

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JON C. GREAVES

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
LGBTQ Oral History Series.
Interview with Jon C. Greaves
Conducted by Anne Graham and Heather Oswald
Saturday, June 21st 2014
Location: Audio Video Technology Studio

AG: It's Saturday, June 21st, 2014. This is Anne Graham and Heather Oswald, archivists with the Kennesaw State University Archives. And we're interviewing Jon C. Greaves in the studios of the Audio-Video technology services at Kennesaw State University as part of the Other Voices series. So, thank you for coming in today, Jon.

JG: Thanks for having me.

AG: So, first, we're going to talk about your family and your background. So, if you could talk about where you were born and where you grew up.

JG: I was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma. My father was finishing a degree at Oklahoma State University and he was also, I think, student assistant basketball coach or something. Lived in Oklahoma for a brief period of time. He got a job with North American Aviation. He was a plant manager for North American Aviation out in Downey, California. We moved to California during the Apollo program. He worked -- managed a plant where they made parts for the Apollo program.

We lived in a series of places, Cyprus, Anaheim, and Lakewood, California. Anaheim's where Disneyland is, which was great as a kid. We'd go out and watch the fireworks at night from Disneyland from outside our house, but lived there from when I was three to seven. And then the Apollo program ended and they closed some of those plants and we moved back to Oklahoma, to Tulsa, where I grew up and lived until I went away to college.

AG: And can you tell me about your family structure, how many siblings you have, parents?

JG: Of course, mother and father, and then my sister and brother. Mother's Joyce, my father was Jon also. Jon C. – Jon Charles. My brother, Jay and my sister, Julie. My parents got divorced when I was nine or ten and both remarried. My father moved back out to California and his new wife was Terry, and I have two half-sisters, Carrie and Kelly, from California. Then my mother remarried. My stepfather, Walt, who's really been a father even more in my life than my biological father, and I call him dad. Walt had

kids already too. So, I have two stepbrothers, Skip and Sam. Skip is actually Walter the third, and then stepsister Susie. So, it's a large family.

AG: Wow, it certainly is.

JG: Large mixed family.

AG: So, can you talk about your relationship with your mother and your stepfather and your father?

JG: Mother and I are very close. We've always been close. I was firstborn and we still talk and enjoy talking with each other. I talk with her and have gotten advice from her on and off through my life. She kind of does the same with me since I've been an adult. So, she talks to me and gets advice sometimes.

My father -- When the parents' relationship was going bad and they would fight a lot, I was the oldest child and I would see them fight. And for some reason, he had anger that he directed at me too, his oldest child. I'm not quite sure why, but after the divorce and remarry, we went to visit, my brothers, my sister and I, during the summer with my father on occasion. But had a kind of -- not the best relationship.

He would get mad at me for things. I remember we went to visit for two weeks in the summer and after we'd been there for two weeks, he told us, "You're going to stay for another month. It was too much money to bring you here for just two weeks." And my brother and sister started to cry, they wanted to go home and I kind of stood up for them and he got mad at me for doing that.

But anyway, we had a kind of not the best relationship growing up. It wasn't horrible. He used to take me hunting and fishing. I grew up in Oklahoma and I loved outdoors and fishing and there were times we spent together were good. But after -- At a point where I told him I was gay, he told me that he couldn't have a relationship with me anymore, that he didn't want to condone homosexuality. He just passed away this last year, the Tuesday after Labor Day. And at that time we had not -- We'd only spoken once in seventeen years and it was at the funeral of my nephew.

So, my brother, Jay is also gay. And my father -- My brother kept trying to get my father to have a relationship with him. He told him the same thing once he found out he was gay too. My brother would contact him periodically and our father would say, "Great, I'm glad to hear from you. How come you haven't come around and did you change your mind?" And my brother would say, "What do you mean?" He said, "Did you decide not to be gay anymore?" And my brother would say, "No, it doesn't work that

way. I'm still gay." And he'd say, "Well, I can't have a relationship with you." He'd repeat that again.

So, it's really kind of troubled my brother a lot. He tried to have that relationship and then went and spent the last week before my father died, with him. Actually with the family there. But then after my father died, my stepmother told him he wasn't welcome at the funeral. So, they didn't want any homosexuals at the funeral.

That was based on some -- They were Evangelical Christians and their particular set of beliefs or their version of Christianity was that homosexuals are evil, so --

AG: But you mentioned that you were close with your stepfather?

JG: Yeah, he -- It's interesting, my own father didn't want anything to do with me. And my stepfather, was a pretty gruff guy. He was in the Korean War, he got a battlefield promotion. He was a major and there's actually a Life Magazine -- coffee table book that has pictures of the Korean War, he's in one of the pictures. He's standing on a ridge with a couple of other guys, eating food out of a mess kit with what they call the thousand mile stare in the eyes. And there's all the trees, or everything's all just splintered after an artillery barrage or something and there in the war. But his military service is probably the most important thing in his life to him.

After the war, he stayed in the National Guard and got his twenty years in the military. And they reduced the rank after the war from the battlefield promotion, he retired as a captain. He used to -- If we were doing something wrong, he would say, "You've got too much energy." He'd say, "Get down and do twenty pushups and I want you to run around the block two times." And he'd come up and he'd look at you and he'd say, "Are you ready to behave now?" And if you didn't say the right thing, two more times around the block.

He was very stern and very strict, but he liked the outdoors too. We used to go on family camping trips and we had a fishing, ski boat. There's some big lakes near Tulsa in Oklahoma. He was really upset when he found my father wouldn't talk to me anymore, it really bothered him. And he said, "Well, what do you care about him anyway? It takes more than just giving birth to someone to be a father."

We have a good relationship and we still talk. He's getting -- He's eighty-four now, I just talked with him for Father's Day. And it was a little difficult, he's starting to forget things, sometimes in the middle of a sentence. Hopefully he'll be around for a while longer. He's outlived all of his friends, all of his military friends are dead and he doesn't have any

living friends anymore. He told me a couple years ago that he's not in any hurry to go, but when it's time, he's ready, that he's lived long enough.

HO: So, can you talk about your perceptions of being gay as a child and kind of what informed your opinion as you were growing up?

JG: Of course as a little kid, I didn't even know there was such a thing. I guess I probably figured out that I was attracted to men when I was twelve, thirteen years old. And figured out pretty quickly, that I wasn't -- that everybody else wasn't the same way. And I just didn't tell people and I tried to keep it quiet. And I didn't even know the word, probably homosexual at that point. But maybe later in high school, somewhere there, I became aware of the word homosexual and what it meant. And of course that was in late sixties, early seventies as a time was very different from now. 1968, which is the Stonewall riots -- And at that time it was against the law to be homosexual in all the states, except Illinois, I don't know why not Illinois, but it was literally against the law to be gay.

And when they had the McCarthy hearings, McCarthy went after communists and gays. They wanted gay people to name the names of other gay people, and they wanted to get gay people out of government and out of the school systems. They had something similar in Florida called the Johns Commission. And in those days, as I started becoming aware of this word, homosexuality and people that were homosexuals. Every now and then, we'd hear about someone, that they'd been arrested and charged with having sex somewhere or with another man or something. And there'd be something about it in a newspaper, and then you'd read about them killing themselves. That was sort of what you did once your life was ruined. Once you were outed, your family didn't want to have anything to do with you. And people would want to beat you up and you couldn't get a job.

And there was a friend of my brothers, I can't think of his name right now. His father was one of the editors of one of the Tulsa newspapers. There was the Tulsa World or Tulsa Tribune, I don't remember which one. But he had gotten arrested in a park somewhere at night, meeting another gay man. And he went out to the city of reservoir and jumped off the dam the next day, killed himself. So, I -- As high school and getting into college, I didn't want anybody to know I was gay and I didn't even want to be gay. I just kind of hoped it would go away. We kind of knew it wouldn't. But it just -- At that time, it meant you're going to have a pretty miserable life or maybe you would just kill yourself. And so, it was something I tried not to think about too much.

AG: And at that point, I guess Stonewall had maybe just happened or-

JG: I didn't know about Stonewall until I came to Atlanta and came out actually. But Stonewall, happened in 1968 in the summer of '68 in the third week in June, which is why they have Gay Prides in most cities in that week. And there wasn't any kind of gay liberation or gay activism going on in any place I ever lived, until I came to Atlanta. I heard about some in Atlanta. I lived in Des Moines, Iowa for a while, and worked as a volunteer on a community crisis phone line thing. It was run by the Red Cross, but we did -- had this phone line service where people could call in if they were lonely or suicide prevention, drug problems, things like that. And I met another guy who was a volunteer there also, he was gay. He was probably the first gay man I knew as an adult and it was in Des Moines.

And then when I moved from Des Moines, I didn't know him anymore, so -- He wasn't around, I still knew him. But it wasn't until I came to Atlanta and I moved to Atlanta in 1983, worked in retail for six years. And I was in De Moines, in retail and moved around different cities, opening stores and training the staff. And I was in Knoxville and then got an opportunity to move to Atlanta, to open a new prototype store for the company. And my brother lived here. So, I was excited about that and moved in with my brother. And when I got to Atlanta, there was a Gay Center and you would see some stuff in the news. And there was a theater, the Garden Hills, maybe. It was one of the Lefont theaters that would show foreign films. And they had a foreign film, one time called El Diputado. It was about a Spanish politician that had an affair with another man at the time when they're trying to get rid of Franco and trying to move towards democracy. And the fascists assassinated his partner and tried to use it against him in the politics. But I went and saw this movie. I'd run movie festival while I was in college and I loved movies. But I saw this movie and after the movie, looked around in the audience and it was all men. And I could see couples and groups of men together, and people hugging each other, it was kind of a sad movie. Afterwards, I just felt really lonely. And I thought, okay, I'm going to try to find other gay people and meet some people. I'm tired of being by myself. So, that was probably 1984, maybe. So, I came out at a late age, I was born in 1957. So, I was almost 30 years old.

AG: So, can you talk about where you went to school?

JG: How far back?

AG: Childhood.

JG: The school -- I don't remember the name of school. I went to a school in California and I remember I had a teacher in first grade named Miss Ortega and she used to speak Spanish to us. So, I knew it a little bit of Spanish when I was that age. And we also had a next-door neighbor,

Kenny Hirata, who was Japanese first generation. His parents wanted him to learn Japanese and asked me, we were best friends, if I wanted to learn Japanese too. And I actually -- at one point, could read and write Japanese on a second-grade level. And I've forgotten almost all of it. I can't remember very much in my Japanese, unfortunately, but there was that school.

And the first school I remember the name of was in Tulsa, Robert Fulton Elementary. And then I went to Skelly Junior High School and the Nathan Hale High School in Tulsa. And then I went to Wabash college in Crawfordsville, Indiana. It's a small private liberal arts college, it's an all-male liberal arts college actually. And took a couple of classes, one at Georgia State and one at Oklahoma State in the summer one time, just for stuff I was interested in where they'd let me take a class, even though I wasn't working on a degree.

AG: So, why did you pick Wabash?

JG: So, I was a pothead in high school. I was a little pothead kid and -- But I was a really good student in spite of that, I made really good grades and I was a national merit scholar. And I got offered scholarships to Washington University in St. Louis, MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. I got offered a commandant's appointment to West Point and Wabash offered me a scholarship. And I've always liked smaller, more intimate places and where you get to know people. And you don't -- MIT, I kind of ruled out right away because there MIT's -- All the prestige of being at MIT is really their graduate program. Being an undergraduate MIT, is like being a cog in the wheel or just a number. And it's a huge place. And Washington University of St. Louis, I actually was interested in, but ended up ruling that out later for another reason.

And Wabash was a small place, it was a small liberal arts college. They had 830 students, and it had a really good reputation. At the time, William F. Buckley said it was the best conservative school in the country, which he based that on, it was a good school, had a good academic reputation. But they didn't take any government or religious funds. It was the only -- And I believe it to this day, it's the only private, completely privately funded higher education institution left in the country. Everybody else takes some kind of funds from the government or churches or somewhere. But I went and visited and it was this beautiful old brick buildings with the patina copper roofs and Ivy growing in the walls, it had a long history. The administration building had a plaque on the back of the building. It was a list of names of the students who had died in the Civil War.

This college was founded, I think, 1823, maybe. And it was a neat place. Some of the --there were some large freshman classes like Introduction to

Biology or Psychology 101, that kind of stuff. But there were other classes and especially as you became a junior and senior, sometimes you would go in and you didn't even have a classroom. You would sit on sofas and chairs in the office with your professor and there'd be six or eight of you in the class and discuss the materials. So, it was just an environment that I found real attractive and they offered me a full scholarship and grants that paid most of my expenses. So, that's how I ended up there.

HO: What was your major there?

JG: Well, that was a -- Wabash at the time that I went to college, I had a severe asthma as a kid and my brother and I both, grown up getting shots and going to the doctors. And badly enough -- The asthma was so bad, that at one point the doctors had told my parents, they should institutionalize us that they wouldn't be able to keep us alive at home. It was sort of before they had some of the treatments they do now. The shots that they give people for asthma now, that was experimental at that time.

The -- but I kind of got this really great respect and admiration for doctors growing up. And I thought I wanted to be a doctor. And Wabash had a great pre-med program with nearly a hundred percent acceptance in the medical schools. If you got recommended by their pre-med committee, you got accepted. And so, I thought I was going to be pre-med, but I also was really interested -- I like liberal arts. I wanted to take a broad range of things I -- interested in sciences, in anthropology, particularly psychology and philosophy. And so, I could be pre-med and major in something unusual. And so, I was a double major. They didn't call it a double majors. It's a major and an area of concentration, but I was a major in philosophy and the area of concentration was psychology. And originally thought I was going to be pre-med until I took a couple of semesters of biology, so -

AG: Can you talk about your relationship with your brothers and sisters?

JG: So, my half-sisters -- When my father quit talking with me, one of them will talk to me and we get along okay but don't talk often, it's very seldom. The other one didn't want to talk with me anymore. And I don't have a close relationship with them. My stepbrothers, one, Skip, he's the oldest one, Walter the third, he lives down in Singer Island, outside of Palm beach in Florida. And we talk occasionally and get along well, but we're not close. Step sister, Susie, still lives in Tulsa and keeps an eye on my parents and helps take care of them and we get along great. And I always enjoy when I'm there visiting, getting to spend time with her. My brother, Jay, and I are very close. We went through a period of time where we weren't that close.

He struggled with being gay also, and went the route of going to church and hoping that he could pray his being gay away, would go away. At some point, he finally figured out that doesn't work and came out after I did. And he sort of got involved in the gay party scene and he was hanging around with all the guys that traveled around with, they used to refer to as circuit parties. There was the White Party in Montreal, and there was the Black Party in New York. And they had this schedule of parties all year -- And people would -- There was a whole lot of gay guys that would plan their schedules around getting time off and going flying to these different cities, to go to these big dances and parties that would go on for two or three days. And my brother got involved with that and I wasn't a circuit boy, party boy and his friends thought I was boring because I was involved in politics.

And so, we didn't talk for about ten years, very much. We were nice to each other, but we just had nothing in common for a while. We're very close now and talk regularly and spend time together and when we can. And he lives in Long Beach, California, he lived here and he and I lived together when I first moved to Atlanta. He worked for Delta at that time. My sister, Julie, also lives in Long Beach. She's lived out there for years, before he moved back out there. And my family likes California a lot. I'm not real fond of it, but they like it. But Julie and I are not quite as close. She's had three kids and struggled financially with raising a family and all the time that you have to put into having children.

Her life has been -- for years, has been taking care of her kids and being the best parent she can be. And all the activities, the sports and the cello lessons for my niece and that and different things. And now, they're finally the -- My niece and nephews are now -- The two youngest are in college and finishing up college. And my sister financially, they're in better shape. And she's actually flying in tomorrow with my brother-in-law. Interesting [inaudible], they're Evangelical Christians and we get along just fine. My brother-in-law, he's a independent rep for a number of companies that sell gift items and books to Christian bookstores and gift shops. And they're having a convention in Atlanta for that industry and a trade show and different companies with their wares and things. So, he's here coming here for the trade show and my sister is coming along so that she can spend time with me. And so, I've taken a couple of days off and spend time with her while she's here.

HO: That's great. So, you had a really interesting story about coming out to your brother. Can you talk about that?

JG: Yeah. So, I struggled with being gay and for a long time, and my brother did too. And for my brother, I guess it was an even bigger struggle. He went to a church here, the Mount Paran Church Of Christ or Church Of

God, I think. Mount Paran Church of God, and his religious beliefs have been important to him. We grew up in the Lutheran church and we had a strong Lutheran family, but his religious beliefs have been important to him. And I guess he thought he could do away with being gay by going to church and praying. And he figured out that didn't work eventually, but he hadn't figured it out yet. And we were living together in a house in Marietta. And I talked about going to this movie and feeling lonely. So, I went home from that movie and looked up "gay" in the yellow pages. I found the Atlanta Gay Center and called and talked to somebody there and found out there was a newspaper and there was a club for gays called Friends Atlanta and got involved with the club. And so, I came home one evening and I thought I was afraid to bring anybody home or tell him about it. And I started feeling like, why should I be afraid in my own home? I live here. So, I decided I would tell him I was gay and I told him, and he just kind of sat stone-faced and looked and didn't say much of anything. And at the time, I thought, well, he didn't get mad. He didn't call me any names or anything. So, I guess that went okay.

I came home the next -- And this was -- this would have been 1984, '85, and the AIDS crisis had already begun. I came home from work the next day or a couple days later. And he had some little Rubbermaid gloves on and Lysol or something, and he's cleaning the bathroom. And I came in and I said, "Oh, you're, you're doing cleaning." And which, I just thought he was cleaning. And he said, "Well, you never know what kind of disease you might bring home to me." I said, "What?" And we had a little fight and he told me I wasn't allowed to bring any gay people to the house that he didn't want to be around them. And he was still struggling.

So, eventually we decided we probably shouldn't live together and he moved out. I met David Greer, not long after that, and not too much longer, David moved in with me. But my brother in the meantime, I guess, saw that I could come out and that I was happy and started thinking about it. And he decided that maybe he could do the same. And he met a guy that he started going to -- I don't know, the clubs or where exactly, but he met somebody that he liked. And one night, we were already up in bed and get ready to go to sleep and there was a knock on the door. And I -- "Who's at the door?" And I went downstairs, opened the door and it's my brother. And he said, "Hi, I want to introduce you to someone." And he wanted to introduce me to his boyfriend.

So, that was his way of telling me he was gay too. So, it was -- I think it's a lot -- It's changed and things are -- Some people still have that kind of struggle, probably, especially people coming from religious families. And I think for a lot of Black gay men and lesbians, it's difficult because so much of the black community is organized around the churches. And I think it's kind of -- it's harder for them, but for a lot of young people, I

think it's a lot easier now and people don't maybe go through as much struggle as we did.

AG: Did you have any concept that your brother was gay before he showed up or was it just --

JG: I didn't, I didn't, but when I finally -- I didn't tell my mom right away that I was gay, but when I finally did tell her, she was upset at first and not upset that mad at me or anything, but there's upset. She told me later on that she actually went through a grieving process. And she said, "I suddenly felt like you were not the person that I knew, you were somebody else. And I felt like I'd lost the person I thought I knew it would." She and I had always been really close and that upset her and later on, that was fine. But originally -- She didn't want me to originally to tell my stepfather. She thought he's this military guy and real gruff and serious and he won't like it. And she was kind of scared to death he was going to find out.

But eventually, she told him herself because she didn't want to just know this herself. And sometimes she worried about us and she didn't like worrying by herself. So, she told him herself after telling us we couldn't tell him. But she told me he -- He and she both told me later on that they suspected even back in high school, that my brother was gay. But they were shocked to find out I was gay, that they never would have guessed that. They thought I was this rough and tumble guy. I had dated some while I was in high school a little bit even and they just were surprised. I didn't have a clue my brother was gay, I was surprised when he told me.

HO: So, you came out in Atlanta and you've talked about realizing that you were gay --

JG: Mm-hmm.

HO: Maybe in your early teenage years or earlier than that.

JG: Knew it, without putting those words on it, probably the time I was 12 or 13. But at a point where using the words and saying, okay, I think I'm gay. Probably, that didn't happen till I was maybe 19.

HO: So, why did you decide to come out in Atlanta? You talked about the movie.

JG: Well, first all of -- Just loneliness. When I worked in retail, I traveled around opening stores. I worked for -- It was called J Brand. It was like a - - Ross Stores bought them and it's -- Ross Stores owns those now, but it was like a Marshall's or TJ Maxx. And I would travel around, I'd open a store, I'd go in when they were building it, the construction's being

finished and train -- Help, finish setting up the store and hire the staff and train them and get an assistant manager to the point where they could run the store and be promoted. And then I'd moved to another city and do the same thing again. So, I lived in five different cities in six years. And so, aside from being gay, I'd go in and then to work seventy, eighty hour weeks for two or three months. And then at a point where I had a staff that knew what they were doing, and they could take care of problems if I wasn't there, I'd start having time off and I'd start meeting people and get to know some people in the community I was in and then move.

So, I had gone through six years of not having any close relationships, really, that lasted very much time. So, I was lonely to begin with. And in seeing that movie and recognizing not only was I lonesome just for other company, but to be around other gay people and people I could be myself with. That just sort of made me want to meet people. So, I did some coming out, going to meet other -- Joining the Friends Atlanta Organization. And I ended up doing some volunteer work at the Atlanta Gay Center. I did some of those things to start meeting other people and have some friendships, but then eventually came out very publicly on television.

After I met David, David was younger than I was. And he just sort of assumed that everybody should treat him fairly. And if they did -- had a problem with someone being gay, that was their problem. He never went through any struggle about being gay. It was -- any internal struggle. And he joined Friends Atlanta also. That's where we met, was through Friends Atlanta. They had a -- We'd get together on Sunday afternoons when the weather's nice and have pickup volleyball games at one of the parks in town and we'd play volleyball. And he'd seen me playing volleyball, one of the volleyball games and decided he wanted to meet me. So, we got together and some of the people in Friends were politically active or activists in addition to being part of this social recreational group, it was a small segment of it. Most gay people are not politically active and they hate politics just like everybody else. But we were at Gay Pride, I think in 19 --, probably 1987.

And their -- The friends group sponsored a volleyball tournament, a friendly volleyball, not competitive volleyball. Anybody that wanted to play, could play. We sponsored a volleyball tournament at the Gay Pride. And if you looked at the film footage from the news in those days, the Gay Prides, they would focus in on drag queens or somebody wearing leather or -- And that was the kind of image that gay people had in the media was -- we were all drag queens or people are guys wearing leather. And the most people were very ordinary and pretty much like everybody else. And this volleyball tournament, one of the news stations came to film the volleyball tournament and they wanted to interview people and nobody

would talk to them. And everybody was saying, "You can't put my face on the screen." So, when they showed the news story, it had those little fuzzy things that go across people's faces.

And I went up to talk to the reporter and I was apologetic. And I said, "You need to understand why they won't talk to you. They're scared of being fired at their jobs. They're scared their families will disown them. They're scared for a lot of reasons. And they don't want to talk to you on camera for that reason." And they said, "Well, would you talk to us on camera?" And I kind of thought about it a minute and thought somebody should, and I was kind of scared, but I said, yes. And I did it. So, I did an interview with them on camera and it was on the news and probably Saturday evening or Sunday morning news. And I was terrified when I went to work Monday. I thought, "I'm going to get fired when I go into work." But I didn't. So, it actually turned out okay.

AG: Were there a lot of people at the time who may have been out in the gay community, but weren't openly out in terms of friends and family and --

JG: Oh, yeah. And there's still some like that. Especially among older gay men. I -- One of my best friends, he's a year and a half younger than I am. And he thinks his whole family knows he's gay, but he doesn't talk with them about it. Especially his mom, he doesn't use those words and he's not comfortable saying that to her. And it's -- It would -- That was even more that way in those days, there were people -- You were out to other gay people, but the whole business about coming out and being open with other people, was really scary for people.

Think about the people you love. Your family and your support network, your friends. And for gay people then, and probably, for some still now. It's a really scary thing. If these people that I love and care about, and who I know love and care about me, are they still going to love and care about me after they find out I'm gay? Am I going to lose the most important people in my life if I tell them this? So it's a tough decision, for the friends and family.

And then, there are no protections that protect you from being fired if you're gay in Georgia and a lot of the country, that's always been a fear for people. If they find out I'm gay at work, I'll lose my job. And then I won't be able to support myself. I'll be homeless. The whole set of fears, if you don't have money coming in, you can't feed yourself and you'll die. There was a lot more of that then than there is now. I would say that was in the 80s and still, even in the early 90s, that was more common than not. The majority of people, not everybody in their family knew, and probably the people at work didn't know.

AG: So can you describe your process for coming out? And talk about maybe your relationships and political activism.

JG: So some of the coming out had to do -- Getting involved with David Greer was part of a motivation for coming out. I admire the fact that he just was who he was and didn't try to hide anything. And he just assumed that people should treat him with respect and dignity because he's another human being. And if they had a problem with him being gay, that was their problem, and not his. I admired that he was like that, and was so open. And it inspired me to try to be more open, but then he was interested in politics. I had been interested in politics. I had done some political activity going back to, I think when I was --

AG: Sorry.

JG: Could I take a drink of water real quick?

AG: Yeah.

HO: And I actually need to use the restroom.

JG: Do you want to turn the thing off or?

AG: No, he'll just edit it out.

JG: Okay.

AG: I think there was just some background noise.

JG: Am I talking too much and being too verbose?

AG: Not at all.

JG: Okay.

I can do that. I can talk people's head off.

AG: That's what you're supposed to be doing.

JG: For here it's okay. Sometimes I'm around people I work with closely or friends, I've given them license and said, "If I get off on a tangent or I'm talking too much about something and you're tired of it. Just tell me."

AG: Are you an extrovert by nature or you're an introvert?

JG: I've done one of those Myers Briggs things, and I'm probably an introvert that has learned to be extroverted, because of the things I'm interested in that require you to be outgoing.

AG: Right.

JG: But I would say, I've had to work at not being shy. And the first time I talked before a group of people, I was terrified and shaking. I could get up for any size group now. I could get up on a stage and speak before a 100,000 people, I'd be fine now. But the first time I had to do something like that, I was just terrified. I'd given a speech in speech class before other kids. The work that you're doing for the archives, and this project, is it a project that Kennesaw decided they wanted to do? Or did you all get to decide what you wanted to do? How did that happen? Is it an area of interest for you too, or?

AG: Yes. And it's also for the archives, because we are part of the Georgia LGBTQ Archives Project.

JG: Mm-hmm.

AG: So it's got Emory, Georgia State --

HO: Atlanta History Center.

AG: Atlanta History Center.

JG: The archives decided they wanted to be a part of that project and you're involved because of that?

AG: Mm-hmm.

JG: Okay.

AG: Well, we had looked at documenting voices that weren't heard, that were part of the minority. And so we're also doing some oral histories with people in the African American community in Cobb County. We'd like to move into some Hispanic--

JG: That'd be a good thing to do.

AG: --interviewees.

JG: There's a huge Hispanic community in --

HO: And the immigrant community, in general.

JG: There are a lot of people from India that live in Cobb County.

HO: Oh, yeah. There're a lot of them in my program actually. So it's really interesting.

AG: Mm-hmm. I think we found that so much of -- Especially just the university archives, really tells that very official administrative history. And we'd really like to broaden that perspective. We've got a lot of the official history -- So we'd like to have some of the unofficial history. It's a lot more interesting. It's always a lot more interesting.

HO: As much as we love memos.

AG: Yes. [inaudible]

JG: I do those at work.

AG: I think it's interesting that you do not want to be on the computer when you come home. I admire you for that, because I can't peel myself away from it.

JG: There was an interesting story recently on NPR. And they talked about people being so engaged with their devices and all the phones have got great cameras now. And people are going around and taking pictures of everything. And they did this thing, where people go to this event and told them, "Take pictures." And they told another group of people go to the event, "Take pictures, but pay attention to what's going on, so you can tell us about the context of the picture and what was going on when you took the picture, and what the picture meant." And they had another group of people, they said, "Go to the event and you can't take any pictures, If you've got your phone, leave it off while you're there."

And then they talk to them afterwards and ask questions about the event and what happened at the event and the different things. The people who were told, go there and take pictures. They couldn't tell them what was going on at the event. They were so busy taking pictures and engaged with their devices that they didn't experience what was going on around them. They're not at all engaged. That's another reason I do that. I think that's one of the problems with technology right now, is people get engaged with their devices, and not other people.

AG: It's very true. I actually just taught a session at an Institute, that the Museum of History and Holocaust Education was doing. And I was telling Anne when I got back from it, is the first time I've taught a class where I had asked them to look at objects, and try to figure out what they were, without giving them any context, because that was what I wanted them to

do. They all got out their phones and Googled immediately. And you don't need to do that, you just need to interact with the actual object, and then try to learn from it. And they didn't seem to understand that concept.

JG: All the bars have the trivial pursuit nights. I still love playing trivial pursuits. And it's no fun anymore --

AG: Because they're all Googling.

HO: It's who has the best phone now.

JG: Or, who can hide that they're on Google.

AG: So I think you were talking about David's influence on coming out.

JG: Yeah. So, David influenced me a lot, especially with his family. I don't how much-- if he talked to you any about his family. His mother and father both came from families where they were one of seven children, each big families. Some of them were Georgia mountain people. I think, David may have been the very first person in his family or extended family to ever get a college degree. A couple of his uncles were in the Ku Klux Klan. I can remember trying to talk to them and be friendly with them at family dinners and things. They wouldn't-- I'd say hello and they wouldn't even say hello back, they'd act as if I wasn't there. They'd act as if David wasn't there. But his grandmother was the matriarch of the family, and they had their holiday events there.

And, when he told her, he was gay and he met me, and he told her about me. And she had a family meeting apparently, with the family and said, "Look, David's going to bring Jon to the Thanksgiving and the Christmas dinners. And if any of you have a problem, you just keep it to yourself because he's welcome in my home and you better treat him like he's welcome." David expected people treat him that way and most of the times people did. The fear that people had about coming out, it's kind of like putting yourself in jail. This fear is like a prison, and the bars are probably stronger than any steel bars. If you can keep people afraid, you can control them. And it was, people who were being afraid of coming out control themselves.

I saw with David, here's a way to not be afraid and good things happen to you. So, that was that part of it. But then the political part, I had grown up, and -- some of it came from my stepfather. When we go on these family camping trips, he'd get his military side out. At the end of the camping trip he'd say, "We need to police up the campsite." That's what he called it. And he'd line us up. My brothers and sister, we'd line up two yards apart and walk across the campsite and pick up the trash and clutter, and throw

stuff away, including stuff that people had left there who had camped there before us. And he said, "We're going to leave it better than we found it." And that was a good thought, to leave things better than you found them.

Some of my objective in life and being involved, not just in gay activism, but other community volunteerism, and things that I've done is to be a part of the community and try to do what I can to make the community be a better place and leave things better than I found them. And for gay people, it was so hard, when I was growing up to be a gay person it's to -- getting politically involved and trying to use the political process, both street activism, but also mainstream politics, getting involved in party politics was a way to hopefully create social change, and make it easier for future young gay people to have a better life, and to leave things better than I found them. That was some of the inspiration about getting politically involved. You've met Dick Rhodes? And, Dick, became a friend pretty quickly. I met him through Friends Atlanta, which was a social recreational club for gays and lesbians, in Atlanta. Dick was the president at one time. And later on, I was the president for a while. At its height we had between 450 and 500 members. And it was at a time where there were few organizations, there were maybe three organizations in the whole area, for gays and lesbians. There was the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, ALFA. And a lot of the women who were in that organization had been abused by men for being lesbians. And they didn't allow any men in their -- They had a house, where they had their meetings and no men were allowed over twelve. If they had children and the boys were younger than twelve, they could bring them. But, once they hit twelve, they weren't allowed there.

There was the ALFA group. And then there was, Atlanta Venture Sports, AVS, which was a gay sports club. They would go on camping trips and things. And their -- Friends grew out of AVS. They had some kind of fight. I don't know what about, but a split between some of the members. And some went off and started their own group, that they wanted to run differently. And that became Friends Atlanta. And Friends had game nights. We'd meet at someone's house and play board games, and cards and have refreshments. We'd go out -- dining out club. We'd go on dinners together. There was a bowling league that was formed. All the gay bowling leagues in Atlanta grew out of Friends Atlanta. And there's a gay volleyball league. There's a gay swim team, that grew out of Friends Atlanta. We had camping trips, and different things we'd do together. But, there was a handful of people, I would say out of that 455 members, there was probably less than two dozen who were politically active, and Dick was one of them.

And he, at one point was the head of the Dekalb Democratic Party. He was the first openly gay delegate to a presidential convention from a Southern state. Went to the 1988 Democratic National Convention. And he ran for office, at one point. I have one of his buttons in my button collection. I had been involved a little bit in politics. And I always had an interest in it. I'd done some activism as a kid, mostly around anti-nuclear stuff, back in the days when there was the craze to build nuclear power plants. But I had also done, when I lived in Des Moines in Iowa, John Anderson was one of the Republican presidential candidates that ran that year. I really liked him. I thought he was a smart guy and had a lot of good ideas. I collected, personally, three-fourths of the signatures he needed to get on the presidential ballot in Iowa. And I went to the Iowa caucuses when I lived in Des Moines. So I'd done a little bit of party politics already. And, seeing what Dick was doing, I got involved in the Democratic Party and started doing both street activism, but also getting involved in party politics. So I'd say, David and Dick were my big inspirations. I consider Dick to be my political mentor.

AG: Let's see. Dick was probably a generation ahead of you.

JG: Yeah. Dick is seventy-seven now, maybe. So he's twenty, twenty-one years older than I am. I mentioned before about the McCarthy hearings and the Johns committee. Dick came to -- I don't know if you know, he came to-- You know about the Johns committee. He came to Georgia because of the John's commission in Florida. It was a McCarthy-inspired commission, where they decided the McCarthy hearings were so great and wonderful, they'd have them in Florida too.

And the Johns Commission was formed and they wanted to get homosexuals out of the schools and government. I'm not sure if the Johns Commission had an anti-communist portion of it too. But they were going around and finding out people that were rumored to be gay. And subpoenaing them, and threatening that they'd ruin their lives if they didn't give names of other gays that they knew and they'd name names, and they printed the names in the newspaper, and then you got fired and you killed yourself. Dick had some people that he knew who had been brought before the John's commission, and figured, his name was going to be named at some point, and fled the state. Terrified of the Johns Commission. And that's why he moved to Georgia.

He's an older person than I am, and was probably, as a younger person, even more closeted than I was from talking with him. And things like the Johns Commission dealt with some pretty awful stuff. Now he's still involved though, and he's working on senior activism, trying to help get services for gay and lesbian elders in assisted living facilities and things. So, he's an inspiring person.

AG: Excuse me.

JG: He calls David his granddaughter. I don't know if he's ever heard. He's always referred to David as his granddaughter. I don't know why, but --

AG: Well, he gave us a copy of David's wedding invitation. So he's still very involved.

JG: Yeah. David is getting married today, officially. And I couldn't go for -- Not just because this was -- I would have rescheduled this, if that was the only reason. And he knew that a lot of people probably wouldn't be able to come from out of town. But, it's the second time, they actually rushed to San Francisco and got married in the brief little period where it was legal to get married. It seemed to be in San Francisco, but then the court later threw those weddings out. I've thought of he and Lee as being married for a long time. So it almost seems strange that they're getting married now, because they've been married.

AG: So like a recommitment ceremony.

JG: This will be official and it'll be state sanctioned, and their license will mean something, and the state of Illinois will recognize it. And their kids will have married parents.

AG: I know you talked about looking up "gay" in the yellow pages, but just maybe talk a little bit more about how you got involved in the LGBT community in Atlanta.

JG: So I looked up the gay in yellow pages and I found this Atlanta Gay Center and it had a phone number. Which was a helpline, interestingly enough. I'd worked on the helpline in -- I'd actually that three times in my life, I worked on a telephone helpline. They were really popular in the 70s and somewhat in the 80s. I worked on one, starting when I was fifteen years old in Tulsa, called Crisis Open Line, I think it was called. And then I worked on one in Des Moines. And the Gay Center here had one and it had his phone number. I called and I was talking with someone there and they told me about the Gay Center and they had a newspaper and they had little get togethers. And then they said, "Oh, and there are some clubs and things. And there're bars that people go to, we can give you a list of stuff."

I went up to the Gay Center and got one of their newspapers and then got information they gave me. And one of the things was the club, Friends Atlanta. I found out when they were having one of their game nights and went to the game night, met a few of the people there. And I ended up volunteering on the telephone helpline at the Gay Center and getting involved in Friends. And I probably got really involved in a bunch of stuff

fast, after having been lonely for six years and not having any close friends around where I lived. It was exciting, to suddenly be able to have a bunch of new friends, and people to do things with, and I probably went overboard.

I got involved in everything I could think of, to get involved with for a while. I got involved very quickly. Within a few months, I was involved in the leadership in Friends Atlanta. Was helping plan activities and run activities. I don't know how much of that -- If I answered the question all the way or not?

AG: Just as much as you can.

JG: You'll ask follow up questions, if you need to. Right?

AG: Absolutely.

JG: Okay.

AG: So, coming from Tulsa and then in California as well. Did you have any concerns about coming out in the South?

JG: Sure. First of all, Tulsa is extremely conservative, Oklahoma in general. Tulsa, probably a little bit less than -- It's a little more cosmopolitan because of the oil industry. Had the largest airport in the world in the 1920s, Paris was second. And it was because of oil been flying in and out from the oil fields there. So it made it a little bit more cosmopolitan. But then it was kind of a weird place too. They had a group in Tulsa that wanted to do opera, but they didn't have an orchestra. And so they did one of the Wagner's operas at the Readers Theater. That one's something I read about, they did in the 1930s or something.

AG: I'm trying to think how that would work.

JG: It sounded really strange. I was trying to figure it out too, but Tulsa had this religious fundamentalism. It's a very conservative state. It's very much a Republican state. I grew up in a conservative household and I'm actually a fairly conservative person. I might've been a Republican too, if it wasn't for being gay. The Republican party has been so unfriendly to gays and they've been so exclusionary toward people who didn't fit a particular set of a mold, that they wanted people to be in. It's just not any way I could participate in the Republican party.

Some of the people, like Pat Buchanan, that were there in the past, were just horrible. But a lot of that is fueled. It's not just conservatism, but it's conservatism fueled by religious fundamentalism. You can look back at

like Barry Goldwater, kind of conservatives. They were not religious conservatives. And Georgia, the South, has that same thing. In some ways, Georgia may not be quite as conservative as Tulsa. But, you also have here the history of the hate groups. I became an expert on hate crimes as a volunteer, and knowledgeable about hate groups and worked with victims of hate crimes for years and tried to get hate crimes legislation passed. And I knew about hate groups fairly early on here. It used to be pretty common for people to get attacked for being gay.

Morris Brown College. It used to be a tradition among graduating seniors to get together and come into Midtown and beat up gays, for an activity as part of their graduating. I had friends that were attacked and when I was working on hate crimes and public safety stuff, I knew people that were murdered.

And, so the hate groups, the hate activity, the anti-gay, conservative, religious fundamentalism. Those things all made it uncomfortable. When I came out, I was worried about being fired mainly, but later when the Cobb County anti-gay stuff happened and I was on the news so much, and I expected that I would get threats. And then we did, I had a listed phone number, and people were calling the house and threatening to kill us. We even got tap set up on the phone with the police. We authorized them to set up tracers on the phone. So they could try to find out who was making these threats and stuff. It was kind of scary. Georgia has that history, the lynching of Leo Frank, which just mark both, the birth of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League and the modern rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.

I mean, we both grew out of that event, here in Georgia. In 1992 -- I've got a report that I'm going to give you, about hate group activity in Georgia that was done in 1992. And it's even got a synopsis of all these different neo-Nazi skinhead, Ku Klux Klan groups. It's got a synopsis of the different things that happen, a chronology through the year. It's an interesting report, but in 1992, in this kind of map that shows where the different organizations were based. There's a huge bunch of them up in the Northwestern part of the state, but there's some now in this area. And there were twenty-two active hate groups in 1992. And, neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan. There was a group that had a Hitler's birthday party celebration in 1992 in Marietta. With a cake. It actually says that in the chronology of that the synopsis, they had a Hitler birthday cake. That was a point where neo-Nazi skinheads, young skinhead, white supremacists Nazis, there were a lot of those groups growing at that time. So being out publicly, there's an added element that was here, and probably worse here than it might've been, if you were in California or New York or something. Just worried about your physical safety, about somebody trying to harm you.

AG: Let's see. So you mentioned coming out publicly on television. You didn't have any repercussions at work about that? Did anyone ever mention that to you?

JG: Yeah, something funny happened at work. There was this guy that was my supervisor at work, and he was this big, heavy guy. His name was Darryl. And, Darrell was a class clown kind of guy. He was constantly making jokes, he liked people to laugh at his jokes, and he made racial jokes and he made anti-gay jokes, among the different jokes he made. Not all of them were those, but I was really offended by him, but afraid to tell him. And this is one of the reasons I expected to be fired when I went to work the next Monday. So I went into work on that Monday and Darryl walked up to me almost as soon as I came in and he said, "Hey, I saw you on television, Jon." I said, "You did?" And he said, "Yeah, you did really well."

I said, "I did well?" And he said, "Yeah, you spoke really well. You looked good on there." I kind of dumbfounded. I said, "Darryl, I was kind of scared coming into work today. I thought you were probably going to fire me after seeing me on there." I said, "You make jokes about gay people sometimes, and they're pretty awful jokes." And he said, "Ah, I like to get a laugh out of people. I'm sorry, I shouldn't do that." And I was shocked. I was really shocked.

But it was also like a big relief. It was like, what have I been so scared of all this time? So, and that's the truth about all the stuff we're scared of. A lot of the things we're afraid of, never happens. But, as long as you're afraid of it, it can still control you.

AG: So you were talking a little bit about, you've been active in communities, maybe from the time that you were part of the hotline in Oklahoma. So can you talk just a little bit about kind of how you got started with that?

JG: The very first thing I did, getting active in the community was when I was in junior high school. I heard about this thing called the Walk For Mankind. It was a March of Dimes event, where you had this twenty mile walk and you got people to sponsor you for amount per mile, to raise money to fight birth defects. And I don't know why that I got excited about that, but I read about that. I thought that was really cool, helping raise money to fight birth defects. And I called up the March of Dimes office and told them I wanted to participate. Asked them how I could do it. And they said, come by our office and get one of these packages, a sponsorship package. And so I got my mom to take me over there.

And while I was there, they said, "Oh, you're young. And you're in school. What school do you go to?" And I told them, and they said, "Would you

be your school chairman for the Walk For Mankind?" And I said, "Okay." And I said, "What do I do?" And they said, "Well, get other kids to be in the Walk For Mankind." So I asked to speak before the student council and asked for permission to put up posters on the walls. And I recruited other kids to be in the Walk For Mankind.

So that was my first community involvement. There was a move in the 70s, to build nuclear power plants. And a lot of people were scared of nuclear power plants and afraid that they weren't safe. And I think the first political kind of activism I got involved, a nuclear power plant was going to be built in Oklahoma. I think it was called the Black Fox or Black Hat nuclear power plant. When I was fifteen, I found out about it and I knew some older persons that were involved in anti-nuclear stuff and got them to take me and go to a protest outside of the site where they were building a nuclear power plant.

But I always liked reading and I used to read. Started reading Time magazine when I was eight or nine years old, and like to know what's going on in the world. And got worried about wars and different things. Really, at a very early age and got interested in politics, and who our leaders were, and what things they stood for. Whether or not they were good leaders or not. That was something that I was interested in by the time I was twelve or thirteen years old. Well, just reading stuff.

But while I got involved at Wabash College in a couple of things. We had a small group of Black students there. And we had, was called the Malcolm X Institute. The guy who was the faculty advisor to the Malcolm X Institute was also the advisor to the college film series.

And I loved movies. There was a girl that I was really close friends with in high school, we used to go to foreign films together in high school. So I got involved in running the film series and then got involved with the Malcolm X Institute, because he said, "You should come to the Malcolm X Institute meetings." And this is a time when Nelson Mandela was in a prison in South Africa. And there was the efforts to try to end apartheid in South Africa. And there was a movement, mainly among Black colleges, but some other schools too, to try to get schools to divest of their investments in South Africa, from the school endowment funds.

So I got involved with the South African studies group, which there were people from the Malcolm X group, but there was also some of the professors from the Philosophy department.

One of the professors, her name was Ann Roberts. I got to know her pretty well. And she was a Philosophy professor. She was also a Marxist. She was a dyed in the wool Marxist. She really believed in the Marxism, and

the collective work for the benefit of all people. She was involved in that as well. But, we began working together as a group, researching the apartheid and the political process in South Africa. And the way that Blacks are treated. And we built up a case and went to the board of the college, and asked them to divest college's investments in South Africa. So that was another, political legs.

And then, I think the first party politics I got involved with, was in the 1980 election when I lived in Des Moines. And I really liked John Anderson. I thought he was a smart guy and had lots of good ideas, many of which Ronald Reagan took from him, and used after he got elected. But I went and collected signatures, and found out about the Iowa caucuses, how the caucus process worked. And went to the Iowa caucuses. So, that was some of my early stuff.

AG: That's really interesting, the fact that you were answering a suicide line when you were in your teens. How did you get into that?

JG: They used to have this thing on television years ago called, the movie of the week. You know about that?

AG: I do.

JG: Didn't think you're old enough to know about that.

AG: I am much older than you think I am.

JG: So they had these movies of the week, and one of the movies of the week, once -- And it was when I was fourteen or fifteen years old. And it was about a suicide hotline in California. And then these kids, teenagers and twenties, college aged. They worked on the suicide hotline. And then it was the movie of the week about how they were saving lives. And people would call. And it had some weird thing where they weren't supposed to meet the people. You only talk to them on the phone, which that was always a rule. Every hotline I ever worked -- The gay hotline, it wasn't. It was okay to meet people off that one. But the one in Des Moines and in most of the crisis hotlines, for your protection, you only talked to people on the phone. And in the movie, one of them goes and meet someone who just seems so lonely and they really need somebody. And they ended up getting killed or something. It was some something stupid in the movie.

But I got fascinated with this idea that the hotlines -- And I found out they had one in Tulsa called Open Line. And I decided I wanted to work there. So I called them and said, "I'd like to volunteer. How do you volunteer?" And they told me, that you had to come in and fill out an application and you had to take psychological tests. And then they had training classes that

you had to go through. And if you went through all that okay, then you could work on the hotline. And they told me about, they were having a meeting coming up for people who were interested in being volunteers, so I should come to this meeting. So I got to the meeting and I went through the whole meeting, and listened to their whole spiel and stuff. And at the end told them, I wanted to fill out the paperwork and wanted to join.

And they said, "You're really young, how old are you?" And I said, "Fifteen." And they said, "I'm sorry, you can't be a volunteer unless you're eighteen. We don't let anybody under eighteen volunteer." I said, "Why not?" And I argued with them and I persuaded them to let me go ahead and take the classes and do everything. And they could see how well I did, and then decide later on whether or not they're going to let me volunteer. And I went through the psychological stuff in the classes and everything, and part of the classes was role playing and they decided after I did all that, that I did well enough and they let me go ahead and be a volunteer. So I was, most of the people that were there were, there were a few that were eighteen, nineteen, but most of them were in their late twenties, early thirties.

And there was a couple of psychologists that were the sponsors or the people with credentials that made sure that we abided by good guidelines and had good processes and policies and whatever. But, I was definitely, I was the youngest person there, but I really liked doing it. It was really nice to, I felt good about doing something to help other people. I've always enjoyed that. It's nice to do something for other people. It was an interesting experience. Most of the people that call those things were people that were lonely. That was probably the number one reason people call just, they wanted somebody to talk to, lonely people. And then after that, probably people with relationship problems, that would be number two. They were having fights with their boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever. Even though it was suicide prevention and drug overdose stuff, those were very tiny percentage of the calls you actually got.

But, I dealt with, when I was fifteen, I talked with the people on the phone who that were suicidal and we had a thing called the Physician's Desk Reference, PDR. Somebody would call up and they'd say, "I've decided to kill myself and I took this overdose of pills," and you say, "What kind of pills did you take?" And we'd looked them up and find out was this a dangerous dose or not, and we'd talk to them. And anyway, that's how I got involved with that. I really enjoyed it. When I got to Des Moines moving around in the retail business, I got to Des Moines and found that they had a similar thing there. The one in Tulsa was just a group of people who thought it would be a good idea to have something like that because some of them had friends that had died of drug overdoses and they said, "We need some kind of place that will help people and prevent this here."

So this group of people got together, raised the money and set the one up in Tulsa. But the one in Des Moines was actually run underneath, it was sponsored through the Red Cross in Des Moines. Oh, the one in Des Moines, in addition to doing that, also had a contract again, probably because it was through the Red Cross they could do this, they had a contract. Part of the training we had to have in Des Moines was in screening phone calls after hours, screening for child abuse complaints. We handled the after hours calls for the Des Moines area for child abuse complaints. And we could page on-call workers if a child was being abused or that a caseworker needed to go out and investigate a home or something.

And so I worked there. I also dealt with child abuse calls. I had a call once that I took where a man had been going by a house, had heard screaming and it was in the summertime and the windows were open and he went up closer and he got to one of the windows and he saw, heard the screaming and it sounded like a child scream to him. And he looked in the window of the kitchen and saw a chair propped up against, underneath the handle and propped up against the oven door. And it seemed like the screams were coming from the kitchen and he climbed through the window and took the chair out. Somebody had beat up this little girl and stabbed her in the head and put her in the oven and turned the oven on. Yeah, you can tell it bothers me right now to think about that. That was a child abuse complaint I took. So we had pagers. We'd get paged to call the police and the child abuse worker that was on call. That had nothing to do with being gay.

AG: So, how does something like that affect you though?

JG: Oh gosh, that's upsetting. In taking calls, talking to somebody that's lonely is not intense, but when you actually did get on a call that was a suicide call or something, it's a very intense and emotional experience. Usually, if you did take a suicide call, afterwards, you were required to not take any more calls for the evening, then you would call the people that were the psychologists that were in charge of the program. And they'd have somebody come and debrief you and talk to you to calm you down afterwards and stuff. And I talked to some, I've talked to over the years, maybe a dozen people that were suicidal. And I had one of those persons that killed himself while I was on the phone with them. That was pretty devastating for a while. But I knew that wasn't my fault. Sometimes people get overwhelmed and like, "Gosh, what did I do wrong?" For whatever reason, I knew not to think like that. I got over it, but it was a tough experience.

AG: So, do those experiences inform how you live your life now, how you address problems?

JG:

Yes. My last partner killed himself. He had, after having worked over in Russia and having a run in with the FSB and stuff which I can tell you more about that another time, but he hung himself. He was having panic attacks and went into depression after being interrogated and scared by the FSB in Russia. So a lot of people, I went to a support group afterwards, survivors of suicide after that, and didn't connect well with the other people in the group. There's so many of the people in the group and it's really common for people after that, when someone close to them commit suicide, or if you're a person who has a friend or somebody, and you're trying to stop them from, a real common reaction is guilt. People feel guilty. What did I do wrong? Somehow I should have been able to stop this. That seemed to be a lot of what the survivors in the support group were struggling with. Just overcome with feelings of guilt about maybe they could have stopped it somehow.

How could they have, they should have seen something, that this was coming or, and somehow I've known that you're responsible for your own actions and other people are responsible for their actions and you can try to help people, but you ultimately, when people decide something like that, they decide it themselves. It's not you that did it. You're trying to help them. And so when I've had situations in life that involve other people and stuff like that, even getting in arguments with people. I've been really good about understanding what I'm responsible for and what other people are. It helps to process it and move on and go on with things. That's been good for that. I said I was a pothead when I was in high school and I can remember working the first outdoor concert I ever went to the Tulsa State Fairgrounds. There was somebody that took acid and was climbing up to the top of this thing and was going to kill themselves. Somebody said, "That girl said she's going to kill herself." And these other people are all high and they're saying, "Oh my gosh, she's going to kill herself."

And they're just sitting there and, "Look, there she goes." And I got up and went after her. I see a problem and I do something about it. I'm not afraid to get involved. And so that's part of things also, too. It's great to talk about stuff. And you can tell I like to talk and talk about things, but sometimes somebody needs to do something too, and I've been willing to do things and take action on the things I think need to be done and not just talk about them. And some of that comes from some of those experiences too, I think. You can make a difference by getting involved. I like that quote from, is it Margaret Mead, the anthropologist? She's got a, there's a quote from her. It's something like, never doubt the abilities of individuals to change the world. Something like that. Individual people can do a lot sometimes.

AG: So you've mentioned some of your earlier political activism. When you came and were living in Marietta, how specifically did you begin to get involved?

JG: So there's a number of things. I mentioned about getting involved with hate crimes and the hate groups. When I met David, David lived in Mableton. Mableton is, you know where Mableton is. So he was still living at home when I met him. And the first time I drove over to his house on a weekend to pick him up and we were going to go out and do something, I was driving and I got to the intersection of some road in Bankhead Highway. I don't remember what road I was on, but there were Ku Klux Klansmen in robes on all four sides of the intersection. They didn't have their hoods on, just their robes, but they were doing the white power salutes to cars as they went by. And when the cars were stopped on their particular side for the red light, they were handing out literature.

I knew that there were things like the Ku Klux Klan, and I knew, but I thought of them as history and not something that would, and I was shocked. I hadn't lived in Atlanta that long and I knew a little bit about the Klan. There had been groups here before, but I didn't know there was people who still did that stuff. And I was just shocked that here's these people, and they're not the least bit ashamed of what they're doing or the things that they're saying and they're handing out literature in broad daylight on a Saturday afternoon in the street. So, I kind of got interested in the civil rights movement and anti -- the stuff that was working against hate groups and equal rights.

And I started reading up on some of the history of the civil rights movement here. And I also, having been discriminated against and treated badly as a gay person, I felt like I understood some of that. And once I got involved in the gay groups, a lot of the gay groups are made up of people that lived here and Atlanta has been this Mecca that's attracted gay men and lesbians from little towns all over the South, places where it's still hard to be gay. And they brought with them the attitudes of their communities. I was kind of shocked when I started coming out in Atlanta that among other gay men and lesbians that I met, I sometimes heard people use the N-word and say -- I found out, I just kind of assumed having been the victims of prejudice and being mistreated, you would understand that you should treat other people with kindness and respect and not treat other people the same way.

And I was shocked to find out there were gay men who were bigots and there were some. So I started getting interested in, I had past interest in politics in general, but I started getting interested in gay activism, not just trying to make life better for gay people, but gay activism has as part of the civil rights movement and became interested in not only changing

societies attitudes toward gay people, but working to try to get gay people to understand that our struggle was part of the civil rights movement and that they should treat other people with respect. And so I guess that's some of what I got interested in. Dick Rhodes, let's see. There was an umbrella group, as other organizations started coming about in Atlanta, there was an umbrella group. I can't remember the name of it now, but it was sort of a group of groups and it didn't have a membership. It didn't have a headquarters or anything. It would just meet at different places. But representatives of all the different gay and lesbian groups would get together periodically at this organization.

And we started sharing ideas, telling each other about the events on our calendar and asking for support from each other. But we started talking about how can we work together to advance gay rights and we started, as a group, people started talking about we should get involved with getting the police to quit beating us up, and we should start looking at hate crimes. And I joined the ACLU. The ACLU of Georgia had a lesbian/gay rights chapter. And I joined the ACLU and started going to the ACLU chapter meetings. Later on, I was president of the ACLU gay and lesbian rights chapter. The president before me was Cathy Woolard, who was president of the Atlanta City Council for a while.

But, so through the involvement in both street activism and protests and rallies, but also starting to look at how to get involved in the mainstream political process in parties and in city and county government. Some of that all started coming out of these groups, all of us talking about how we can change things. And Dick was interested in, we formed a group called the, it was, Legal Lesbian -- I can't remember what it stood for even now, but it was basically a lesbian/gay political organization to get people, to recruit people to work on campaigns, to get involved at party politics, to ask to get appointed to boards and commissions of cities and county governments. And so we could start getting involved in the political process and have a place at the table.

AG: So you've mentioned Atlanta a lot, but at this point in time, you lived in Marietta. Was most of your activism based in Atlanta in the beginning?

JG: So if you look back at that time, the community that was out and active and public was in Atlanta and there were gay and lesbian people living all over the place. Funny thing, I'll tell you right now, if you look at the last census, I found out this recently, the Guardian in London newspaper ran an article not too long ago about this. The zip code with the highest percentage of gay and lesbian households in Georgia is Blue Ridge, Georgia.

AG: Really? We've actually heard that from someone.

JG: Yeah. There's some articles, apparently in the Guardian, about it. Back at the time when this, during the legislative session, there was a thing of the Religious Freedom Act or something that they were trying to pass that if a business wanted to deny, tell a customer that they wouldn't sell them their product or service because they didn't like gay people and they were gay, that they couldn't be sued for it or something. It was some strange law the legislature was talking about -- There was a move to try to do that in, I think like sixteen or seventeen of the state legislatures all at once. Some organization planted model legislation all over the country. But anyway, that's when the Guardian did that article, but there have been gay and lesbian people living all over and there were plenty of them out in Cobb County.

It's expensive to live in Atlanta, so people lived out in the suburbs for the same reason other people live in the suburbs, maybe it was close to their jobs. You could get a house you can afford. Maybe you couldn't afford to live in one in Atlanta, but there wasn't a Cobb County gay and lesbian group or a Gwinnett gay and lesbian group, just wasn't stuff going on in other places. And even though there were people there, and David and I lived in, even before I met David, I lived Mariana with my brother. And when I started to get involved with the groups and then David and I lived in Smyrna and we would come to Atlanta and do stuff in Atlanta. But we didn't even hardly, I think we knew one other couple that lived in Cobb County. People were pretty low key and invisible.

There was in 19--, I think it may have been 1989. I'm not sure. We decided we wanted to do something about that. And we got the Pride Committee and the Southern Voice was the newspaper in Atlanta and Etcetera Magazine, a guy that was the editor of Etcetera Magazine most of the time it was being published, is a friend of mine, a guy named Jack Pelham, David and I were good friends with Jack and I could get anything I wanted published in Etcetera Magazine. We got everybody to put our house, us as a contact and we said the Cobb County's first gay pride event and we had a potluck, a gay pride potluck at our house for gays and lesbians. And we had about maybe forty people that showed up at our house for a potluck in Cobb County.

And let's see, this actually, it must have been '88, not '89 because, so we had the potluck and these people came and it was supposed to be from, it was on a, I think we had it on maybe Saturday from four in the afternoon until eight at night or something like that. We had people at our house until three in the morning. They wouldn't leave. There was all these people came and they were so excited to meet other gay and lesbian people who lived in Cobb County. They were doing the same thing we did. If they wanted to socialize with other gays and lesbians, they went to Atlanta. They didn't know anybody else either who lived there. And the people

were just so excited to meet other people that lived in Cobb County. And we finally, at three o'clock morning, said, "We have got to go to sleep," and the last people left.

But before everybody left, everybody said, "This is so great. Let's do this again." So we made a list of names and phone numbers and addresses. We made photocopies and then mailed everybody a copy and somebody before the evening was over volunteered and they said, "Let's do this again next month. Let's have a potluck every month and I'll have it at my house," so they did. And the next thing, the next time we did it, we had ninety people. And then somebody else volunteered for the next one and I think it was a summer month. They had a swimming pool and a big yard, and it was going to be a pool party. And two hundred people came and it started getting, we went, in four or five months, I think the fourth or fifth one, we had six hundred people came to this thing.

And it was all these people who were kind of hungry to meet other local gay and lesbian people. And all these people lived in Cobb County. And it was really interesting, but the thing that made me remember it was 1988 is '88 was an election year and there were people running for office and there was a woman. Her name was Lynn something. She was like 6'2" with bright red hair. She was an engineer. She had gone to Georgia [University of Georgia], but she was interested in politics and David and I were interested in politics, but most people weren't. And most people were very closeted. And Lynn invited a guy who was running for office in Cobb County for County Commission or City Council, or maybe State House of Representatives from Cobb County, something. Invited him to come to one of the potlucks and told him he could give out literature and meet people and ask people to vote for him and the potluck, this is like our sixth one or something. It blew up. There were people there that said, "How could you have a --" People were really scared of being out. Lots of people said, "How could you have somebody who's running for political office here? Do you know what will happen? He knows who we are now. He might've got our membership list. We'll get fired. He'll take that and give it to people and it's going to ruin --" And there was this argument that started, there were people who were scared that were just furious that she had brought this guy to the potluck and had violated the privacy, which we didn't have any rule or anything. We didn't have any rules, but the thing blew up and got ugly. And there was kind of like a fight and people got in their cars left and the big potluck thing that grew overnight, just in a few months, huge, disintegrated. We had one or two more and people, "I'm not coming if there's going to be fights and I'm not coming if there's going to be government officials there." The majority of people weren't interested in politics and they were scared of losing their jobs, their families, or if people find out you're gay, people will come beat you up because that stuff happened.

So, that was our Cobb County activity. And then at some point, I don't know how, Stan Wise, he was on the County Commission at one point, he's a member of the Public Service Commission now. He was a Republican. I had started getting involved in Cobb County Democratic Party politics, going to their Democratic Party of Cobb County meetings. And I'd gone to, I went to some NAACP stuff and I met a guy that was trying to organize Latinos. There was an early thing called HISPAC, Hispanic Political Action Committee, he was trying to build. And there was a huge Latino community around Smyrna. One point, back in like 1992, there were like 20 to 30,000 people that Spanish was their primary language in Smyrna. Which is -- But something that I went to, I met Stan Wise and talked with him and he called me up about a week later and said, "Would you be interested in being on the Cobb Community Relations Commission?" He said, "We --" He explained to me what it was. It's this commission that's supposed to foster good relations between different groups and people in the community and also between the people in the community and the community government.

He said we have representatives of different religious groups. We have Jewish and Catholic and Christian. And we have people who are white and Black and we have Asian persons and we have a Latino person. And he said, "I think it would be really good to have an open gay person on the Commission." And I said, "Okay." And he said, "I need you to get me a resume." And he got my resume and he nominated me and the County Commission voted on me and I became a member of the Cobb Community Relations Commission. So that was my first involvement on a political body. And I was a member of the Cobb Community Relations Commission when the anti-gay stuff happened. But we did some other stuff before that, the 1992 hate group activity thing, I'll get you later, that has the chronology of stuff.

One of the things that's noted in that, and we did it in 1992, there was one of the efforts going on at that time was to get rid of the old Georgia flag because it was offensive to Blacks in Georgia. And one of the things we did was to sponsor at the Cobb Civic Center, our organization sponsored a community, open community forum on the state flag. And we had a panel that talked about at first and different people gave their opinions about it. And then we had open mics and people were allowed to come up and they could speak for a minute and a half about their opinion and give their opinion. And so we sponsored this and we had I think it was the Cobb County Police probably. There were some police there to provide security or whatever, but there were some people that just came to it, but the largest part of the audience was made up of people from local NAACP supporters and civil rights groups and people from some of the local Klan and white supremacist groups.

It was really interesting because we set up these rules about how it was going to work and that you got to speak for so long and you had to treat other people -- We told the rules at the beginning. Anybody that you have to treat people with respect and let them speak when it's their turn to speak. There's not going to be any arguing or shouting or whatever. We need to recognize this as a heated topic for a lot of people. We want to have a civil discourse. And we did. The different people came up and said what they wanted to say, and everybody listened to each other. It was a really interesting event, especially to think of the two groups that were there and everybody listened and let each other have their turn say what they wanted to say. But it took years after that, before the state flag was changed. It wasn't changed until, can't remember -- Was it changed under Zell Miller or Roy Barnes? Roy Barnes, I think.

AG: Barnes did the first version of it, I think.

JG: Yeah.

AG: Were there any other notable projects you worked on with the Relations Commission?

JG: We talked about, we would have people come to the meetings and tell us about different problems in the community in Cobb. That was the biggest thing we did. There were a few cases where people came and presented information to us about homelessness in Cobb County. I think there may have been something about some vandalism at a synagogue somebody came and talked to us about, and we would write up reports and send the report to the County Commission and say, "Here's something we want you to be aware of and we recommend you do this or that."

I think the homelessness thing, we sent a recommendation to them that they should do some research on the homeless problem and there were probably more homeless people in Cobb County than they knew about. And we got the police and connected the police up with the synagogue about the vandalism. They'd had vandalism, but not called the police. Somebody had spray painted swastikas on the synagogue and somebody came and told us about it and nobody at the synagogue had called the police, which is unusual with the ADL here, but they hadn't done it. There wasn't a lot that went on in the, I was a member for a year.

AG: Can you talk about the founding of the Cobb Citizens Coalition?

JG: So when I read in the newspaper that Gordon Wysong, who was a county commissioner, planned to introduce a resolution supporting family values and saying that the, I can't remember the exact wording, but that the lifestyles of the homosexual community were contrary to community

values and family values of Cobb County or something like that, that he planned to introduce a resolution at the County Commission about this. And I read it and I was horrified and I was a member of the Community Relations Commission. So, I called the head of the Community Relations Commission, the chair, and said, "I've got an item I'm going to put on the agenda to talk about the next meeting." But then I got on the phone and started calling the County Commission offices. And I told them, "I'm on your Community Relations Commission and I understand that this is -- I read that this is going to happen."

And some of the other commissioners didn't even know about it, but I told them about it. They listened to me on the phone. And I said, "This is a really bad idea. You shouldn't have an official resolution where you single out a group of your citizens and basically say that they don't stand up to the values of the community or are less than everybody else." And it was put on the agenda and it was scheduled for one of the commission meetings. So went to the first commission meeting where it was on the agenda and listened to the meeting. And basically at that meeting, they announced that he hadn't put it on the agenda properly and they couldn't discuss it at that meeting. So it was going to be a later meeting and nothing happened, but now that all the commissioners knew about it and then there was more stuff in the news about it. And I called some of the commissioners' offices again, and most of them didn't want to talk about it. There was a one commissioner, Bill Cooper. He was, I think he was a pilot with Delta Airlines, but then he was also a County Commissioner. He listened to me and he said, "I agree with you. I think it's a bad idea. I wouldn't support something like that." He said, "I don't know about the other commissioners." He said, "You know where we live and you know the way things are here." He said, "That's probably something people are going to feel afraid not to vote for." He said, "I'll see what I can do." So anyway, they had the next meeting and I can't remember when it was, I called for a rally, if it was before or after the next meeting.

But at some point I'd started speaking out about it. And I thought we're going to have to fight this. And I knew part of politics is positioning and the names of things are important. And Cobb Citizens Coalition is this generic kind of name that citizens, how could anybody be against citizens? It's something, it sounds like a kind of political body that our political system supports. You should have groups of citizens who are interested in their communities. And it also had the same initials as the Cobb County Commission. They were both CCC. So, I decided I'd form a group and with a group, if we had a group, we could work better against it if they actually tried to pass this resolution.

So I called the Secretary of State's office, and reserved the name. Got a corporate registration for a nonprofit. Then I got the Southern Voice and

Etcetera to publish, announcing a meeting. And we had a first meeting and a bunch of people came to the meeting. And we talked about forming a group. There were other people that were interested in it, too. We probably had about twenty, twenty-two people, maybe twenty-four. And we had a meeting at a restaurant somewhere in a private dining room at some Italian restaurant or something, but other people were interested in getting involved in it too. And they were worried about this resolution. And interestingly enough, they weren't all gay and lesbian. There were some people that came, who just didn't like the idea and wanted to support us. Glamour, I think it was Glamour magazine, or it may have been Vanity Fair. One of them did an article at one point that, "When hate comes to your back door," and it was about the straight women who got involved with the Cobb Citizens Coalition to fight the anti-gay resolution.

But, we began talking about what we would do, and once they had the next meeting where -- Anything that goes on the County Commission, you have to, it has to be read into the minutes of a meeting before they can vote on it, at least two meetings. So, the resolution was read into the minutes of a meeting and there was no discussion, and it was just put into the minutes. And then the following meeting, they brought it up for vote, and the commissioners had a brief discussion and they voted and passed it. Bill Cooper voted against it. And the other commissioners all voted for it. And at that point, we'd had the meetings of the Cobb Citizens Coalition, and I got invited to be on a radio station to talk about the resolution on a live morning talk show on a Sunday, I think, and just sort of spontaneously on the radio show while I was talking, I announced that we were going to have a rally in the Marietta Square. I hadn't talked to anybody about it, but I thought, "We'll have a rally and protest this." I announced we're going to have a rally at Marietta Square on the following Saturday at such and such time. And, the radio station made a public service announcement -- they were friendly -- and began playing it.

And I got a phone call a few days later, and it was the chief of police of Marietta police. And he asked for me and then told me who he was. And he said, "I understand you're having a rally on the Marietta Square on Saturday at such and such time." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, you're required to have a permit for that. If we can schedule a time that's convenient for you to come down here to the office." He says, "My guys will help you fill out the paperwork and get your permit so that you have all the proper permits and everything." He was really nice. I think, for whatever reason, they wanted to make things go smoothly and not have problems. And they didn't want to have us have a rally and then be arresting a bunch of us. So, and I should've known you had to have permits. Being in the ACLU, I knew about protests and permits and what you could do on a public right-of-ways and where you had to get permits. And I just didn't even think about it at the time I said all that stuff, but I

went down and filled out the paperwork and got the permits and announced this and, and it was getting this air play on the radio.

And we had several thousand people showed up. The area around the gazebo in Marietta Square was standing room only. And the Friends people I had that were in ACT UP and Queer Nation, some of the gay activist groups in Atlanta called me and said, "What can we do to help?" And I knew that ACT UP people were used to doing demonstrations and being around counter-demonstrators and keeping their cool. And I asked them, I said, "This is going to be a Cobb County." And there were hate groups in Cobb County. The guy, what was his name? I can't think of it right now. He was involved in the bombing in Birmingham, where the church was bombed during the civil rights movement, and little girls were killed in Sunday School. Served his time in prison, and then was back living, out of prison and was back living in Marietta. J.B. Stoner, maybe that's his name.

But I knew there were hate groups in Cobb County from doing some of the stuff I'd done with hate crimes and all. And I was a little worried about counter-demonstrators. So I asked the ACT UP people, "Would you come and be peace marshals? I'd like you to get your people and position them around the fringe of the crowd, especially in between our people and any counter-demonstrators and keep people from getting into confrontations and help keep the peace." And so they said they do that, but then we had already started getting some phone calls with death threats and stuff. And, some of that got into the newspaper. And the day of the rally, 6:00 a.m. sharp, in the morning, my phone rang. I was still a bit asleep was a Saturday, and it was the Marietta police chief again.

And he said, "Jon, we know about death threats against you, and we're not sure we can protect you. And we want you to call off this rally." I'm thinking, oh, goodness. And I said, "Well, no, we're not going to call it off. I don't even know how we do that. It's been on that radio and people are going to come, even if I don't show up and we're going to have the rally." And he said, "Well, we're going to have a lot of police officers there. There's going to be a whole bunch of police officers. And I want you to know it's not to intimidate you or anything. They're there for your protection. They're there to protect you and your people. We want to have a peaceful rally." And I said, "It's what we want too."

So we got there for the rally and there were police all over. I found out later on, they had a group of state police on call off a couple blocks away and could come in quickly if they needed to. They had sharpshooters on the roofs of buildings up above. They had police helicopters or state police helicopters flying around all over. Noisy. And there were counter-demonstrators there, there were people with big signs, three, four feet wide

and six feet tall signs that said things like, "Praise God for AIDS," "Out of the closet and into the coffin," "God hates fags," and things like that. So there were a handful and J.B. Stoner, the guy I was talking about. I'm pretty sure -- As I'm getting older, my memory is not as good for names and dates and things. But I think know he was one of the people that are holding the signs and they're screaming at us and stuff.

And it was quite an event, but we had several speakers and different people out on stage. And I was scared when I got up on stage, at first. I was a little bit frightened I was going to get up on stage and get shot or something. And, actually, there was something that happened toward the end of the rally. I was onstage, and I was speaking. We had a sound system set up and a microphone. And a police officer came up on the stage while I was talking and put his hand over the microphone, and he whispered in my ear, and he said, "You need to get off the stage. We have a device." And I said, "What?" And he said, "You need to get off the stage. We have a device." And I said, "What is a device?"

And he said, "We think there's a bomb under the stage." I was just taken aback. And we got off the stage, and they moved people and got people away from the stage. And here came this guy with one of those armor suits on and the helmet and it wasn't under this stage, it was behind the stage and maybe ten, fifteen feet back from where I was standing. On the ground, there was this metal cylinder with wires. And he came up and they brought up this pickup truck with a trailer, with a bomb disposal unit, a big round thing with a top that would open and they brought it up, and he came and picked up this thing and carried it over real carefully and put it in there and they closed it and drove off. And I think I started crying.

It was just something that was upsetting then, and even upsets me even now is sometimes you wonder, "Why do people hate us so much? What did we do? Why do people who don't even know us hate you so much?" But it turned out it wasn't a real bomb. They took it out to some bomb disposal range, somewhere that they had and blew it up and, and then checked and it was just an empty metal cylinder and wires.

But I found out afterwards, this was in the summertime, it was in August, some guy with a coat on and a bulge in the front of his coat was walking up toward the stage. And the police spotted him and yelled at him to freeze and asked him what he was doing. And he dropped this thing out from under his coat. He was coming up to put it under the stage. So he had made a fake bomb to put under the stage to scare us. And, it did. So, it did. Times are a bit different now and a little bit better than they were then.

AG: And what year was this?

JG: That was in 1992. I think that's right. So anybody who watches this video, if I messed up names or dates, I'm giving my best recollection.

AG: Do you recall the names or roles of anyone else that was involved in the Cobb Citizens Coalition?

JG: Yes. There were three couples, so it was interesting. We had these three couples that were involved and did a lot of stuff. And, then this one guy. So there was a guy from Atlanta who was the Atlanta head of GLAAD at the time, GLAAD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] is the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Defamation, something like that. I don't know what. They're still around. GLAAD is still around, but his name was Carl Lange and he was from Atlanta, but he did PR for a living and he was very savvy about press conferences and press releases and things. And we were friends and he came and he said, "I'd like to offer to help. I can do press releases for your events and your positions about things." And, then there was Anne and Elaine, and I'm not going to say their last names because I don't remember for sure. It's awful. Having been involved in politics, you should remember people's names. That's one of the most important skills, and I've never been very good at it. But Anne and Elaine were a couple that got involved and became part of the leadership. And then a couple, Noel and David, Noel Lytle. I can remember Noel's last name because I was looking through the stuff I brought earlier today, and I saw his name on there, and they're in some of the pictures. So that was really the core group is David and I, Noel and David, and Anna and Elaine and Carl Lange.

And there were lots of people that got involved and offered to help do things, but that was the leadership of the group. When Dave and I eventually moved out of Cobb County and we moved because we were getting all these death threats, and we were scared, and we didn't feel comfortable in our home anymore. And we just wanted to go somewhere else, not too far away, but someplace with an unlisted address and phone number. We had a listed address and phone number at that time and had got some pretty awful threats that were made toward us with phone messages and stuff, some really scary ones. One of the worst ones, there was a couple that were really bad. I'll tell you later because I'm getting off subject.

But anyway, and I was the initial president of the group, but I said, "I don't have any need to be president." I was initial president because I called for the formation of the group and reserved the corporate registration. But David was an accountant and really good with business stuff. And he followed through on the corporate registration and got all the paperwork done and formally registered the -- We'd reserved the name.

And Noel was just good with logistics and making sure that all the pieces came together for things. David and Noel helped put together the pieces of the rally, the event. And Anne and Elaine would just help with just about anything. Anne was a good speaker. And she was good at speaking and getting other people involved and very good at focusing on the issue and pulling out the extraneous stuff and saying, "Well, here's what the real issue is." And Anne and Elaine were both flight attendants with Delta. They flew on mainly -- They had worked with Delta long enough, they got to pick the flights they wanted to work on. And they worked together on flights between U.S. and Germany.

They told a funny story after the rally. For whatever -- there's a variety of reasons why this ended up being such a big news story, but it ended up being international news at the time. And in those days, Delta would get the CNN news of the week roundup videos and they would play it on the flights before the movies. On the international, the long flight. So they were serving people in first class, flying back from Germany, and they're giving out food and wine or wherever. They told this story about -- And they look up on the screen, and there they are. And, "Oh my gosh!" And they're looking at the people, "Do these peoples recognize that we're the ones up on the screen?" And nobody did, but they said it was really startling to see themselves on the screen, on the flight coming back from Germany. It's the following week.

Anne became the head of the group after -- I was president for just a brief period of time. And then we set up a formal election, and she became the president and we had a board and all of the persons I just mentioned were all -- Except Carl, Carl wasn't a board member even though he offered to help us and help, he didn't want to be an officer or a board member because he didn't live in Cobb County. The majority of the people that were in the group were from Cobb County and about 40% of the group was straight people, mostly women, not too, not too many straight men. But we had a lot of straight women who were sympathetic and wanted to get involved and help. And it was really nice.

Oh, and the red headed person, Lynn, from our old potluck, she got involved too. She got involved, but she had a temper. And when we'd talk about issues and there was disagreement, she could get heated and passionate, a little overly passionate, sometimes about stuff.

So after they took the, what we didn't know was a fake, bomb away, we actually finished the rally and this rally, there's a newspaper out there I brought with me that I gave you, and there's got a picture of me standing up on stage at the rally with a clipboard and a suit and tie and my sleeves rolled up on, no jacket, but there's a thing in that article that describes me as Jon Greaves on the stage at the rally, looking more like an insurance

salesman than a gay activist. Which I was really pleased with because I lived in Cobb County, I was a member of the Human Relations Commission, I believe very much, and I liked the idea of a peacemaker. I liked that Jimmy Carter was a peacemaker when he was president. I liked the idea of helping people get along.

And people talk all the time about the founding fathers of our country. And I was a philosophy major, political philosophers that were popular at the time this country was founded, John Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Rousseau. They talk about, "Why do people even have communities? Why do people band together in the first place?" And that they do it for their common good. And, that's been something else that's been a theme through stuff I've done in my life is to try to be a peacemaker and bring people together and help people recognize the things they have in common rather than fight each other for what's different about them.

And so I wanted to present a face at this rally of the Cobb Citizens as us being your next door neighbors, and the people bull that you work with and live next to who you like, and we're just like everybody else. And, so I made a point of, I was trying to build affinity and support with people to support us and wanted to look like somebody they could identify with. So I made a point of wearing my suit in August and on a stage outside in Marietta, and we had things at the rally. We didn't have any real strident, rebel-rousing speeches. We talked about the rights of citizens and the freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and we had a mother who had a gay son that contacted me and she had a song that she composed and a little electric piano that she'd composed a song about how much she loved her gay son and asked if she could sing. And I said, "Sure." And she got up and sang this song about loving her gay son, so that was to play up the family stuff. So we had a variety of different speakers. I spoke too and emceed the thing. So, we got up after words and finished the rally.

And I made a point of asking the crowd, saying, "We're citizens of Cobb County, and this is our community where we live. And we want it to be a nice place, please pick up your trash before you leave and clean up," and people did. They all started picking up. The place with spotless afterwards. And I thanked the police and said, "We really appreciate the wonderful Marietta Police for being here to protect us and keep us safe. And thank you, Marietta Police," and that was the end of it. But it was followed by, after I had announced that rally, the next day, the gay activist groups in Atlanta, Queer Nation and ACT UP decided they wanted to have a rally because they were angry with Cobb County for what they were doing. And they had a rally the following week and they called theirs, the Queer Family Picnic. They asked everybody to bring food, and it was a very different kind of a rally.

AG: Was that in Marietta as well?

JG: It was on the same place, exact same location, the following weekend. And, it was a difference from approaches because my approach was, "We live in Cobb County. This is our home, and we shouldn't be singled out and treated badly by our county government just because they don't like us. We're citizens and our county government is here to serve us, not to mistreat us, but also this is our home and we're citizens. We're neighbors and we're a part of the community." And so that was our point of view and what we're trying to play up and trying to draw on the support of our neighbors and the other people in Cobb County, and the Atlanta gay groups really were angry and they came and had the kind of speeches, which I participated in at other times. You do different things depending on what's appropriate at the time in what you're doing.

And there are times where it's important to show anger and maybe some of their anger was good, but when you're angry and you're in people's faces, you don't usually make them feel like, "Gosh, I like you. And I think I want to support you." And so they had speeches about, "We're here, we're queer, get used to it. You don't like queers you're --" And that was part of Queer Nation was using the word queer. Make it a name that had been used in a mean way, so in other words, they wanted to take it back and use it and say, "We're proud of it." And, so they had a very different kind of a rally that was fiery speeches and condemning people for their hatred.

So it was interesting. So the two rallies, there was a character of the suburban gays who wanted to blend in and be part of their community and probably weren't particularly, most people, politically active and a lot of times suburban gays didn't identify with the gay activist groups who were doing the street action. They were uncomfortable with them and like, "Guys, they're scaring people. They're going to make people mad at us." But there really is a place for all of it, but it was just interesting. The two rallies that were, it was the suburban gays and it was a different character and a tone of, "We want to be your neighbors and we have a right to live here just like everyone else," and the, "We're going to show you how mad we are because you're stupid and you've done this stupid stuff. And you don't like queer people and we're going to make lots of noise and make your life miserable." That was the Atlanta street activism approach. So it was interesting.

AG: What was your sense of the community reaction to the rally and the other work of the CCC?

JG: The news media was pretty supportive and wrote to some extent, fairly positive thing. They're supposed to be reporting and reporting the facts, but we were portrayed fairly and in fairly good light. And the Marietta

Daily Journal, Otis Brumby was the editor. And they were a conservative community newspaper. They were conservative Republicans, but they were old fashioned conservatives. They were not the current brand of neo-cons or religious conservatives, religious extremists that have gotten involved in politics so much. And I would say they wrote editorials saying that talked about the rally, that, they didn't look like a bunch of rabble-rousers or extremists. They look like just everybody else in Cobb County. And, somebody's mother sang a song about how much she loved her son. And, these are not the ways that the people think of that are stereotypes of gays and they seem like people that should be left alone and allowed to live in their community. And the County should rescind this resolution. There's no reason why the County Commission needed to give themselves a black eye and do this. And they really started in and from then on took a stand against the County Commission and the resolution. And I think, I would guess, I don't know for sure. I talked with Otis Brumby once for a little bit. I went over to their office and talked with him and did an interview with a reporter afterwards. But I would guess that he probably wasn't terribly happy about having -- Here's a county where there weren't any gay groups, and there wasn't any gay activism, and there weren't any gay bars. And they probably knew there was some gay people living there, but they were invisible, and here, within two weeks, they'd had two demonstrations with thousands of people on the Marietta Square.

All of a sudden, Marietta's become a hotbed of gay activism. And I think, probably, they would prefer that things had just stayed the way it was. And there was no reason, one, for the county commission to go pick a fight with a group of citizens, that was wrong on principle, but two, for somebody who wanted to use the political process to beat up our gays and lesbians had instead made themselves look stupid and foolish and drawn a bad light on the county.

AG: Do you think the County was able to differentiate between the two groups, the Atlanta-based groups and the Cobb Citizens Coalition?

JG: I don't know the answer to that. I'm not really sure. I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know.

AG: What was the reaction of the County Commission?

JG: They wouldn't take my phone calls anymore, the commission offices. Bill Cooper who had abstained from the first vote, apparently got all kinds of nasty mail and messages at his office, which I don't think reflected a majority view of people in the county, but there were people that were part of the hate groups or people with really strong opinions that didn't want gay people around it. There was a very vocal minority that was stirring up trouble, but the commissioners had some people telling them how great

what they did was. And I think Gordon Wysong got invited to come give speeches at some churches. And, in his public statements, he hardened himself after the rally and said, "See how they are. They're having these demonstrations. They're --" He tried to portray us as if we were attacking the peace of the community and creating, we were upsetting the peace and good order of the community and, "Do you see what they're bringing in?" And part of what happened at this time, remember that Atlanta had bid on the Olympics and the Olympics were coming to Atlanta. And there was a group, Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, or business group, in Atlanta that was bidding on having the Gay Games come to Atlanta. And, he would talk about that. He said, "God only knows what Gay Games means, what kind of things they do." He was pretty hateful and stuff. And, he began making public appearances and speeches, and he got invited to go to places in other states and speak before groups. And he really hardened just his --

Bill Byrne, who was head of the County commission, he tried to be a little more pragmatic in saying, "Well, we'd like things to die down and calm down and not have this big dispute." And we actually, Cherry Stark and I and Bill Byrne set up a series of meetings. We agreed to get together and have private meetings and not talk about what was going on in the meetings in the news media and discuss how we calm things back down and get rid of this resolution.

And, we had a series of meetings with him. His daughter came out to him during this time and told him she was a lesbian and that she was ashamed of what he'd done, and that may have impacted him some also. But I think that the county and Otis Brumby, and this was played up in the local and the national, international press, these counter-protestors with the signs that said, "Praise God for AIDS," and they're screaming, "Go home faggots." And they got in the news a lot. And I think that just about everybody, Gordon Wysong wouldn't talk about those people. But when I heard Bill Byrne make statements and you see the stuff they do, I think just about everybody was embarrassed by that. They thought, "Oh my gosh, that's what Cobb County now looks like. The people who support this. Those are the people who were at this rally who support the resolution." And they were embarrassed by that.

AG: Can you talk a little bit more about some of the threats you received afterwards?

JG: We started getting phone calls, and it wasn't a whole lot of them. I would guess we maybe got under a dozen phone calls, ten to a dozen, something like that. But they were just really -- It was scary to have people call you and say, "If I see --" One of the first ones they got, the guy said, "If I see your faggot face on the news one more time, I'm going to kill you." And

then we had somebody that called and said they were going to come drag us out in the street and slit our throat to let our faggot blood go down in the gutter where it belonged. And then said, "Don't think we can't do this." And then they described our house and our cars and the license plates of the cars and told us what our address was.

We found out later on, there was a predecessor to websites, were newsgroups. They had newsgroups on the internet and found out there was a white supremacists newsgroup had put my name and address and phone number on the newsgroup and said, "The world would be better without this faggot." And didn't say, "Get rid of him," but they'd put this on their newsgroup, out to the other people who supported them. So that may have been where some of this stuff came from, but there was another guy that left a recording. I may have the tape somewhere still. I don't know. It was one of those little micro cassette recorders when you had answering machines, micro cassettes. But this guy left this message, and that one actually really, probably upset us more than anything because it was on our recording and we played it over and over again and obsessed about it.

But it was somebody who sounded crazy. This guy, the message started out, and he'd say, "I saw you queers," or faggots or used some derogatory- - I can't even remember what -- but, "On the news." And then, "I see you talking," and he said, "You people are animals. No, you're worse than animals." And as he's talking, he's getting louder and louder and ranting. And it's like, you could hear he's working himself into a frenzy as he's leaving this message. He says, "No, you're worse than animals. Even the animals don't do the filthy stuff that you do, you faggots," and then he starts talking to himself, he's, "Calm down, calm down, calm down." And he said, "You can tell you're making me really mad." And he said, "I'm going to kill you if you don't stop this and get off the television."

And, we played that over and over again and called the police and the Smyrna Police sent a police officer. She came to the house and talked with us and took a report. And talked to us about locking our doors and showed us how to check our car before we touched the car to -- She said, "It might be a good idea to --" Told us first to try to downplay things said, "Most of the time, people make these kinds of threats and they never do anything so you shouldn't worry about too much, but you should be careful. Be sure you lock your door at night. And when you drive home from work, look around and look at your surroundings, be sure you're aware of everything before you in the house."

And then she proceeded to take us outside and show us how to look under the car and check the car to look for wires or signs of someone tampering with the car before you got into it. So she tried to reassure us, but ended up leaving us feeling pretty disturbed. I grew up, I told you, that my father

took us fishing and hunting, and I used to do target shooting. And I bought a .38 revolver and we started, had the gun within reach at the house whenever we were home. David and I, I kind of expected to get threats and calls, but I had this naive idea that by expecting it that I could control it and it wouldn't bother me, but it did. And it just got where we felt unsafe in our house.

We'd come home from work and change clothes fast and go out to eat or drive to go visit with friends in Atlanta or something. We didn't like being at home. We didn't feel safe in our house. And eventually moved because of that. And we just didn't want to be there anymore and didn't sleep well at night. And one of the things from working with hate crime victims, you hear about it now with people in the war, but it was a thing with hate crime victims, a lot too, and crime victims in general, but more with hate crime victims, they have a greater propensity to have post-traumatic stress disorder. And, as I learned about that working with hate crime victims, later I recognize that I had some PTSD for probably a year after all of this stuff from living at home being afraid for months. There were several months where we lived there, where it was like that from August up through October. It was October when we moved.

AG: You just mentioned that --

JG: People were sending threats to my office. I worked at PacTel Cellular. I'm sorry.

AG: No, please.

JG: I worked at PacTel Cellular when I became member of the Community Relations Commission, which was in the news because I took it before the Community Relations Commission, I put it on the agenda and it's a public meeting under the public records, public meetings laws, and the news media came and the Community Relations Commission voted with one abstention, Jeri Barr, who was Bob Barr's wife, she voted to abstain, but everyone else voted that they would recommend to the county commissioners that this resolution was ill-conceived and that they should rescind it. And that it wasn't fostering good community relations in the community, whatever.

But when Stan Weiss had asked me for my resume, the resume was part of the public record in the county commission meeting where I was nominated and somebody got my work information, and I was called into office at work by the vice president of the Atlanta vice-president for PacTel Cellular, which later became AirTouch and then Verizon. I was called in the office one day and he said, "You've been on the news a lot." And I'm thinking, "Oh no, I'm in trouble. They're going to get rid of me."

He said, "We've got some threatening letters here at work." I said, "Threatening letters?" And he said, "Yes, someone sent in letters here." And he said, "Their letter is pretty hateful. It's got some horrible language in it. It says that they're not going to do business with you. And they're going to recommend that other people quit doing business because you work here," and I said, "Well, I hope I'm not in trouble." He said, "No, no, no, you're not in trouble. That's not why you're here." And, and I said, "Can I see the letter?" He said, "No, I'm not going to show it to you." He said, "The language in it is too awful. I don't want you to see it." He was mad. He was actually angry about this letter. He said, "You need to be careful what you say and do."

He said, "Just be sure that you don't ever mention anything about our company and what you do on your own time that you represent yourself and not the company." I said, "Of course, that's what I'd do." And he said, "I'm going to have our PR person set up a time to meet with you and give you some tips on working with the media." "Okay."

So that was kind of interesting. But I found that they had gone to the corporate security and they were worried about somebody trying to come at work at attack me at the office. So that was kind of scary too.

AG: You mentioned the Olympic bid. Can you talk a little bit about the Olympics out of Cobb movement and how the CCC was involved with that?

JG: Well, first of all, the CCC mostly wasn't involved with it. There was a guy named Jon-Ivan Weaver, lived in Atlanta, and I'd never met him before. He called one day and he introduced himself over the phone. And he said, "I've got an idea about how to help get rid of this resolution in Cobb County and how to punish the County for what they've done." Which, the Cobb Citizens Coalition, we did at one point call for a boycott, but prior to that, we wanted to be left alone and allowed to live in peace with our neighbors and not singled out for mistreatment. Our objective wasn't to punish the County.

But at any rate, that was the main thing he was concerned about. And he had this idea about, they're going to have Olympic volleyball at the Cobb Convention Center, I think is where it was going to be. Or somewhere in Cobb. I think that's where it was going to be. And planned to have events there. And he said, "I want to call for the Olympics to not have the volleyball in Cobb County because Cobb County's not welcome to all people."

And I said, "That sounds like a good idea." And he wanted Cobb Citizens to join in with him and he wanted that to become the focus of what we did

and to be the main effort. And I told him, you can do that. And I think it sounds like a good idea that would put pressure on them, but we live in Cobb and the way we're positioning ourselves is that we're part of the community and this is our home and that we want to be left alone and recognized that we should be treated the same as everybody else. And we might work together some, but that's not the main thing that we want to work on.

And he got mad. He was really angry about that. And I don't know why. I didn't really know him very well. But there was a person, Pat Hussain, who was another Atlanta activist, got involved with him and they sort of headed up the Olympics out of-- So that was really a whole separate effort. And for the most part, there wasn't anybody in Cobb Citizens Coalition who was doing anything with the Olympics out of Cobb.

There were two completely different efforts. The Olympics out of Cobb got a lot of publicity because they did some high profile stuff. They did a lot of the traditional street activism stuff that I'd done, and other kinds of protests and things. They got together and had cars with signs on them, "Olympics out of Cobb," and got side by side in all the lanes on 285 and drove 10 miles an hour with the traffic behind and the people honking their horns and yelling at them. So they called it a rolling protest. They did things to disrupt.

And they were really successful in getting the Olympics out of Cobb. They removed the volleyball events from Cobb County. There was a guy, Dick something, he might have been the Chief Operating Officer of the Olympics Organizing Committee. I had a couple meetings with him and we talked and he asked, "What is it you want?" And, "I know you've been having these meetings with Dell Burn. What's going on in those meetings?" And I talked with him and we had some honest conversations and he told me he was trying to get information to find out what the organizing committee should do.

And the King? I started to say King of Norway. I don't know if they have a King. President of Norway? King in Norway? Something. Norway was one of the first places to have same-sex marriage and to have public policy that gay people were to be treated the same as everybody else. And he wrote a letter to the Atlanta Organizing Committee and said that the Norwegian Olympic team did not feel safe coming to Atlanta for the Olympics and that they needed to remove the Olympics from Cobb County. So they were successful in getting that out.

But the two groups didn't really work together too much in the fact that we didn't work together too much, the Jon-Ivan Weaver guy, it just infuriated him. He didn't like us. I mentioned about wearing the suit and tie to try to -

- If you look at the ACT UP Activism, people were dressed very differently and didn't wear suits and ties, are street activists, most of them, a lot of the ACT UP people were people that had AIDS or their friends were dying of AIDS. And they were young flamboyant New York gays originally. But then the ACT UP people here tended to be some of the young, angry, a lot of people involved in AIDS activism. And that's where a lot of the activism came from, at that time, were angry about their friends dying and about the way people were treated. And a lot of the activism was focused on anger and showing the public how angry we were. And that we're going to make your life miserable unless you get with it and help us.

When we started having the meetings with Dell Byrne, I would get phone calls from the head of ACT UP or the other activist groups in Atlanta. And they'd say, "What are you doing? Why are you having these secret meetings? You're selling us out." And I said, "Oh yeah. What do you mean?" And we'd go to these meetings with Dell Burn in the daytime and then I'd take time off work. And then I'd go over at night and have to go meet with the ACT UP people and reassure them that we weren't doing anything to sell out the Atlanta gay community. Which I don't even know how we would've done that. We'd given away their gold or something.

But the Don Ivan Weaver guy, he was kind of putting this stuff out there. You know, "These people, they won't help. They're not supporting our Olympics out of Cobb thing. They won't talk with us. These Cobb County people, there's something wrong with them." And it got kind of hostile.

They eventually wrote a book, a self-published book, he and Pat Hussain, about it. And they attacked all kinds of people, including other people who had joined in with them and had been a part of the Olympics out of Cobb thing. It was a very weird kind of dynamic. And I didn't ever know either of them very well and didn't understand why that was that way. Pat Hussain and I had gotten to be friends in recent years. She ended up having really severe depression and problems with depression and we'd met and talked before. And I found out about her depression and talked with her and got to be friends with her partner. And we get along fine now. And I don't know where Jon-Ivan Weaver is now.

There were two separate things that came from a very different perspective and with different goals. And the Olympics out of Cobb was Atlanta-based. And the Cobb Citizen Coalition was based at Cobb.

AG: What other work did the Cobb Citizens Coalition do?

JG: When this all started, there was a politically active group, the Christian Coalition. They would have meetings in different parts of the country.

And they had had a meeting in Marietta a few weeks prior to all this starting. And Gordon Wysong had gone to the meeting. I don't know if it was at his church or he'd gone to the meeting from another church. He didn't talk about that, but that was part of where the inspiration for this came. And there was this new strategy that was starting to evolve in the politically active religious community to get political bodies to do stuff. And this is where DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] came from eventually, was to pass laws to try to put a stop to gays and lesbians.

And I think Gordon Wysong -- Atlanta was this oasis where you could be gay and lesbian in relative safety and comfort compared to the rest of the South. And it's across the river from Cobb County. So I think Gordon Wysong, he saw the Atlanta activism and gay pride parades, and there wasn't talk about same-sex marriage in the way there is now, but there was in the news for some reason. I don't remember what. And he heard about this group that was trying to get the Gay Games here. And he was upset about that.

And then there was a play that had been at Marietta [Theatre] in the Square. A play called Lips Together, Teeth Apart by Terrence McNally. I can remember some names. I wish I could remember all the ones I want to remember. And it's a play that's not a gay theme play, but it does have a gay element in it. It's a group of couples that go and spend a weekend, or a holiday, at a beach house together. And they talk about all kinds of stuff. What's important to them in life and how much they love their kids and all this kind of stuff while they're there. And that's the whole play is around this interaction with them and them talking about the things that are important to them in life.

And at some point during the play, they're talking about how they love their kids. And would you love your kids if? What if your kids got into trouble? What if your kids got arrested? What if one of your kids turned out to be gay? And they said, "Well, I'd still love them." And that infuriated Gordon Wysong. He said, "They're having gay plays at Marietta's Theater in the Square." And the County gives grant money through the Arts Commission to Marietta, the Theater in the Square.

So there was this attack on gays to have this political thing, this resolution. But then there was also, it was a two-pronged attack, the other side of it was to attack the arts community because the arts community, not so much that they supported gays, but I think that the conservatives, they know gays are here and that's fine as long as we're invisible. They wanted us to stay invisible.

And I actually saw a talk show at that time, by chance, not long after that, where they had a person from one of the religious nonprofit groups that

was talking about why the arts were bad. And he said, "Arts can depict gay people. Therefore the arts are bad." And so there was this attack to pull -- The County commission decided they would not give funding to Theater in the Square anymore because Theater in the Square had had a play that was a gay play, which it wasn't. But that's the way he depicted it. And they wanted to have this thing that's in the book that I gave you out there for that meeting, the resolution to change the County ordinance about grant funding. To make grant money that went out to organizations and for the arts to apply a community and family value standard to the grant applications. That they couldn't give money to any organizations that would use it for something that was contrary to community and family standards or value.

So they had hearings about that in the County Commissions. And we went, besides fighting the resolution and wanting to be treated fairly, we also all thought this is kind of a bad idea to not support the arts in Cobb County. Again, we live here, it's our home and we like having arts in Cobb County. And I think that adds to the quality of life. Plus it's free speech. We have a Constitution and it guarantees free speech. That's un-American to take away.

And so we went and we organized members of our group and talked about who would go speak and what they would speak about so we wouldn't all go talk about the same thing. And we had an organized effort to go and participate in the two hearings that they had about the arts funding, which is why we got the PEN/Newman Award. And there was this affinity that happened almost from the start where the supporters of Theater in the Square and the Cobb Citizens Coalition, we got along really well together because we were both being attacked by the same person for the same reasons.

And the sad thing was that, when we spoke, we gave our public speaking at the public participation portion of those hearings, we talked about that it would be unconstitutional to single out and decide who got grant money based on the content of the art. That they couldn't decide that some art was okay and other art was not okay. And People for the American Way is a national organization, they sent one of their organizers here and they came and testified. And they were an organization that worked on a number of issues, but the arts and free speech was one of their big issues.

And then the County Attorney I guess told the commissioners that was probably right, that they would probably get sued if they single out particular types of art and said, "We're not going to fund that art, because we don't like the content or what it's expressing." That would be unconstitutional and they'd get into trouble. They'd get sued and probably lose and have to pay the court fees and everything.

So then, Wysong announced that they were changing the proposal. And the proposal was that the County wouldn't fund arts at all anymore. And they killed arts funding in Cobb County. Which I think they have arts funding now, but they defunded things like programs for plays to be put on. To take school kids, could be bused in to be able to see a play. They killed funds for Cobb County Art Museum. They killed funds for some choir groups. All kinds of stuff got defunded. And it wasn't a huge amount of money that Cobb County gave, but it was a really sad thing to have happen that all the arts funding just got killed completely because they didn't want there to be depictions of gay people in art.

And that was really a lot of what all this was about. Sort of slap gay people and tell them to keep in their place. And we want them to be invisible. And I think the County Commission, that was probably a surprise to Wysong. He saw these gay activists in Atlanta and a lot of this is very anti-Atlanta and the gay people in Cobb County were invisible. And I think it was probably a surprise and a shock to him when this group of Cobb County gay people came up and stood up against him. I don't think he expected that to happen. He expected it to be an Atlanta versus Cobb County fight.

AG: Did the CCC continue after this work was done or did it slowly begin to dissolve?

JG: So they worked to rescind the resolution and they worked to try to get art funding restored and not defund the art. The work went on for a period of time. I'm trying to think exactly how long it was. And we wanted to get this resolution rescinded and get the arts funding restored. It became clear after a while that there was no way that the County Commissioners were going to vote to rescind this resolution because they had so much pressure from the religious groups. And it also became clear that they probably were not going to re-fund the arts. In fact, Commissioner Bill Cooper told some of the people in the art community that they just needed to be quiet and not say anything and let things die down. And they would get money restored after a while. But that if they made a big ruckus and kept fighting against the commission, that the commissioners weren't going to do anything for them.

And so the arts community, other than the people in the Theater in the Square, who tended to stay active, the rest of the arts community in Atlanta was relatively quiet. Just hoping that they'd get some money restored. But they were having fundraisers for private donors. And they initially got a big influx of money from people outside Cobb County, out of state, who donated money to try to make up for what the County had taken away from them.

But the CCC group kept working on that and kept having meetings and activities. But after that summer and in the fall, it died down where it wasn't at the same intensity. And I think people were at a loss of what else can we do? And somebody who was an attorney and knowledgeable about the County Commission stuff had read through things and they found something that said that resolutions passed by the County Commissioner was considered to be the sentiment of the Commission who passed it. And so basically, once that County Commission was no longer the County Commission, so next election cycle, that any resolution that they passed, so if they passed a resolution that said -- The resolution's not binding first of all [inaudible]. But if they passed a resolution that said we'd like all of our meeting minutes to be on green paper, once their term is up and there's a new Commission, that resolution doesn't have any force at all. It's not even a wish of the new Commission.

And so the idea came out that once their Commission term is up, unless they pass a new resolution, that for all practical purposes, that resolution will be gone and dead. And we talked about, should we keep fighting this? And should we keep trying to get them to formally say it's dead even after it really is dead? And we finally decided that we'd accomplished what we needed to accomplish, which are a couple of things. One is there was this strategy coming from the Christian Coalition and these religious politically active groups to start using political bodies to pass stuff, similar to what had been done in Cobb County, to make things difficult for gay people.

And by fighting back and getting this tremendous press and the media coverage that we got, we inoculated -- And there was a story actually in the press later on that was written about a dozen other places that were considering similar resolutions and passing similar stuff. And nobody else passed any. They all put them aside. And I think they all saw what happened and said, "We don't want to have this big ruckus in our place. This is not a good idea." So we kind of inoculated other places and helped protect them from having a similar stuff passed.

But the other thing that happened is that we'd had this quiet, invisible, gay community in Cobb County. And it wasn't a quiet, invisible community anymore. There were groups of people that were meeting out of that group, social networks. And this guy announced they were going to open a gay bar in Cobb County. And it's still there.

And so instead of suppressing the gay and lesbian community in Cobb County, and giving them a slap on the hands, what actually ended up happening, and we decided that it was okay with the way things ended up, was that they woke up and we had an active gay community and people

who weren't invisible anymore. So I guess we decided we were all satisfied with that and moved on to other things.

AG: So you had mentioned before that you had some friends from Atlanta from ACT UP and Queer Nation who organized the Queer Family Picnic. Was there any really coordination between Atlanta groups and Cobb County Coalition?

JG: We appreciated that they offered to help us and I was friends with Jeff Graham, was the head of ACT UP at the time, he's the head of Georgia Equality now. And we're friends to this day. Lynn Cochran was the head of Queer Nation at that time. He was also, Lynn made his living, he was Coretta King's administrative secretary. He was her personal secretary and went to South Africa and got to help write the South African Constitution. Or provide advice on it.

Their offer helped for the first rally in saying, what can we do? We had these meetings where there was some suspicion and people worried that we were somehow doing something that didn't look like what they were used to. And they wondered if we were undercutting it. But we met and talked about that and we were fine and got along well.

And when they had the second rally, the Cobb Citizens Coalition participated. And we said to them the same thing they'd said to us at the first one, "How can we help?" And they gave us some stuff. "Here. You can help us do this or that." But that was their rally and they wanted to run that one. But we participated in it and continued to talk about what we could do and how we could help each other. And so that worked out okay.

The only group we really had an ongoing problem was with the Olympics out of Cobb people. And that got to we just didn't talk to each other anymore. But there was so much of the activism in Atlanta was -- Stonewall, was an act of anger when Stonewall happened. And the early gay movement was anger. Stonewall was this bar where there were a lot of drag queens hung out there. A lot of them were Puerto Rican drag queens. And gay bars, including the bars in Atlanta, a lot of them used to be run by the mob. And they would pay the police to leave alone. But the police would once in a while come in and raid the bars and arrest people and harass people anyway. And Stonewall, that would happen periodically.

And what Stonewall was, was when police came in to raid it one time, and the Puerto Rican drag queens said, "We're not standing for this anymore. Enough of this." And they took off their heels and were throwing them at the police and yelling at them and they had to call for backup. And they had a riot basically started by Puerto Rican drag queens that said,

"Enough. We're not going to let you treat us this way anymore." And it was anger.

And the early gay movement grew out of anger. It was people angry at being treated the way they'd been treated and angry at being marginalized, angry at being afraid of losing your jobs. So much of it was anger. And then AIDS happened and anger. The early days of the AIDS crisis, I knew guys that were in the hospital at Grady and the nurses didn't want to come check their blood pressure because they didn't want to touch them. They were afraid of them. And people's friends would have to go in and help provide some of their care for them while they were in the hospital. That was that way around the country.

And it was anger that people were dying and there were medical people who didn't want to treat them. There were other medical people that were great and were really helpful. But the anger at the whole process for the way drugs are approved by the FDA was changed because of the AIDS crisis. Because of AIDS activism. The process was short. It used to be this thing that went on for years and years and years to develop new drugs. And there were some -- Part of the AIDS activism was anger at that process. People are dying after they find out they're HIV positive. They're dying in less than two years. And you've got this process for developing new drugs that takes ten to fifteen years. You need to stop that. If you have a drug that looks promising, let people try the drugs. Let them sign over a waiver that says they know that the drug is not fully tested, but give them something that has a chance to live.

So the activist groups were people who had formed around anger and a lot of the activism was anger. These protests, you would go and chant stuff. One of the chants that was popular, "No justice, no peace." You're not going to treat us fairly, we're not going to let you live in peace. I can't remember how you asked that question exactly.

AG: Just if there was coordination, between not even necessarily the Atlanta groups, but the same people.

JG: There was coordination, but I think in a way what we were doing in Cobb County was really different and unusual. And the mainstream activists in Atlanta, the people who are established activist groups, didn't quite know what to think of us because we weren't having angry protests. And that was mainly what gay activists consisted of in those days was angry protests.

One of my heroes in the gay rights is Harvey Milk. Harvey Milk was a mainstream politician and he did stuff. But he was assassinated. And this guy that killed him, Dan White, got off. They called it the Twinkie

defense. He wasn't thinking clearly because his blood sugar was elevated because he ate too many Twinkies because he was busy being a fireman and a politician and didn't have time to eat properly. And he was acquitted of murder. And the gay community, there's a really good film that won an Academy Award for Best Documentary, *Life and Times of Harvey Milk*. And they show you all about Harvey Milk's life. The building and being part of the community and how to become part of the community and how to show that the same things that are important to other people are important to us too. Good safety and a clean environment, the trash being picked up regularly, all that kind of stuff.

And that reminded me of what the Cobb Citizens were doing. But, after Harvey Milk, the murderer was acquitted, the gay community in San Francisco who he'd helped mainstream and make part of the community and get a seat at the table and be part of the political process, they were angry and they turned over police cars, and burned them and busted the windows at City Hall. And they had riots for two days. It's hard not to be angry sometimes at some of the stuff that happens. And that's just where so much of this stuff was.

So we did work together. We coordinated things. But the approaches and the way of looking at things were different. It's kind of interesting, Jeff Graham I've stayed friends with who was the head of ACT UP in Atlanta in those days, and if you go to Political Activism 101, the class he teaches to people who are members of Georgia Equality and want to get involved in political activism, he talks about the importance of understanding the people who you want to impact and understanding what their values are and how to connect with them and how to be someone that they feel that is like them. And show them what you have in common. And he will tell you, if you're going to go up and be a citizen lobbyist at the legislature, you need to dress a certain way. If you come in and you're wearing crazy looking clothes, he said you may want to take off some of your piercings. He says if they can't identify with you and you look like somebody who's nothing like anybody they identify with, they don't listen to you."

So that was something that I think we already knew in Cobb County and it was instinctive somehow for us. And the gay activist community, not just in Atlanta, but all over the country hadn't learned that yet at that time.