we couldn't find an Asian American woman who wanted to go to—
to Boston. But otherwise, we met them. And this year, the Affirmative Action Committee was formed. I, again, was on the committee. This year's affirmative action plan for delegate selection has last year's numbers, or four years ago's numbers, but the percentages that those numbers represent has gone up, because the number of delegates has gone down. So now, there are 26 slotted gold seats in the delegation. That is six people less than it was four years ago. And the interesting thing at this point is now it's to the point where—and it didn't happen, but the LGBT caucus of the DNC was upset, because they basically went in and figured what state—the number that states should set. They even went as far as, this year, it still isn't required that you set an LGBT goal, but it's more of a pressure to do it than eight years ago. Eight years ago it was, Okay, you know, if you got nothing else to do, set a goal. If you don't, we're not going to say anything to you. So—and so states were taking advantage of it. Missouri

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never set—Missouri set a goal, an LGBT goal this year, for the first time in the eight years that I've been involved in the process. Kansas has done it twice now. And some of the states, it's like the state party says, Well, how many do you want? You know, I've talked to—I had board members, a couple of board members who were sitting on committees in states where, Well, okay, if the magic number's 10 percent, you've got 10 percent of the delegation. It's supposed to be based on a mathematic figure of what the percentage of the voters in the state—but who knows?

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: You know, number one, there's no exit polls. You know, ever since they screwed them up eight years ago, they stopped exit polling. So you don't know how many self-identified gay men and lesbians vote. You know how many self-identified households there are because of the census. But you can't poll—and you don't know who they are. Of the—the voter files and the programs that run the voter files have gotten so—to the point that you can almost—there—there's—the voter file is so refined and the search engines are so refined that you can basically give it—search same-sex households where there's a whatever-year span between the two parties, two different last names, and run it. And I had somebody in Florida who said that they could do it by 90 percent accuracy.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: And the other one is you throw out any house—any locations within 10 or 15 miles of a university. But basically, you know, and especially with men—I mean, if you do—men—two men living together who are over 30, you know, they're not roommates. So—and (laughs) in fact, I had somebody tell me that when they first introduced it and they were doing the training—this happens to be a straight woman—so she did, you know, single men over—you know, between 30 and 35 and looked at—and printed out a potential date list. Some—one of the gay men who had access to the same list was doing the same thing. Actually, I think they were running the same list.

ALBIN: (laughs)

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BROWN: Because they were both just looking for—for partners.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: Anyway—

ALBIN: So—so what direction do you—do you see Kansas politics heading in?

BROWN: Oh, Kansas politics is so much fun.

ALBIN: In terms of GLBT rights and issues. I mean, we—you know, the Kansas Equality Coalition was able to get, you know, the domestic registry pushed through—

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: —in Lawrence. But what do you—what do you see happening with (unclear)?

BROWN: Well, having been—that was another one of my things that I helped form.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm. The Kansas Equality Coalition?

BROWN: Yeah. I sat through the two years of meetings. Actually, I was on the board, representing—.

ALBIN: Well, how did the Kansas Equality Coalition come about?

BROWN: Let me go before the Kansas Equality Coalition.

ALBIN: Okay.

BROWN: One of the other things that came out of my involvement with Stonewall and my involvement with getting Four Freedoms started was recognizing that Kansas and—okay, Kansas needed a ancillary organization to the state party to represent the LGBT community. I happened to notice that the bylaws stated that there should be 10

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ancillary organizations, 10 caucuses, a women—you know, a women's caucus, a Hispanic caucus, an African American caucus, a labor caucus. Labor wasn't there yet. Anyway, there were 10 slots. There were only seven caucuses. There were three chairs at the table that no one had claimed. And I says, You know what? We're going to go after those, one of those. So I started organizing the state LGBT caucus, and it worked because it was before all this stuff with marriage. The LGBT community wasn't a wedge yet. It hadn't gotten to gays, God and guns. And the party was supportive. The powers that be were supportive. I got all the cooperation that I needed.

I had—I remember the 2000—the 2001 meeting of the party in Topeka. We had the first organizational meeting of the caucus and that was on Saturday. Monday was President's Day, because the party used to meet on President's Day. That's why they called it Washington Days. Doesn't work that way anymore. But I remember Tuesday morning I got a phone call from the executive director of the party, going, What's your fax number? And I said, Why? And he says, You've been faxed by Phelps. I—I was the subject and the caucus was the subject of Fred Phelps Monday Morning Fax. We held our first organizational meeting in Topeka on Saturday. Monday was a holiday. Tuesday morning, Rita Klein, who was then the treasurer of Shawnee County, walked into the Election Commission and said, If the Democratic Party, of which I am a member, will let that group start, I don't want to be a member of the party, and re-registered as a Republican. And the news media picked—and we were all over the news. So I got—so I got the caucus started and, eventually, got that seat on—so—

ALBIN: So who's running that—who's doing that now?

BROWN: I stepped down and let Jason Dilts, who is the executive director for Sedgwick County, Democratic Party. You know, it's one of the—I did it for—I did it for six years.

ALBIN: That's a long time.

BROWN: It's a long time and it gets to be—sometimes, it gets to be thankless. It—you get to the point—and—and I've sort of gotten to the point with a lot of things recently—it's like, Okay. I've been doing this—I've been doing this since 1993. I did it because nobody else wanted to do it. Now there's people that are interested in doing it, and I

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have no problem (laughs) saying, Go ahead. I get people coming up to me and saying, You were part of that Jewish group, weren't you? Yeah. And it was really good and fun. Yeah. Well, let's do it again. Okay. Call me. (laughs) When—when you get it going, call me and I'll come to your first—but I am not doing this. You know, the first president of the congregation, who took us through wandering from location to location to building us a building, said, There are—there's two things you only want to do once in your life. (laughs) He says, One, is replace your water heater. He says, Two, is build a—you know, build a house of worship. And I have three, and three is, start this whole thing over again. You know, it's like, been there, done that. The Yiddish term is gaovak, which, I've had enough. So you know, I'm—support it but it's like, Let somebody else do it this time. So you know—so it got to be where I was doing things, and you would—you'd have the executive board that you would send out letters to—and to ask for input, and no response. So you start running on this, No response is acquiescing. You know, You—you're agreeing with me unless you disagree with me, Because otherwise, you can't—you can't work an organization. And—but as far as Kan—you know, so—but the politics of Kansas, and it's not as much the politics of Kansas—where I'm fascinated now, and I'm really focusing my time in all of this period of this organization—intro led me to this organization, the only political thing that I'm really sticking to right now—well, I'm still—I'm still working with the—with the Democratic Party.

But the only nonpartisan thing that I'm doing is I'm on the—and I have been for years—on the board of Mainstream Coalition's Back. And—because I've decided it's easier to focus where I live. You know, somebody else can worry about what's going on in—like I said (I don't know if we were on here or not), what I like about Network is it's nonpolitical. And I got—I got called on the carpet for trying to bring anything political to their attention by somebody who just reminded me that, A, you're a visitor. You know, even though you're a member, I still feel like, since I don't live in the town, I'm there by the grace of the people that do live here. And so—but it's—it's that I have no—I don't feel responsible for doing—you know, any—and no one's going to—you know, I don't think that—I don't feel like somebody's got to come to me to get it done and I have to volunteer to get it done, or I have to suggest—because you know, not my worry anymore. Because I can focus—there—there's enough chaos going on in Johnson County alone to keep me busy.

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As far—but somebody has to do it. I mean, somebody has to keep their eye on what's going on. I tell people, The one—the nicest thing about passing the torch in the caucus is I now don't have to worry about making my comments, like, I will give you a moderate Johnson-county Republican over some of those so-called Democrats in Kansas. I'm sorry. I have no need—you know, I have absolutely no use for any of them. When we were fighting the Marriage Amendment, I was accused of being a little bit abrasive. And when it was all over, I—I sent a letter to—of apology to several members of the Legislature. And I said, But you have to understand. I'm not just a gay man who is putting up with this stuff from the right—you know, from the fundamental evangelical community. I'm a Jewish man who has been putting up with this stuff for as long as I can remember. You know, when they weren't coming after me because I was gay, they've been trying to shove Jesus down my throat for as long as I can—you know.

When—(laughs) when Princess Diana died, I don't—and I tell—I don't know what upset me more, the fact that Diana had been—the whole—the whole thing with her death, or the fact that ever time the Cardinal of Canterbury started the Lord's Prayer, I could repeat it, because I had to learn it when I was in fifth grade, because school started every morning with the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. So don't get on my case about how I react—when you come—when you attack me for being gay. You've been against me—you've been—you know, you've been trying to tell me that I have to follow your thoughts. So—but I was told—asked nicely—that there were people in this Legislature that I needed to back off of, because—Democrats in the Legislature that I needed to back off, because when it came down to a vote to override a veto, they needed—Kathleen needed them on her side. I said—you know, not wanting to piss the party off because the party has been very nice to me—you know, I wouldn't be where I am today, doing what I'm doing with the contacts that I have, if it weren't for the—you know, being nice to the party—you know, scratching each other's back. I said, Fine. I'll back off. First item of business after this conversation is the proverbial TRAP [Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers] Act. And I don't know if you're familiar with the TRAP Act.

ALBIN: (unclear).

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BROWN: All right. The TRAP Act is the licensing of abortion clinics. It's—the sell is, We need to license outpatient clinics but we're only going to do the abortion clinics right now. And we're going to charge them. It's going to cost us \$210,000 to administer this oversight. So we're going to charge the seven abortion clinics in the state of Kansas \$30,000 apiece and make them pay for the over—for us to oversight them, knowing damn well what \$30,000 would do to the organizations. But we're only going to do the abortion clinics right now, but eventually we're going to do—the rest are—you know, the liposuctions and the dental clinics and the plastic surgery. But right now—okay. And every—it's been brought up and passed and vetoed every year—basically, I think, every session since Kathleen's been governor.

In fact, you know, I sat with somebody one day and I said—I wasn't even paying attention and I said, Are we doing TRAP again? And the response was, Well, you know, she just doesn't understand what we're trying to do. Okay. TRAP goes through first time. Here comes the veto vote. And now—this didn't come from any Democrats. This came to be from Planned Parenthood. Every Democrat who voted against Kathleen for—to override her veto on TRAP sponsored the Marriage Amendment. And I called the Party and I says, Don't you ever tell me to back off from some of those western Kansas Democrats, because they're no good to you either. They're there when you need them for labor and that's all they're good for. They're gun toting, homophobic—see, I can say—I'm no longer chair of the caucus. They are gun toting, homophobic Democrats. They're Republican-light. And I—and that's an insult to the good Republicans. They're fundamentalists is what they are. And I have no need for them, and I won't do anything to help get them elected. I will wor—I would be more than thrilled to work to get them defeated, if I could do it, if we could find somebody to run against them. So I'm staying on the other side of the state.

You know, we've got enough lunatics in—in Kansas—in Johnson County. I mean, we have somebody who, you know, everybody in Lawrence knows, because Lance Kinzer who, you know, supposedly wants to go after the Domestic Partner Registry, is from Olathe. I don't know if he's going to have an opponent. I don't know if he's going to have—if he's going to have the same opponent that he had two years ago. I think a lot of people discounted his opponent, because I don't—and I won't say that they did it because she was a lesbian, but the fact that she was a lesbian didn't help her not

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getting support. I don't—you know, it's—I don't know. I've never—I haven't talked to—I—I need to talk to someone like Jolie Justus, who was elected in Kansas City as a state senator, as the first lesbian state senator and to see how much—you know, where you can draw the line between being an openly-gay candidate—gay or lesbian candidate and bucking the system every other way you can too. That was Honesty's problem. It wasn't just that she was an—a lesbian running for office; she was bucking the system. And I think you have to compromise. I think if you're going to do—one, you've got to get the system behind you. And she wasn't just bucking the system; she was bucking everybody else. I mean, she was out there fighting on her own because she was going to do it her way. Well, you know, speaking from experience, sometimes your way doesn't work. (laughs) You know, and you've got to be willing to go, Okay. Maybe this isn't working right.

We've got a candidate in Johnson County who has, for three times, taken on a moderate Republican for a House seat and doesn't make it because you can't—there—there's nothing—other than the fact that this woman is a Republican, there's nothing wrong with this woman. And she usually votes with the Democrats anyway. You know, she just happens to be a Republican. You know, so you just—it's—you know, Johnson County Democrats, I really do think coined the word rino, which is Republican in name only, because there's never been much activity in Johnson County. I mean, the biggest joke is rino Democrats in Johnson County. Yeah. Thirty—yeah, 1,700 of them showed up at my caucus last night, but there are no Democrats in Johnson County. But because there is no—for years, there was no—no visibility, Democrats, just for the action of a primary, registered as Republicans. They're slowly coming back, and especially in situations where, now, we're getting Democrat primaries, which is fun. (laughs) First, you could never find a candidate; now, you got two. But you know, you—your rinos are good for lots of things.

So—but it's—it's the fun—so, you know, like, this woman was probably as close to a Democrat, even though she's a—I mean, she's got some Republican leanings but for our issues, she's pretty—you know, she's great. I am part of a—(laughs) I guess we're a duo. The president of Four Freedoms Democrat Club, as the representative from Missouri, and I do the political thing for the gay radio station in Kansas City. And we've done this for years and we'll do it before the—before an election and this year, we finally

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talked the host into doing a follow up after an election. So we did the pre-caucus, pre-primary show for an hour on Saturday, and then this morning—it's been a long 24 hours.

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: You know, I got home from the caucuses after midnight last night, went to work—went down and did—he gave us 15 minutes to sum up what happened last night. But you know, talking about the fact—the numbers of people in Johnson County that showed up—and anyway, but it's fun doing that, because it gives you a chance to, you know, reach out to—to people that—and especially doing it today on this music show because this isn't usually—I mean, he got the gay—you know, basically a gay take on the process without it being a gay show. But one of the things that I was mentioning last Saturday when we were talking about this, Four Freedoms endorses for candidates. They're not—Four Freedoms has not become a part of the Democratic Party because they endorse. If you're—it's hard to be an ancillary organization and choose between two Democrats. You know, actually, they get very upset if you try to do that. I think in a couple cases, they would look the other way. But Four Freedoms, that's their purpose is to endorse. And Kansas City is the complete opposite in terms of the priorities. In Kansas City, it's all in the primary. And once you make it to the primary, especially if you're a Dem—in most part, if you're a Democrat who makes it to the primary, you won. In Kansas, if you're a Republican who makes it to the primary, you've won, especially in Johnson County. So Four Freedoms has always been players.

But I made the comment—we were talking about the two presidential candidates. This is going to be real interesting as an after—you know, say this now and see what happens later. But I made this observation to the Four Freedoms Board. We were sitting—we were screening mayor candidates. They're—the Kansas City mayor's race last year was, you would walk into a bar and walk up to somebody and go, Did you file? There were so—I mean, there were 12 candidates in the pot to begin with, and we screened every one of them. And there was—and every one of them is gay supportive. So we're sitting there in this group and, number one, we—Four Freedoms has finally gotten to the point where candidates call us and say, We want to be screened. We have a candidate for sheriff in Jackson County who comes to everything with us.

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(laughs) It's like, Oh, where's Mike? He'll be here. But I'm—we're sitting there talking to these candidates and we very quickly said, Okay. We—you know, we want to add gender identity to the Human Rights Ordinance. Fine. Nobody (unclear). Went through the couple things—so then we're sitting there. We're talking streets, tax—TIF, which is tax discounts for development—schools. And I said, Here we are. We're an LGBT organization and we're worried about the same things that everybody else is because we don't have any issues. And I said this Saturday. When you look at Obama and Clinton and where they stand on gay issues, it's a win-win. You know, so what are we—when you talk to—to the gay community and say, Why are you supporting Obama? or, Why are you supporting Clinton? It has nothing to do with anything that used to be our wedge issues. You know now, those wedge issues, I will guarantee, are going to come out because the Republicans need something.

You know, it's—we're going to go back to God, gays and guns somehow. The—because it works. It worked for them eight years ago. It works—worked for them four years ago. They'll figure out a way to get it to work for them again. But for right now, you know, neither one of them is—will—favors marriage. They both feel the same way about civil unions. They both feel the same way about (unclear). They both feel the same way about hate crimes. So now we're going to talk about the economy and the immigration and health care. Now, granted, it's things that affect the gay community. But it affects the Jewish community. It affects the, you know, Catholic community. It's not—it's not our agenda anymore. We sort of—we've worked past that, which is great because that's—you know, that's where you want to be.

ALBIN: Okay. We'll stop.

BROWN: Okay.

ALBIN: Take a little breather.

BROWN: What time is it?

ALBIN: I have no idea.

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BROWN: Okay. We won't ask.

ALBIN: No idea, but we're on—we're going on tape number five. Each tape is about an hour long.

BROWN: Oh, my God! (laughs)

ALBIN: See, people get (unclear) and I love it. It's great.

BROWN: Oh. Well, and—what I'm—I'm doing my best. I severed my—I mean, just to be upfront and honest, and I'm not going to discuss this on tape.

ALBIN: Oh, wait. Let me stop this then. [tape turned off/on] Well, what we could do is we could get back on track. I have no idea what we talked about in the last tape, because we had a tangent where we stopped everything.

BROWN: (laughs)

ALBIN: So—so what are you doing now with your life?

BROWN: Right now, I'm working for—actually, I have a life.

ALBIN: Uh-huh.

BROWN: You know, that—that was part of—I've finally got to this point. I've always had this attitude with organizations that my time is important. I can contribute time. I don't have a lot of—you know, I don't contribute money. (laughs) I, actually—for the first time that I can remember, I was in a good mood. I had a candidate call me and say, Would you write me a check? And I actually said, Okay.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: I don't do that. But I also had this attitude that as soon as you start—as soon as it isn't fun, I feel like I'm being taken advantage of, I'm fighting you more than I'm

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fighting for the cause—I can find another organization. I did this with—I think I’ve— (laughs) and I’m trying not to do this with an organization in Kansas City, Missouri, because I really don’t want to fight the cause. But I woke up one morning and I decided I need a life. I went—I, at one point in my time, I would leave the—I would leave home at 7:30 in the morning. I would come home at 10 o’clock at night, and I would do this sometimes four nights a week, three weeks out of the month. I was living for my organizational work. I stayed in Kansas City for two and a half years. I said earlier that I didn’t want to have to go someplace and start all over again.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: I didn’t want to leave the organizations that I was in. I was too vested in them. And I finally decided, You know what? It’s time. I’ve been doing this. It’s—if it isn’t—if I don’t—if—well, I hate to say—if I don’t do it and it doesn’t get done, it’s not going to get done. You know, if there’s not somebody there to take over, then it’s a—it’s a lost cause. You know, I’m—I’m worried about things that, you know, I—maybe at this point, I’m willing to put time and effort into things that directly affect me. You know, and if it doesn’t directly affect me right now, if you want to do it and you want some help, I may do it. But if it doesn’t directly affect me and it’s affecting you and you don’t give a damn, find somebody else. You know. And it may be a bad—you know, it may be—it may (laughs) be just a general burnout. I mean, I’ve got a friend. I have two—and this goes back to comments I’ve made earlier.

I have two trans friends who keep me honest and keep me in line, and we have—I mean, we have good times and I have said things and done things with them—said things, especially to them that—you know, sometimes I ask questions and then I sort of duck because I was—(laughs) I was—and one’s male to female; one’s female to male. And my female to male friend lives in Columbia. And I was in town. We were doing some work and it was Mother’s Day. And I said, So tell me. On Mother’s Day, do you get a—do your—and she has—and he has kids. I said, Do your kids still send you Mother’s Day cards? And do you get Father’s Day cards? I says, Do you get—you know. (laughs) And he said, No. I said, Well, you know, it’s a good question. You know. But my two trans friends keep me on tow. Well, one of them, any hour of the night, I could call and I would get the phone answered. And she sort of dropped out and

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she dropped out—she's so dropped out that I got scared and sent an e-mail to her roommate. And I said, So what's the deal? And she said, She's decided that she's just going to walk away. She has a job. She goes to her job. She comes home. And that's all she wants to think about.

And I'm thinking, 'You know what? I can get there.' You know, the years and years and years of doing this, part of it. I think the other part was, I used to tell people I had two jobs. I had my 8 to 5 that paid for my 6 to 10. And then when I didn't have my 8 to 5, I could do my 6 to 10 from—you know, 24 hours a day. And then I got a job. And for a long—I mean, I—I was unemployed for two and a half years. I got hired. It'll be three years next month that I've been working. And for two of those three years, I was still trying to put in an eight-hour day and an eight-hour day. And it just is getting—I don't know. You know, maybe, you know, I don't want to admit that I don't have the energy that I used to have. But I think it's, I don't have the drive that I used to have. It's—you know, I've been doing this and I've been doing this and it's time to say, Okay, you do this. You know, and if you don't want to, then neither one of us will do it. And maybe—you know, and this may be a pha—you know, maybe in a year I'll go, Okay. I'm tired—I—I took my vacation. And then it's sort of like, I need to take a vacation, and so I'm picking and choosing. I'm very careful of what I do.

I have a couple organizations because I have—they're filling my needs and, you know, I can—I still—I like to tell people, I—I dabble in Johnson County politics. I dabble in Jackson County politics. And I don't care what's going on in Shawnee County or Cedric County or Crawford County, because I don't live in any of them. And as long as I'm watching what my legislators are doing, then it's someone else's responsibility to watch what—and as long as my city isn't, you know, going after me, then, you know, that's somebody else's fight. So—I mean, there's lots of things to get changed. It's not a perfect world. But I don't know. You know, I'm thinking—I've mentioned, it's so frustrating when you—and I'm trying to get back to, you know, some of the things I've said earlier. Then when you're dealing with these kids, and I know they hate the term but I use it—when you're dealing with kids who grew up where there was never—they didn't have to put up with some of this stuff.

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Now, some of this stuff that I put up with as a kid, they're still putting up with. And I've talked about Passages in Kansas City and I think, you know, if—if an organization for—for youth would have been there when I was that age, you know, who knows—would have happened? There wasn't. You know, you had to do it on—you know, you did it on your own. You were the only person who was like you until you found somebody else who was like you, then somebody else who was like you. So there are things that—that we have to fight, but there were doors that—that the movement has opened. (laughs) And it's really frustrating when you're dealing with people who don't appreciate the doors that have been opened. And I get—I think part of my animosity is for some organization—local—lately, my animosity is I've opened so many doors. And I'm starting to feel like, in some cases, those doors are getting slammed in my face by the people that I let in. And so—but you know, (laughs) so I just don't open doors anymore. You know.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: But I'm—if something comes up, I'll jump back in. But you know, it's the thing of, you don't know—if you don't know where you've been, you don't appreciate where you are.

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: And it's true of everything but it's especially true in the gay community, and especially in this area. I mean, this isn't Los Angeles. I used to have—go around and go around when I was on the board of Stonewall. (laughs) And sometimes—you know, and I do think sometimes I'm a devil's advocate and I love to stir things up. And I know how to stir things up. I had some things happen with the Stonewall board and, again, like I said, I start feeling like I'm bucking the system. Something happened to two of us on the board, and the rest of the board didn't stand—didn't come to our support. They basically said, It'll go away. It was a smear campaign that we—national smear campaign that we went through that I found out was instigated by the people who were trying to, you know, get a seat on the board. But, oh God, where was I going? I'm sorry.

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ALBIN: Smear campaign—

BROWN: The Stonewall board—

ALBIN: Your experience of being on the board.

BROWN: Oh, God. I was going someplace real well with that.

ALBIN: It not being Los Angeles?

BROWN: Ah, thank you. Okay. So Stone—so—I'm still on the—at this point, I'm still on the Stonewall board. We have a meeting in San Diego and they're just going on and on about how great they are. So I decide I need to break this up with a little bit of humor. It's a—at the time that they were trying to get Log Cabin Republicans started in Kansas City. And I said, I was just at the most fascinating party last week. I met the head of the Log Cabin Republicans and I'm working with LCR, trying to get it started. And the California Democrats and the New York Democrats just came down on me, said, How dare you, you know, talk to those people? They're lunatics. The typical. And I said, I'm sorry. This is the Midwest. You know, where you've got moderate Republican—and it goes back to the previous conversation—when you've got moderate Republicans that are more supportive of you and have put their heads on the chopping block more often and they're Republicans. And then you've got Democrats who sponsor legislation to put you down. Screw all of you.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: You know. And that's—you know, it's—it's that way. It's—you can't—you can't be—there's no black or white in this—in this—in any of this stuff.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm. How did people react to you being like this openly gay person on this caucus from Kansas? Like, like being this—you know, being—you had talked earlier about being the—the individual for the caucus, the first open—

BROWN: Yeah.

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ALBIN: —openly gay person in Los Angeles, you know at the—at the big event.

BROWN: Well, I was—see, when I was—I was one of—for Kansas, but Ohio—

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: —had 10 and—

ALBIN: Right.

BROWN: —California had 15 and—

ALBIN: But you would—you just automatically assume California's going to have 15. You know, but I mean, I guess I'm curious as to how people reacted with you being from Kansas.

BROWN: They were a little bit surprised. Actually, and—and the one person who really—but I—and some of them—I—I did get pissed off. You know it's this ego thing, but Melissa Etheridge sang at the convention. And I'm thinking, 'Okay. She's on stage. She's from Leavenworth. I'm the openly gay delegate from Kansas. Do you think she might come over and say hello?' No. And I said something to someone. And they said, Oh, excuse me? Melissa Etheridge only does things in Kansas when it's good publicity for her. She does—that's the only time she—you know, she makes a—she'll come to do her reunion in Leavenworth with her whole entourage. But they said she's—and you know, she's been around and she never does—So don't take it personal. She doesn't come talk to us anyway. (laughs) You know. But I—it surprised a lot of people that—but—and especially because Kansas had done it and the surrounding states hadn't done it. But I think it said a lot for the—for the Democratic Party. Again, I mean, it's not like I was at a—at a Republican convention where it would have been unique. I mean, this was something that, even though it was the first time from Kansas, in was something that was sort of, Well, it's about—it was more of, It's about time.

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ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: And, Why didn't—you know, why didn't you do this? And why didn't this person—yeah. Actually, what happened is I did have somebody from Missouri—Missouri did get—set a goal either. And we got an openly gay fellow board member from—for Frito's through the Missouri delegate selection process. But it takes—it takes work and it takes—and I—I talked about how much support I got when I started the caucus in Kansas. Multiply that support by the other way, and it's what happened when two of us tried to do the same thing a year ago in Missouri. The politics of being seen by the general population as LGBT-friendly in the party have changed. You know, I—people—and it's another discussion. You know, people always thought that, you know, Kansas was this, you know, red state and so Republican and everything else, and the Democrats were the good guys but they were out powered by the bad guys, who were the Republicans. And then you find out that the Republicans are just as good as the Democrats and the Democrats—but here's Missouri, which is always these really good Democrats and these bad Republicans, but now Missouri is looking like Kansas. And a couple of us work real hard to try to get a caucus started in Missouri, and the party doesn't want anything to do with it, because it—it scares the party, that they don't want to be LGBT-friendly. Now, this is the, you know, the Democratic Party.

It's like—when I was in Atlanta or—yeah, Atlanta for the meeting, Joe Andrews, who wor—who was on the DNC, Democratic National Committee, delivered a speech. And I—I use this when I speak and I use—and depending on where I'm speaking, it alters, but it's—this is the Democratic Party. This is the party of inclusion. We don't care if you walk in here, crawl in here or wheel in here, you're welcome. We don't care if you're green, purple, orange, polka dot, black, white, brown; you're welcome. We don't care whose hand you hold, as long as you hold somebody's hand, you're welcome. This is the Democratic Party. Now, when I do it I around Kansas—and we don't care if you're Fred Phelps because Fred is the most notorious Kansas Democrat we have. But, We're the Democratic Party; you're welcome. You know. So I have to remind people of that, you know, and it's hard when you see a state party that doesn't want to be inclusive. They're too afraid of what it's going to do out—in out-state. Kansas, on the other hand, you know, didn't—didn't care—you know, wasn't concerned. And it was—ah, God! The day that we got—the way the process worked is we had to meet. Then

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we had to, basically, ask to be accepted. And I remember going to the state committee meeting. And it's—were going to be brought to the floor of the committee. And I'm going, you know—and all these things are going through my head about the—the comments that are going to come from these homophobic Western Kansas people or these homophobic Southern Kansas people. Can't say anything about the—you know, the—I had—I knew I had Johnson County under my—in control, because I had been working with Johnson County. I was on the executive committee of the Johnson County party, so I had—and I was getting egged on by people in Johnson County. But I was all psyched up to, you know, all this dissention and everything. And (laughs) Tom Sawyer, who was the chair, comes in. And remember, there were three openings. And we had now three new caucuses to be presented. And he gets up and he says, The Rules Committee recommends that we add the following three caucuses to the State Committee: the Labor Committee, the Disabilities Caucus and LGBT Caucus, and said it that way, LGBT Caucus. All in favor. Aye. All opposed. Not a sound. (laughs) I looked at the person I was—I was sitting with the co-chair of the party, Johnson County Party. And I says, Do you know, if I would have gone to the bathroom, I would have missed that? But I was—had been so psyched up to this floor fight and it went through. And like I said, number one, I think when he did LGBT Caucus, I think half the State Committee didn't realize what they voted for. But it was like, okay. You know, it was—it was so anti-climactic. (laughs) I wanted—I wanted fireworks and—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah. But you know, and—but I—I did that for six years and I decided—I mean, I took a lot of crap from the party in those six years. I took a lot of crap from the membership. I had unilaterally made decisions, because I figured if I ask and nobody says no, it was fine. So I, unilaterally, decided one year to put a marriage amendment resolution on the floor of the committee. And then it was pointed out that doing that would kill the—would basically split the party in half. It's the same reason that you will look—if you look to see, the State Democratic Party has never taken a stand on abortion, has never taken a stand on stem cell research, has never taken a stand on gun control. If it's an issue and there's a—two sides to the issue, they aren't going to take a stand because they don't want the vote to come to the floor. Marriage is—so I opted to do with—the first year, I did it and turned it into an honoring—all of the house

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members who voted against it, that—because what happened the first year with the Marriage Amendment was it went below everybody’s radar. And I got really upset because I was actually sitting in the now Democratic House Leader’s office when it was going to the vote. And he never had the balls or respectability to me and the organization to tell me, Oh, by the way, we’re voting on a marriage amendment today. You know, one of those I have no use for Democrat people. So this whole thing went below our radar, but when it happened Friday and then we met on Saturday, we found out about it. And so Saturday at the meeting, what we did was we honored the people. We had a wall of shame. I mean, (laughs) we were not to be—you know, be—we had—we took a copy of the state—of all the state—it was—went through—it was the House. So the picture of all the Democrats in the House, took it to Kinko’s, had it blown up to a huge picture and then took red marker and marked through the people who voted against this. And it was our wall of shame. And we honored the heroes on the floor. We asked them to stand. And the next year, we decided we were going—you know, someone said, Let’s do it again, and we did—tried to do it again and realized not—still not going to fly. So I—I, of course, arbitrarily decided not to do it. And so—but you know, there’s days when, you know, you know—you know that doing it—doing what you’re doing is going to be better than—or not doing what you want to do is better than doing what you want to do. You know, and it may come with maturity; it may come with insight. It may come with knowing what you know or—but whatever—but you know, those days, you have to compromise some.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: And there’s days when I won’t compromise. I mean, you know, I’m the first one to forget the bear with the honey. I’ll (laughs)—you know, I’ll swat that bear and get pawed. But, yeah, anyway.

ALBIN: So was there ever a point in your life where you decided that you might want to leave the Midwest and head to a coast? I know you had mentioned earlier—

BROWN: Well, you know, it—I had—I have friends in Palm Springs who, the two and a half years that I wasn’t working, kept saying, Come to Palm Springs. And I said, Excuse me. I’ve been to Palm Springs in the summer. It’s 120 degrees outside. Don’t give me

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this 'dry heat.' Number one, as long as there's green grass in Palm Springs, there is no dry heat. You're watering the lawns all morning. That puts humidity in the air. Number two, 120 degrees in the oven—a 120-degree oven is hot when you put your head in it. I don't care if it's dry or not. I—I really should—I hate Kansas City winters. I mean, I've been here since I was three years old. I hate Kansas City winters. I hate Kansas City summers. My ideal temperature is 75 degrees. But it's one of the—it's a comfortable town. Unless they screw up things with the airlines, it's easy to get in—you know, get in and out of. It's an hour to—no more than a two-hour flight—I can't remember the last time I spent two hours in an airplane. You get anywhere in no time. So if—you know, if you don't like it, you can go—you know, go someplace. And I've still got—and I don't think it's as much my—well, I don't know if it's the organization. I've just—I just feel a little bit too rooted here now to pick up. You know, now, if we—you know, I came into finances and wanted to retire in a gay or lesbian retirement area in Sun City or, you know, the new—the new marketing thing is Palm Springs is now building retirement villages for the LGBT community.

ALBIN: (unclear) to be retired community.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah. I don't think they're going to build one in Kansas City. I really wouldn't want to move to Branson (laughs) if they did.

ALBIN: Apparently, a lot of people retire to South or North Dakota. Those are the top two places that couples retire to, apparently.

BROWN: South Dakota is—I did—yeah, I went to—this two years that I was—two and a half years I wasn't working—(laughs) I was working part-time jobs. But I was basically freelancing, whatever I wanted to do. And I was doing some organizing for Stonewall. (laughs) And my thing was, I'll come anywhere on these conditions. It has to be less than 600 miles from my front door and you will feed me and house me while I'm there. And otherwise, I don't care. So I drove to Sioux City—Sioux Falls one day. I just got—it

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was like, Okay. I'm going to Sioux Falls. Never driven. I'd never been past the turnoff—I'd never been past the I-29, I-80 Interchange in Omaha. And I—all the time I lived there. I didn't know there were casinos (laughs) in Omaha until I went to—to Sioux Falls and got out past where I could see the casinos. And it was a nice—what, Omaha was halfway and Sioux City is halfway to Sioux Falls. So it's—you know, it's six hours—it was five hours. I went to a meeting one night for something; I don't know. And I pulled up behind this little convertible with a rainbow tag. And I walked in (laughs)—you know, I am not the subtle one. I walk in and say, Okay, whose—who at this table is family so I don't have to play games? And it was the—one of—a woman who I've gotten to be friends with here has a sister in Lincoln who is tied into the gay community in Lincoln. I went up there and we got a Democratic caucus started. And it was fun. I went up for their—to do some organizing. And again, my—you know, You feed me. You put me up. These were two women who had—Robby was probably four at the time, cute little kid. And we all did our thing and we came back to the house and he had been sent to the baby—he—the babysitter had him. And they bring him through the living room on his way up to bed. And we go to bed and I—it was like—I said—I started to say, Lynn, I know—something's going to happen tonight and I don't—but I don't know what it is. I just have this feeling. About three o'clock in the morning, I got up to go to the bathroom, and I came out of the bedroom and went to the bathroom. I come out of the bathroom and here is this kid, four-year-old, standing in the middle highway, takes one look at me and lets loose with the most horrendous scream. Because I—you know, number one, it was a strange man in the house and, number two, it was a man in the house. (laughs) And I'm going, Oh, God. You know, what—what kind of reaction—and all I got was an arm reaching out from the bedroom, grabbing him and pulling him into their bedroom. And I'm thinking, Okay, I've traumatized this kid for years. Go downstairs in the morning. I'm eating breakfast and the next thing I know, there's this weight in my lap. And I look at—he'd just climbed—you know, it was like, Okay. You scared me last night, didn't know who you were. You're down here. You must be okay. Feed me. So—but, yeah, it—I did—I would jump in the car and just go. I found—(laughs) I drove to Minneapolis and decided—this—I said, Six hundred miles. That—I figured that was my limit. Coming home from Minneapolis, if it weren't that I knew that my front door was 45 minutes from Liberty, I would have had a break down, because I was going stir crazy. But, yeah. But then I—you know, in fact, I started working and my whole—(laughs) it's so nice and—and it's—what started as a lot of—not a whole lot of

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thinking work is now becoming thinking work. And the more—you know, I do come home and I'm just—I give myself vegetating in front of the TV. I've always done that. I'm as old (laughs)—Channel—WOW in Omaha, WDAF in Kansas City and I are about the same age. You know, WOW was Johnny Carson's start. My grand—my mother's father gave my parents a TV set when TVs first star—you know. And I learned how—and you know, I have been told this. I don't remember this. I have been told I learned to stand up using the dials on the TV.

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: Remember the—the cable show about the guy that used to live his life through the TV? Oh, anyway—and this—the beginning—the opening credits, the mother would put him in front of the TV set. The TV set was his babysitter.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: All right. Well, my mother used to swear that the house could burn down. The house—anything could happen but as long as the power to the TV didn't go off, I wouldn't know it. And I'm still that way. The first thing on when I come in the door is the TV. The last thing off when I leave the door is the TV. I'm not a listen-to-the-radio person. I listen to the radio on—in the car. But the TV is—you know, my life is my (laughs)—and I've—you know, and I—but I say, I deserve it. You know, I—I've worked for this. I have—I have done my due diligence—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: —to whatever. But I'm not ready to quit yet. I'm just ready to be more selective.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: Yeah. Not as much the whore that I used to be when it comes to organizations. (laughter)

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ALBIN: Well, I think we've almost got everything wrapped up. Now, is there anything that I haven't asked that you wanted to talk about or anything else—

BROWN: I don't know. I don't think so. But if you think of something—

ALBIN: We'll just have another—

BROWN: We'll just have a—yeah—

ALBIN: We'll have another session.

BROWN: (laughs) We'll just do this again all night.

ALBIN: Yeah—

BROWN: We'll have another all-nighter.

ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: We'll take a road trip.

ALBIN: We could do that. We could do that. We could go to Leavenworth and see if Melissa Etheridge's mom could get hold of her for me.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: And I could interview her.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: That would be fun. That would be fun. I like how, in front of Leavenworth, you know, they've got that guitar with, like, Home of Melissa Etheridge. (laughter)

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BROWN: Yeah. I mean, (laughs) that was such an eye—you know, and not like I really expected—I didn't expect her to know that this is hap—but it was just such a—a letdown, going—well, you know, here I am—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: And the—well, and the other thing that got me that I had no idea, Kansas (laughs) really is sometimes the ugly stepchild of things. Living in Kansas City, Missouri for a long time and then moving to Johnson County, you lose track of the fact that the news media is Kansas City, Missouri, not Johnson County. So the news teams—so the Kansas City news does not recog—basically, during the four days of the convention, did not recognize the fact that there was a delegation there from Kansas. That was the responsibility of the Kansas news stations, who weren't there either. Yeah. And there—I mean, we had—I—I said, you know, nothing—nothing will match what happened at Los Angeles in terms of the parties. The—the party at the Beverly Hilton, meeting Bruce Vilanch, but doing things like—I have a picture of me sitting in Bruce Vilanch's lap. (laughs) Or—and it's like, you know, Rocky and the mountain. But I—I remember—I don't know if you were watching the convention but I remember getting the phone calls the day that the Boy Scouts showed up. This is one of—this was a classic. The Boy Scouts showed up on the podium. Kansas was behind the Florida delegation. My fellow Stonewall board member was standing in the back row of Florida. I was in the front row of Kansas. The Boy Scouts come onstage at this convention, and I looked down and there's a rainbow stripe sticking out of his pocket. And I went, Oh, God, no. We're not—we're not going to do this. We're not going to do this. Oh, we are going to do this. And he pulled on the corner of the flag enough for me to grab it. And I went one way and he went the other way. And the next thing I know, we've got CNN in front of us and we're flagging that—we're—you know, we're showing the rainbow flag as a protest to the Boy Scouts. (laughs)

ALBIN: Oh, wow.

BROWN: The next morning—we did things—we got—the DNC knew that the LGBT Democrats were there. They didn't want us bringing in placards because all of our placards said—had Stonewall's web site. And they were all in either rainbow colors or

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pink triangles or—didn't want that. Well, you know, I debated in college and debaters learn very quickly—you know, you're not supposed to take magazines out of libraries. But they don't pad you down. And we weren't supposed to bring signs into the convention, but they didn't strip search us. And (laughs) we would—I mean, we would meet offsite and pass out signs. We'd—you know, and this—you know, it was Los Angeles. It was the summer so it wasn't freezing. And you would basically, you know, take off your shirt, wrap the sign around your—your stomach, put the shirt back on, go through security. And then we—finally, the DN—I mean, it got to be a game. We would sneak—we would—they would say, No signs. We would show up with signs. They would say, No signs. And they finally said, You know what? Bring your signs. You know, just go ahead and bring the signs through so you don't have to play the game. But there were a couple—we would—we would get lectured. Well, the morning after the flag incident, we got lectured. But it means somebody was paying attention. (laughs) We had an incident where—oh, I was telling convention stories. I talked about the woman who had—was freaking out because Barbra Streisand was serving her breakfast. I was sharing my room with a fellow board member from DC, and I learned a long time ago—I smoke but I always—when I travel, I do no smoking because I don't—I don't like where the no—where the smoking rooms are, keeping in mind that the pipe smokers, cigar smokers are in the same area. So I was in the no smoking room and we were at the Marina del Ray in—in L.A. No smoking room. Number one, I go downstairs to the concierge. I said, You know, not to say anything but this is a no smoking room. Right? Right. Can you explain why there's roaches in the potted—in the pots on the balcony? Or is this not a cigarette-smoking room? You know. Anyway, so I go down—my—my routine is I go downstairs for a cigarette, and I'm downstairs in the little courtyard area one morning. And when I do this, I do it in—basically, probably what I slept in. I'm dressed enough that I'm not indecent but I'm not dressed. And my roommate comes over and beckons me over and says, I want you to meet somebody. And I go in and here is this petite, impeccably dressed woman, and I look like something that no cat would even drag in. And he says, Steve Brown, I want you to meet Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. And I looked at him and I said, You picked this moment in my life to introduce me to her. And he looks at her and says, Do you think she looks this good when she gets up in the morning? (laughter) And I said, Where do you get off—you know, coming to her defense—How can you talk to her like that? He

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says, When you grow up with her—his family and the Kennedys go back three generations.

ALBIN: Wow.

BROWN: (laughs) So of course, not only did I meet her and—I mentioned before and I'll mention again—one of the things I had so much fun with in Los Angeles was most of the convention is we're swapping buttons. I'm swapping business cards. And I'm running around with the Maryland delegation and the DC people, so I'm meeting the DC people. We had suite passes so we were getting upstairs to the—all the private suites at the convention. But I met, like—you know, every Kennedy that was there, I met, because my friend from DC made a point of dragging me over to introduce me to a Kennedy. It's just it's an exciting place. I would love to go to Denver. There's no way I'm going to get elected—well, I don't know. I—it depends. I might be able to get elected as an at-large again. The regular delegate process is going to be too cut throat (laughs) to do it. I was talking to the director of the radio station and were—were seriously thinking about giving two of us press passes to report back. So—

ALBIN: Would be a lot less work.

BROWN: (laughs) Yeah.

ALBIN: (unclear).

BROWN: So—but it—it's fun.

ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: Yeah.

ALBIN: All right. Well—

BROWN: This has been an experience.

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ALBIN: Well, and thank you—

BROWN: (laughs)

ALBIN: —for sharing your experiences. I really, really appreciate it.

BROWN: Well, I—see, what I need is, once there's a transcript—

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

BROWN: —then I can start editing—

ALBIN: Right. (laughs)

BROWN: —my book. (laughs)

ALBIN: Well, and—and you'll get a copy that you can use for a book if you want.

BROWN: I had somebody tell me that, you know, I need to—

ALBIN: I think you do.

BROWN: —write a book. I mean, write a book but my thing is, who would—you know—

ALBIN: You'd be surprised.

BROWN: (laughs) Who wants to hear—I—

ALBIN: (unclear) listen.

BROWN: Right. Well, I do this to captive audience. You're not going anywhere. (laughter) You know. But a non—I'm not sure if my memoirs would be interesting to anybody who wasn't a captive audience. Maybe prisoners would enjoy it. You know, they can't go anywhere. You know, 'cuz it's—you know, not to be self-defacing. When I

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had the administrator of my synagogue beg me for exactly what was going on—I came back from a national convention of the synagogue. And I said, you know, When the current leader of the reform movement stops me to say hello, when the executive director of the Religious Action Center, which is the social justice arm of the reform movement in DC pulls me over to sit with him and his family on a Friday-night service, she says, You know, you just like—you know, you like to hobnob with them and then you like to drop their names. I said, Yeah, and so what's wrong with that?

ALBIN: Yeah.

BROWN: Yeah. At least I recognize the fact. And I've had issues—I've had problems with board members in different organizations, who will get upset that I do it and (laughs) I notice it. And then what I will do is, when I get in a situation where that—oh, best example. I'm going to wrap up. I do this. Okay. We get an invitation—Terry McCullough, who, at the time, head of the DNC before Howard Dean, is coming to Kansas City. We're invited to brunch. All right. So I show up. You know, I'm—I'm the token Kansas—Kansan who gets to play in Missouri politics. Because—and they know that. I show up and Terry walks in the room, sees me, walks over, puts his arms around me, gives me a hug, walks away. And my Stonewall—my Four Freedoms board member, who is always rolling his eyes when I start talking about name—people on first-name basis, he's just white as a sheet. (laughs) And it's like, I'm not making this thing—you know, I'm not making this up. I—you know. There—(laughs) there's a whole bunch of stuff going on with the DNC and the LGBT Caucus and the chair and the chairs of different things, the DLCC, the Leadership Conference. And I'm having a ball. Those are people I know. They're are fellow board members, who I have suffered through their, you know, pettiness with, who are now getting their own comeuppance on a national level. And it's like, Ah, pity. What a shame.

ALBIN: (laughs)

BROWN: Goes back to what I said long time ago. What goes around comes around.

ALBIN: Yeah.

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BROWN: And I'm just watching my back to make sure I don't get hit with it. (laughter)

ALBIN: All right. We'll stop there.

BROWN: That's a good point to end on.

ALBIN: That is good. (laughter)

[End]