

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JON C. GREAVES

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for the

LGBTQ ORAL HISTORY SERIES

SATURDAY, 26 JULY 2014

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
LGBTQ Oral History Series.  
Interview with Jon C. Greaves  
Conducted by Anne Graham and Heather Oswald  
Saturday, July 26<sup>th</sup> 2014  
Location: Audio Video Technology Studio

AG: It's Saturday, July 26, 2014. This is Anne Graham and Heather Oswald, archivists with Kennesaw State University Archives. We're interviewing Jon C. Greaves in the studios of the audio video technology services at Kennesaw State University, as part of the museum's archives and rare books oral history project. This is our second interview with Jon.

HO: So, to get started, Jon, can you talk about your experience at the two democratic national presidential conventions in '88 and '92?

JG: Yes. So, the Democrat Convention in 1988, a good friend of mine, Dick Rhodes, had run as a delegate from DeKalb County for the Democratic Convention and he was selected, so he was going to be a delegate at the convention. And there were groups of us that got together and talked about, what he was going to be doing there. But something else that happened at that convention, Dick was inside the convention and he was a friend and he was one of the first, if not the first openly gay delegate to a Democratic National Convention, but the national organizations, the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and at that point it was not HRC, it was Human Rights Campaign Fund, HRCF, decided that they would jointly sponsor a gay and lesbian press booth, press suite, and that they would talk about the issues that they wanted to get into the platform and they wanted the candidates to address and provide press packets to the media.

And that was a first. There hadn't been gay and lesbian press activities there before. So, as the convention started, the joint press suite asked for volunteers to come help get things ready and David and I volunteered. We went and oddly, that's probably not that odd, most people don't like politics and most gay and lesbian people are apolitical, unless they are really motivated, because something has come hit their back door or whatever. So, there weren't a lot of people that volunteered and there was the head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at the time was Urvashi Vaid and her partner, Kate Clinton, who's a woman comedian, hilarious. And we showed up to help at the press suite and it was the night before the convention started and nobody else was there. Just Kate and Urvashi, no other volunteers had come.

So, they said, we got to get all these press packages ready for the media. And they had all this stuff they'd been copying at Kinko's or somewhere and contact information. And so we sat in the press suite and stuffed press packages 'til maybe two o'clock in the morning. And Kate Clinton kept ordering rounds of drinks

brought up to the room, charging them on her credit card and telling jokes, so we stuffed press packets and drank and listened to jokes until two o'clock in the morning. Went back and volunteered and worked there some more and talked to Dick a little bit in the evenings, but he was really, really busy with the activities going on. And I was already a member of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Chapter of the ACLU of Georgia.

And the ACLU was concerned that groups that wanted to protest, which there always are groups at the conventions, that they be allowed to protest and their First Amendment rights would be respected. And they had talked some and met with the police. One of the groups that got a permit to protest was the Ku Klux Klan, one of the chapters. And I don't remember where they were from, but there was a effort among lots of different social justice groups, from variety communities, from the Black community, from the gay and lesbian community, from people connected with similarities from the ACLU, people that were connected with the Anti-Defamation League, that said, we need to have a counter protest and not just let them be there saying what they're saying unchallenged. So, that was one of the things I showed up for.

And they had this group of Ku Klux Klansmen, there was maybe eight or nine of them, and they had little blow horns, what are those are called? The little things that --Megaphones, things you speak through. And they're doing some chants and there were policemen in a ring around them, where they could link arms and completely surround them. And so this seven or eight Klansmen and about four to five hundred counter protesters. And you could tell the police were really on edge. And I was with the counter protesters and we're shouting back at them and really kind of drowning out the Ku Klux Klansmen. And at some point somebody picked up a rock or something and threw it at the Klansmen and some other people threw things. And I remember saying, "Stop that. Don't do that." And yelling at the people that were close to me that were picking stuff up.

And as this is happening, the police told the Klansmen, they said, come on, we can't protect you. You could hear him say this. And there was this ring of policemen with the Klansmen in the middle, running, kind of at a jogging pace, running away from the official demonstration area. And people were throwing stuff at them, not this four or five hundred people, it might've been maybe an eight or nine, or ten people that were throwing stuff, but it looked like it could turn ugly. And I stepped out, I got out in front of the crowd, in between the crowd of protesters and the Klansmen and the police that were running away and just as loud as I could yelled "Stop it, don't drop to their level. Don't throw things at them." And somebody slugged me and knocked me to the ground. So, I laugh at that because I wasn't hurt badly, but I learned a valuable lesson. If you're going to be a peacemaker between groups that are agitated, angry with each other, be careful about how close you are to them, if you're going to get in between them. And that was useful for later things, useful lesson. I did some work with ACLU later on as clinic escorts. When the people were protesting outside abortion clinics

and attacking the people who were going in for abortions. Learn to keep your distance from people and they're angry at each other and heated political confrontations.

So, there was a group that came from New York, ACT UP, which is a group that was formed really to fight for better drugs for people, for AIDS, to fight for quicker and faster research and better treatment by care givers, by the government. And it came out of New York and the New York ACT UP people were one of the groups that came to Atlanta for the demonstrations and for around the convention. They needed some places to stay and David and I hosted a couple of them in our home and I participated in some of their demonstrations with them. And one of the things I have that I can't fit into anymore, but it's a ACT UP shirt. It's got the black shirt with the pink triangle and the silence equals death. I think I showed it to you last time I was here and I have it with me, but they gave me one of their shirts, so it's a prize possession. And it was before, there was an ACT UP chapter in Atlanta, but it hadn't formed yet. It formed actually after the convention in the following year.

So, that was some of the experience there as being an outsider, outside the convention, participating in the demonstrations, trying to get the attention of the media and of the people attending the convention and the political leaders attending a convention. And knowing Dick was inside trying to work to do a little of what you do as part of the process instead of being an outsider, outside protesting. So, that was sort of experience being an outsider at the 1988 convention and working outside the convention.

In 1992, for the presidential convention, I ran -- Dick Rhodes, and I mentioned was kind of a political mentor, and he had a run as a delegate, he ran and became the Chair of the DeKalb County Democratic Party for a while. And I kind of followed some of his lead and got involved in Cobb County Democratic Party politics, which was kind of disappointing. They didn't do a lot. They had meetings and talked a little bit and they didn't recruit candidates. They didn't do voter registrations, but they'd get together and eat and drink. And so they didn't do much. But I had decided I would run as a delegate for the '92 convention.

Paul Tsongas was running for president that year. And I really, really liked Paul Tsongas, he was a Democrat from Massachusetts. And I ran as a -- Went up to Cartersville was where they had the caucus to go run as a delegate. And the process was that you went into rooms, you split up for, in rooms by who it was that you were supporting. So, there were Clinton people in one room and there were Tsongas people in one room, and there was a couple other candidates that had people supporting them and I can't even remember who they are now. But I was in the Tsongas room and each person that wanted to be a delegate got an opportunity to make a speech.

And then the people that were there voted on you. And the number of delegates picked for each person who was running was based on the support that that person had gotten proportionally in the primaries in Georgia. So, Paul Tsongas got a number of delegates based on what proportion of the primary vote he got in Georgia. And I was one of three Tsongas delegates. So, I was a delegate to the convention. The convention was in New York, the host hotel in New York for the Georgia democratic delegation was the Helmsley Park Lane across from Central Park. And the airfare and the hotel rooms are very expensive. I had got selected to delegate and then I realized I couldn't afford to go. And I raised a little bit of money. There were groups of friends in the community here, some that raised some money and gave me money to go. But the Communication Workers of America actually had scholarship money available. I told the Democratic Party that I was having trouble finding money to go and they said the Communication Workers, CWA, has got some scholarship money and let me give you this phone number. And I think they gave me \$250 or \$350. They helped. David went with me and David wasn't going to be able to get in the convention. I had credentials because I was a delegate. We went to a friend of ours, Jack Pelham, he's the editor of Etcetera Magazine for most of the time it was published. In fact, I'll see him this evening, his other half's birthday party is tonight, but we went to Jack and said, would you fill out the forms and list David as a reporter representing Etcetera so he can get press credentials.

And so Jack said, sure, I'll do that for you. And David filled out the forms and submitted them and he got press credentials. So, there were times where he couldn't get on the floor, but he got inside the convention and he got to go places I couldn't go, because he went into the press suite and he could go to the little press things that were going on and got to hang around with the other reporters and stuff. There was a woman who went as a delegate, also. I can't think of what her name is right now. She was a Clinton delegate. And then we had one other person, a guy named Eric Spivey, who was an alternate delegate for Georgia. He already had AIDS at that point. And he was really, really interested in bringing up awareness about AIDS, and he was open about the fact that he was an alternate delegate to the convention and had AIDS. And that was a first, there was somebody here, and given the timing-- That wouldn't have happened in the sixties or the seventies, because there wasn't AIDS then. But he was followed around by reporters from CNN, from the networks a lot because he was there openly as someone with AIDS, trying to get the entire convention and the press and the elected officials to pay more attention to the AIDS crisis. He died not long after the convention, and those of us that knew him kind of thought that he had run himself down just working so hard at New York and didn't recover his energy from that. But, attended the convention, Paul Tsongas asked me if I would be one of his whips at the convention.

And I said, okay, I'll do it that. And I got to have a seat on the aisle, in our delegation so that I could get up and move around when I needed to and go talk to other people. And there wasn't a lot involved with being a whip for him because

he was not-- It was obvious he wasn't going to be the nominee, but still tried to get certain issues that were important to him on the platform. So, we attended the delegation meetings and the convention sessions and went to the parties afterwards at night. But there was also, at the '92 convention, where Dick had been one of the first, if not the first, openly gay delegates at the convention in '88. And there were just a few of them there, less than ten, I think.

There was a group probably of close to 130 of us, gay and lesbian delegates at the '92 convention. So, we had a separate gay and lesbian caucus and Senator Ted Kennedy came and talked with us and some of the other candidates and elected officials came and they made sure they let us know that they were going to try to get some of the issues that were important to us. And we worked out a strategy about when we would demonstrate on the delegation floor and what kind of things that we were going to push for within our delegations. So, that was something, we were doing too and working again as insiders. Something that happened, it was on the first night that we were there, they had a welcome party for the Georgia delegation. And the welcome party was on one of the ferry boats, double-decker ferry boat. It had food and a bar, buffet on one level and a band and whatever on the other level.

And the whole Georgia delegation and all of our elected officials from the Congress and the senators from Georgia and the governor, and some of the state elected officials who were there as part of the delegation, were all on this boat. And we went out and cruised around the Statue of Liberty and whatever, and, but there was talk already... One of the issues that was important to us was, of course, AIDS was really important and getting better treatment for people with AIDS, more money for research, but also the doing away with the ban of gays and lesbians being able to serve in the military. And Clinton had already talked with gays and lesbians, and he came and talked with our caucus, and said that he intended to end the ban on the gays and lesbians the military. And it was already in the news, Sam Nunn, who, of course, was there with our delegation too, was the head of the Armed Services Committee. And he came out publicly and said, he didn't think that would work and that he would work on something. And he had started talking already about the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy that he thought that there was a sort of middle ground that they could come up where gays and lesbians could serve, but had to hide who they were and make sure nobody knew they were gay or lesbian. And I took advantage of us all being together and Sam Nunn was there on the boat out cruising around. And while we were out cruising around the Statue of Liberty, I went up and asked to talk with him, and talked with him about this plan of his, this "Don't ask, don't tell" policy and told him what a bad idea I thought it was. I said I hadn't served in the military, but I heard all the time about these honor codes in the military. And to ask people to lie about who they were, to conceal who they were and hide, I said, it was not only bad for those people psychologically, but it was wrong and it wasn't consistent with the code of ethics of the different branches in the military. And he just kind of politely listened and shook my hand and, thank you for your ideas. And that was

that. And, of course, they put the “Don't ask, don't tell” policy into effect anyway. But the other thing I'll tell you about that happened at the convention, I mentioned Eric Spivey -- So, this was an opportunity to work as an insider and get to talk to Sam and get to talk to the governor and get to talk to some of the candidates and some of the senators and congressional people as an insider, and instead of wearing jeans and an ACT UP t-shirt, I was in my suit and tie the whole time, which it was --There was a heat wave during the convention in New York, which is not well air conditioned.

And it was miserably hot. We were just soaking up a good part of the time. But one of the things that was done by the people outside the convention, and the gay and lesbian caucus came out of the convention and joined in, and it was purposely scheduled so it wouldn't conflict with the time when we needed to be on the convention floor, was a march outside the convention center, Madison Square Garden, a march down through one of the big streets in New York calling for, there was a list of things, some demands, calling for better treatment for people with AIDS. And I remember Eric Spivey had already gotten tired and Whoopi Goldberg led the parade and she was pushing him along in his wheelchair. He couldn't walk so well at that point because he was already exhausted. But those of us from the Georgia delegation got to walk at the front of the demonstration with him and Whoopi Goldberg.

And, I remember, as I said, he died not long after that, and I remember how much energy he put into all of that while he was there, it was kind of -- And he accomplished what he wanted to. He got tremendous amount of press coverage and drew a lot of attention that I think helped make AIDS research and better treatment for people with AIDS -- It actually helped get it into the Democratic Party platform. So, that's what I can tell you about the two conventions.

HO: Going back to the '88 convention and the large differences between the number of gay delegates and the activism outside of the convention. Did you feel like your voices were heard at that time as an entity?

JG: That's a good question. There's two reasons why you demonstrate. One of them is you want people to hear your voice, but sometimes you demonstrate because it's a matter of self-respect and dignity that you don't just sit quietly and suffer and say nothing when you're not treated properly. And so whether you're hurt or not, I think there's still something you get out of it and it's very exciting and there's a sense of satisfaction that comes from -- I meant to bring some Kleenex with me today. [laughs] There's a sense of satisfaction that comes from demonstrating. We hoped we were heard. And what happens at that time, the '88 convention, the official demonstration area was right where the delegates had to come and line up with their credentials to go through security. So, they saw us.

The elected officials and the senators and congressmen, they had a backdoor somewhere they came in through and they didn't see us, but the press saw us and

the delegates saw us. What happened over the years, and you see it now, is that big events like that, they have to give people their First Amendment rights, they have to allow people to demonstrate. But a lot of places, if they don't mind the demonstrators, they may treat them very well. But if they don't really like them and they're just begrudgingly giving them their First Amendment rights and giving them a place to demonstrate, what they do at a lot of things nowadays is they designate a free speech area and they put it off to the side somewhere where the people that they want to see don't see them.

But those demonstrations, the audience that you wanted to target was both the delegates, the elected officials, and also the media who were going to then put it out over the -- Hundreds and hundreds of media people there from all over the world. And we did get in the news and in the media, and the parade I mentioned, the fact that Whoopi Goldberg, and there were some other Hollywood stars that were already starting to talk about AIDS that were in the parade. And that Eric, here he was as a delegate, an alternate delegate at the convention and open about the fact that he had AIDS, that got tremendous coverage and really drew a lot of attention to the AIDS crisis. The start of it.

HO: So, Jon, can you talk a little bit more about the proposed “Don't ask, don't tell” policy with Sam Nunn?

JG: So, there was that initial conversation I had and of course groups were -- It was a big topic of discussion among gay lesbian groups here in Atlanta and other places. And with Sam Nunn being head of the Armed Services Committee and our Georgia senator, one of our Georgia senators, we felt like we had to take some lead in fighting that. There was a group here, a gay and lesbian service members group that formed, a guy named Danny Ingram was the head of the group. And they did all kinds of things, but there was some protests, also, that we had after the policy was announced. And then it was passed in Congress and put into place. Sam Nunn had offices, both in Washington DC, and he had his office in downtown Atlanta. And we had stickers that said, “Don't ask, don't tell,” and it had the little red circle with the line through it, superimposed over “Don't ask, don't tell” made. And there was a group of us that went and got military haircuts. And we bought at the army surplus store and got uniforms and boots and we get dog tags made and everything.

And then there were real people who'd been in the service and it was their uniforms that... and we had a protest outside of his office the day after the, I think it was the day after, within a couple days after the bill was signed into law, protesting the “Don't ask, don't tell” policy. And we started the protest. We went inside the office, there was no security there. And we didn't get arrested for vandalism, but we put the little stickers we had made everywhere. They were on the walls and on the windows and the chairs, and the few people that were inside were caught off guard and surprised, and they didn't know what to do with us.



And then we went back outside and had our protest and it was a pretty angry protest, this particular one, I think I'm not sure who it was that put together the protest that was sort of leading it. But one of the chants was "Don't ask, don't tell. Sam Nunn can go to --." So, it was kind of an angry protest, but there were ongoing efforts in the group that Danny Ingram was head of, was involved with them all the way up until the repeal that "Don't ask, don't tell" policy that went to meetings in Washington. There were letter writing campaigns to the members of Congress and senators.

And if you look at any of the video footage, the gay pride parades in Atlanta, that group led off from the point where the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy was put into place. The gay and lesbian service organization, service members organization, would put on their uniforms and they were the color guard leading off the gay pride parade every year from then on. So, my friend Joanna, I mentioned to you earlier, that's not on video, who's the forensic illustrator, she served in the Marines and she carried the Marine flag in the color guard.

HO: Switching gears a little bit, can you talk about your experience in attending the Atlanta conference of Christian Coalition organizers in conjunction with People for the American Way?

JG: During the activities -- connection with the Cobb County anti-gay resolution, we got support from the Georgia ACLU and we got support from the national organization for People for the American Way. They actually sent one of their staff to help work with us. And then the staff person, when the Cobb County Commission had public testimony, public hearings about killing the arts funding, she spoke and gave some of the public hearing testimony, but I got to know some of the people from People for the American Way then because of that. They invited me later to come up to their office in Washington DC. And they brought activists in from other cities and states, this kind of effort that the Christian Coalition had had a meeting here and this anti-gay resolution happened at the Cobb County commission was a new tactic that was being pushed by the Christian Coalition. And they were trying to get similar things happening in other places in the country.

And so they asked me to come in and talk about what had happened in Cobb County, and they were trying to put it into a light of an overall strategy and talk about how to defend against it. So, it was in early, in some point in 1994, and I can't remember the date, I got a call from the people at People for the American Way, and they said that the Christian Coalition was going to have their annual grassroots organizer conference and development conference here in Atlanta. And it was a conference where they had training sessions for people who were Christian Coalition members who wanted to learn how to be political activists and how to be involved in running campaigns and running for office and influencing political officials. So, as a series of workshops that went on for two days.

So, they told us that this was happening, they told me it was happening, and said that they wondered if I would be willing to go to the Christian Coalition conference, sign up, that they would pay my way, and go and attend and document what was going on at the conference. They had some concern that there were things that the Christian Coalition, which was a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and there's political activity they're allowed to engage in, and political activity they're not, they had some idea that there were some violations of the law that they were engaged in and they wanted to see if they could get some evidence of that. But they also wanted to get all their materials, the training materials that they were giving out to activists. And they told me that I could go in my own name or I could use it assumed identity if I wanted to, that that didn't make any difference, but they wanted me to just seem like I fit in there and that they had a woman who was willing to go. And the two of us could go as a couple, so that we look like we were this male female couple that fit in. And it was Cecile Richards. Cecile was the daughter of Ann Richards who had been the Governor of Texas. Cecile's now the national head of Planned Parenthood.

And so I agreed and Cecile and I had dinner the night before the conference. She came in from Texas and we had got to know each other a little bit. And then we went together as a couple to the Christian Coalition conference and attended the conference, got their materials and took notes. And we turned all the information over to the People for the American Way afterwards, for them to use, to work with other organizations and to look through the materials and what they were doing. So, it was kind of fun. Something.

HO: Talk about your experience with David hosting the Gay Pride event in Cobb County and the organization that resulted from it.

JG: We were involved with gay pride and David, especially Gay Pride was a big deal to him and tell you more about that later, but we decided to have a Gay Pride event. There was official calendar in the Southern Voice – or, put out for Gay Pride each year and Southern Voice published it, and may have put it in some of the other publications too, but we asked to have a Gay Pride potluck, Cobb County Gay Pride potluck, put on the official calendar, open to anybody who wanted to attend and had our phone number for contact information. And it was going to be the first Cobb County Gay Pride event.

So, we got refreshment stuff for people, things for people to drink, but we asked people to bring food to share as a potluck basically. And we had no idea how many people were going to come, or we just knew a few other people in Cobb County. And this was prior to the Cobb County anti-gay stuff. So, we hadn't met, yet, all these people who we met through the Cobb County anti-gay initiative and the Cobb Citizens Coalition. So, the day of the event, actually, it said evening, we had it on a Sunday the weekend before -- or maybe it was a Saturday, the weekend before Gay Pride. So there was a weeklong of different events in the calendar. And we said that the event was going to be I think like four in the

afternoon, until eight at night or something like that. So these people came to our house and there was a pretty good sized group of people. It seems like it was probably thirty to forty people, I don't remember. But both men and women and some people individuals, some couples they came in and we had a little potluck dinner and people socialized and drank and talked. And people that came were just really, really, they were excited to meet other gays and lesbians in Cobb county. Gays and lesbians were mostly invisible in Cobb County.

And people sometimes knew other people in Cobb County, but not very many. And there weren't any gay bars. There weren't any gay organizations in Cobb County. And there was just a lot of energy and enthusiasm around here's this big group of gay and lesbian people we met. And before the evening was over the decision was made -- and this evening which was supposed to go until 8:00 went until early in the -- after midnight, it went pretty long. We finally had to say we got to go to sleep and send people on their way. But there was sort of just in the conversations with everybody, it sort of just came up that everybody wanted to do this again. And one of the persons who had attended said they'd volunteer, that they would have something the next month at their house.

And we made a list for everybody that was interested in being part of it and being contacted. We took down names and phone numbers and addresses. And so with this sort of organization, it was a very loose organization, kind of popped up where the next time we had over a hundred people. And then somebody else volunteered to have one. And then it just kept getting bigger and bigger. And we had four or five of these monthly gatherings. The biggest one someone had is a garden party or yard party. And they had a swimming pool, told people they could swim if they wanted to and lived in Austell I think. And had a huge backyard, and there was probably four to five hundred people there. It was huge you had to park blocks away to get there. I'm sure neighbors didn't like it.

So we had this kind of gigantic group that formed and realized there's all these other people here at the organization. I think I talked about this some with you last time we talked that somebody -- We were getting close to election time and somebody had an acquaintance or friend, someone they knew who was running for office, who they thought was gay friendly, and brought them to one of the gatherings. And people -- This was a social networking group, it wasn't a political group. And gay and lesbian people just like everybody else most of them apolitical.

And at that time most of them were closeted. And there were people who were horrified that there was somebody running for office who would be potentially a public official and could have seen our lists of people that were members and names. And there were people who were scared about that and it ended up actually causing the group to fall apart. People got angry that someone had had brought this person there. The loose organization that was born and grew very large quickly and disintegrated all within about seven months.

HO: And what year was that?

JG: It was 1994.

HO: 1994. So it was after the anti-gay resolution?

JG: Yes.

HO: Okay.

JG: No, wait a minute. It was not after the anti-gay resolution. It was before the anti-gay resolution. It had to be probably 1992 then if it was election time.

HO: Can you talk about the change in Pride celebrations in Atlanta from a small celebration to a large one?

JG: When Pride -- The first Pride that I went to was probably in 1986, maybe 86 or 87. And it was a fairly small thing, we had a Pride parade and the Pride parade was mostly people with signs, some had signed some didn't. But all got together in a group in the street and marched down the street and there weren't floats, there weren't marching bands. There weren't -- There were a few groups that had banners that were organized groups, but it was mostly just people who wanted to get out and have gay and lesbian people be visible. So we had this Pride parade and we'd marched down the street, down Peachtree Street and into Piedmont Park. And then there was a little stage set up and they had a sound system and some speeches, and they had a DJ that played some music and the festival would end with a drag show on the stage.

Drag is part of Southern gay life. So they would have a drag show at the end of the evening. But there would be anywhere from like 900 to 1200, 1300 maybe in a big year, 1500 people. An exception to that, it was before I was involved in a Pride but I'd heard about it, was when Anita Bryant in Florida started her crusade against gays and lesbians. And she came to Atlanta, had been in Atlanta and it made a lot of people mad. And I heard that they had close to 5,000 people that year.

But the Pride was fairly small. And there was a Pride committee that organized pride, and it was a group of buddies. There was these guys, there was maybe a half dozen of them. The main person was a guy named Dale Biggers and they all worked at bars. They were all bartenders or bar managers in gay and lesbian bars in Atlanta. And at some point they had decided Atlanta should have Gay Pride, and they started organizing Gay Prides. So it was fairly small.

I remember we had the volleyball that was part of the Gay Pride one year and this is where I kind of came out on television with the television people. But David and I attended the Pride together I think two years. And David had been in

marching band, David Greer in marching band in high school. And he thought parades should be more than just a bunch of people walking down the street with signs. He thought we needed to have floats and we needed to have marching bands. And he also thought that he liked fireworks. He wanted to see fireworks at the end of the evening, after the drag show. And he contacted the guys, the Pride committee. And he said, I want to come to your meetings, I have some ideas about Pride and they'd say, sure, sure, we'll let you know when it is.

And they wouldn't contact him. And he tried again and they wouldn't contact him. He'd try again and they sort of figured out after a while that they didn't want other people getting involved, that they liked being able to do what they wanted to do and control it. So David decided he would just organize his own Pride committee, and he did a press release and got a meeting space at one of the public library meeting rooms and announced that the Pride committee would be expanding. And they were looking for new activities to enlarge pride and make it a bigger celebration and invite anybody who wanted to participate to come. And he scheduled a meeting of the Pride committee and then called these guys and said, you're welcome to come if you'd like. And they came and they were kind of angry.

And I think initially came with the idea of telling him, you don't get to do this, you're not the Pride committee, kind of put him in his place. But there was all these other people that were there, there was fifty or sixty people who came who wanted to be part of the pride committee and wanted to see it become a bigger activity. And I think that they saw this big group of people and they kind of backed off and they gave in and said, okay maybe we should let other people get involved.

And so from that meeting, the Pride committee got bigger and they started talking about other events they could have at Pride. And how could they fund those events? And Pride went from the early days, it was a parade usually on a Saturday or a Sunday, used to always be the third week in June to commemorate the Stonewall riots. It's always hot. But it would just be this parade and then the activities in the park and the drag show, and that was it. It was all a single day event that went from noon until a little bit after dark. So the plans were made to make it a two day event, to have a Saturday and a Sunday and have a festival to go along with it so that they would have booths, that organizations could be there. And there would be food and to have more entertainment and fireworks. And also to announce that the parade that they wanted people to apply to enter floats and bands in the parade. So the first year that Pride after this enlargement sort of the Pride committee and more people got involved. We had 25,000 people that came to Pride. So we went from this 900 or 1500 people to 25,000 people. And it really happened largely by getting more people involved and giving more people a voice in what was going on, and enlarging the event. That happened also to be the same year that we ended up on the cover of the Atlanta paper.

The Atlanta -- I don't know if the bigger Pride activity was part of the reason the Journal-Constitution decided to run this big series about the gay community in Atlanta, or it was just the growing presence of gay and lesbian political activities, both protests, but also some mainstream activities. And the issues of concern of the gay and lesbian community. But that probably also contributed to the people -- to the larger number of people. But Pride went 25,000 people that year. And I think the next year it was over 30,000. And now typically there's 300,000 people that come to Pride in Atlanta.

HO: And what year was that?

AG: Yes. I believe that's when the AJC --

JG: '91? That sounds right. So it was probably in 1990 after Pride had happened, it was probably in the winter of 1990 I would guess was probably when David was organizing -- when he decided he was going to get involved in and he called this meeting.

AG: Were you at all involved in the planning?

JG: I attended the meetings. We did some things together, and we also did things separately, but we were a couple and we supported each other. So I went and attended the meetings, but really David took the lead in that. And other than attending the meetings and being there for support and speaking up and saying, there needs to be more people involved in this. There's a whole community of people here. It shouldn't just be a group of buddies that plan this event every year. Other than that, I didn't really have any leadership act in that. But there was no -- this Pride committee, it was an ad hoc group. These group of buddies, it wasn't a 501(c)(3) They didn't have any staff, they didn't have any offices. It was just this group of guys that got together once a year and decided what they were going to do for Pride that year. And they did the same thing every year. And really out of those meetings there was a formal Pride organization that was created. And it became a year-round organization with a director and it became a 501(c)(3) so they could get donations and start getting corporate donations. Once you become bigger if you want to have fireworks and you want to have an event for 300,000 people you've got to have a lot of money. You have to provide security and you have to provide porta potties. It's expensive to put all that on. So it really out of that became the formal prioritization that exists today.

HO: Can you talk about your move from Cobb County after the anti-gay resolution?

JG: During the efforts to fight the anti-gay resolution we had our phone number and address listed in the phone book, and we were getting death threats and threatening calls. And got to the point where we just didn't feel comfortable in our home. I liked it when I was at work because I wasn't scared at work. And at home a lot of times I felt scared. We didn't initially plan to leave Cobb County, but as

time went on and we started feeling more and more uncomfortable, and David and I talked and said, let's us move out of here. Let's go and get an unlisted -- definitely don't want to have a listed phone number and address, we don't want it in the phone book.

And so we made the decision to move and it felt -- On the one hand I felt a little bit bad about that because the Cobb's Citizens Coalition, I talked with you some before about the Olympics out of Cobb. And there was this sort of outside people that didn't live in Cobb County and their efforts to fight the anti-gay resolution. But they were fighting it as outsiders and not people who lived in or were part of the community and wanted to be a part of the community. And the Cobb Citizens Coalition in forming that in the approach we took really was people that lived there, that wanted to be allowed to live in peace in their own community and not be treated badly by their neighbors or their government, and were part of the community.

And making a decision to leave we knew we're not going to be part of the community anymore. And there was a part of me that felt a little bit like we were abandoning the Cobb community when we left. But we literally were having trouble sleeping at night. We were scared, we'd go into work or any place in the car we'd get down and look under the car and go around it and look to make sure that -- look for signs that our car had been tampered with or bombs. And we just couldn't live there anymore. So we started looking for a place to live, and we found a place and moved in, I'm thinking it was October 1993, moved into the city of Atlanta. And I had been a member of the Cobb Community Relations Council. But you needed to live in Cobb to be a member.

And we'd also, Cobb Citizen Coalition at some point to call for a boycott of the newly built Cobb Convention Center. The combination of calling for the boycott of the convention center and moving out I felt like it wasn't appropriate for me to be a member of the Community Relations Council anymore. And let them know I was leaving the County and resigned from the Community Relations group. There was something interesting that happened when we were -- we had made the decision to leave, I don't know how the press people got news that we were leaving, but we got contacted by the press. And they said, we heard you're leaving the County. And we confirmed that, and it was written up in the paper. The city of Smyrna where David and I lived when we had contacted the police about the death threats, because we were scared and they had sent an officer and we arranged to have traces set up on our phones so they could try to figure out who the people were that were calling us.

And they did find out who some of them were. And we never knew who they were. They went and talked to them and had decided that they were just making idle threats and they didn't represent a real danger to us, and they wouldn't tell us who they were. But there was a police captain in the city of Smyrna that called me and told me he was gay and that he really didn't want us to leave, and that we

shouldn't be worried that they would protect us. And I remember that phone call and being really surprised that he was a police captain on the Smyrna Police Department. So the mayor of Smyrna at the time, Max Bacon, I think he may still be mayor today. He didn't think there were gay and lesbian people in Smyrna from some of the stuff he said at the time.

HO: What was the reaction of other members of the Cobb's Citizens Coalition?

JG: Nobody said anything to us that they were upset that we were leaving or anything. There actually were people who said they understood and they knew about the death threats too. And there were other people who had been in the news and had gotten some threats. And there were other people that were a little bit scared about it. And they kind of really told us they understood why we were leaving. And there wasn't really -- I think people wished we wouldn't leave. They wanted us to stay and not be scared away. But also understood why we did leave, and it's not something I regret doing.

Actually -- You can't do much in your life if you're scared all the time. And you hear about post-traumatic stress disorder. I actually think that I had some post-traumatic stress disorder after living for several months with these death threats and the stuff that was going on. I'm -- Kind of angry and short tempered to the point that friends would tell me, they said, you need to kind of chill out a little bit, this has really affected you. So I think that for our own health and safety we had to leave where we were. We could have I suppose gone to someplace else in Cobb County and just got an unlisted phone number and address, but we didn't really want to live there anymore.

HO: Can you talk about the transition to local Atlanta politics and your work on the Atlanta Community Relations Board?

JG: Now when -- I had been a member of the Gay and Lesbian ACLU and had done some work and actually became president of the chapter which doesn't mean a lot because we just had a half dozen or so people that were active. There are a lot of gay and lesbian members of the ACLU, but they didn't necessarily come to meetings and get involved in activities. But Cathy Woolard had been the previous president of that chapter. And met her after being a victim of a hate crime. She worked with the police, the police wouldn't investigate it. And she contacted the police on behalf of the ACLU and asked why they weren't investigating it. And got more involved in the chapter after that and had done some work on hate crimes. So when we moved into the city, I was contacted by a guy, Phil McDonald. And he told me about this Gay and Lesbian Public Safety Committee.

It was an advisory committee to the Atlanta City Council Public Safety Committee. And they met monthly and would meet with the police chief and the fire chief, or sometimes a deputy chief and the head of the Department of Corrections for the city of Atlanta. And dealt with issues between the gay and



lesbian community. And those different organizations, Police, Fire, and Corrections. So he said, we're sorry that you're leaving Cobb County, but we're glad you're coming to Atlanta. Would you be interested in joining us on the Public Safety Committee? And so I started attending the meetings of the public safety committee. And there was frequently just three or four of us there. And again, a lot of people are apolitical and people don't like to go and sit in boring government meetings. And we'd go sit in these meetings and sometimes we'd go months without accomplishing things, but we did actually accomplish some really good things over time.

But Phil McDonald who'd asked me to be a part of that group, and he was a member of the committee. He had come from Arkansas, his family -- they were comfortable financially. I don't know exactly how comfortable, but he was a full-time political person. He worked on people's campaigns and was a political advisor. And he became an advisor during the campaign for Bill Campbell, who ran for mayor in Atlanta, to Bill Campbell's campaign. And after Bill Campbell was elected he was hired as a gay and lesbian advisor, an advisor to the mayor or the city of Atlanta, to Bill Campbell. And Phil told me that that Bill Campbell wanted to put together an Atlanta Community Relations -- There wasn't a Community Relations Council then. These community relations councils grew out of -- They were actually something that came up nationally as a response after the Watts Riots in LA.

And it was this effort -- The Justice Department actually, mediators in the Justice Department I think came up with the idea to create community relations councils around the country. And they would be these groups of citizens who would work to foster good relations between different groups of people in our communities and also between the people and their government. And also in some cases these groups were given mediation training.

And they could go in when there were disputes or situations like alleged police brutality or something that could lead -- or a hate crime. Something that might lead to civil unrest and riots, which you don't want to have. The people that could go in and sort of mediate with the groups and try to defuse situations. So Atlanta didn't have one, and there weren't as many of them in the South. At the point where Atlanta was forming their's, there was the Cobb County one I'd been on and there was one in DeKalb and may have been the only two in the state.

So he thought it would be a good idea to form one in Atlanta. And Phil asked me if I would be on it. And I said sure, I'd love to do that. It actually fits in with what I like to do. I like being a peacemaker rather than fighting with the people who are against you. I kind of liked the idea of talking to them and trying to turn them from enemies into friends, and to resolve the issues that way. So that seemed like a really good thing to me, and I agreed to be on it. So Mayor Bill Campbell, when he announced the Community Relations Council, it was set up so that he

appointed a certain number of people to it. And then each of the members of the city council each got to appoint a person.

So when he announced it, he announced who his appointees were, and I was one of the persons appointed, got involved. They didn't give the community relations council any money or any staff. And we would go and have meetings and we'd hear about problems that were in the city and things that they thought it was good for us to -- There was some people in the city administration, they would have persons they thought should come talk to us. But then there were people from the community after this announcement he made, they formed this -- they wanted to come talk to us. And people would come talk to the group about the homeless situation in Atlanta, all the homeless people. Or one of the things that was happening then that was really big was neighborhood gentrification. There were people starting to move back into the city into old neighborhoods, a lot of them historic. They were neighborhoods that had maybe in the '50s and '60s had been white neighborhoods.

And then when they had white flight with the school integration, people moved out of the city, they became Black neighborhoods. And now they're at the point where -- this was in the early '90s one of the problems that was happening in Atlanta, and it was actually happening in cities all around the country was this neighborhood gentrification. People were moving back into the cities, getting tired of the long commutes to come into work and wanting to live in the city.

And you had these neighborhoods that had largely older, retired Black people who lived in homes that they owned. And suddenly people are coming in and renovating homes. And the property values started going up and they started getting hit with higher tax bills, they're on fixed incomes they couldn't afford to pay their taxes. And there started being some tension between the Black community and young people who were moving to these neighborhoods and a lot of them were gays and lesbians interestingly enough.

We've been pioneers at renovating neighborhoods in a lot of cities. There was this tension that came up. So that was something we worked on, but it was kind of disappointing being on the Community Relations Commission in Atlanta, because we didn't have the staff or budget or -- There were things that the group wanted to work on. And we couldn't have hearings, we couldn't subpoena people. We couldn't ask the staff to research stuff for us. We could, but they didn't have to. And we didn't have any, as I said, we had no budget. And in retrospect I think part of the establishment of it was a photo-op and something that Bill Campbell could say, look what I've done. And we never saw him again after the press conference where he announced that he was forming the group.

But in spite of that, we did do a few things. And one of the things was around that neighborhood gentrification. There was a neighborhood called Kirkwood in East Atlanta, and it was one of the neighborhoods that people were moving into. And

there were a lot of lesbian couples that were moving in this neighborhood. And there was a minister, a Black minister, didn't have a church but he was a minister. And he organized a march through the neighborhood with some of the older Black people that lived in the neighborhood to demonstrate against the lesbians moving into their neighborhood. And it took on this kind of straight versus gay thing, but it really grew out of this financial pressure being put on older people that didn't want to see their property values going up, because they couldn't afford the higher taxes.

And we held some community forums in the neighborhood and allowed people to come and talk with each other and actually help defuse that situation. It was interestingly enough, well interesting to me, the city councilperson from that neighborhood at the time was a person named Sherry Dorsey. Her husband was the sheriff of DeKalb County and Sherry Dorsey as a member of the City Council you would think she would try to defuse the problem. She'd actually marched with the minister and she publicly was speaking out and saying, these gay people shouldn't be moving in these neighborhoods, we don't want them here. And she was openly hostile. And she later didn't stay in the city council. She wasn't reelected partly because her husband assassinated the guy who beat him in reelection for sheriff. And so her husband is in state prison now. But that was kind of a sad thing to see somebody in the City Council fanning flames and trying to create dissent in the community. Of course seeing that in Cobb County too. So sometimes elected officials are good at what they do and sometimes they're not.

HO: You pulled back from community activism around 1997. What was the rationale for that decision?

JG: First of all I had been involved in activism since probably '86 or '87. And I was always involved as a volunteer, I worked full time. I was never a person that got a salary from a nonprofit group to do what I was doing. And I was doing stuff during the anti-gay stuff in Cobb County and at times when I worked a lot, a whole lot on public safety and hate crime issues. When someone would get attacked in the community, this was after the Cobb County stuff or during the Cobb County stuff, I was available to the press, they'd call me and I worked for a cell phone company. So they get me on my cell phone and I was responsive and I'd call them back before their press deadlines. So they liked calling me, but I take my break at lunch at work and drive over to a shopping center parking lot somewhere, and do an interview with somebody on the news or -- And then I was going to community meetings at night and my days were my lunchtime and my break times, and my -- I took vacation time to go work on conferences, to get training on victims assistance for the hate crimes work guys doing. I took vacation time to go to Washington and help plan the hate crime conference that Bill Clinton had.

And I was doing all this stuff -- work and all this community stuff -- and not leaving much time for myself. You know, I'd come home at night and eat dinner

at 9:30 or 10:00, go to bed and then get up and go to work again. And I just was really getting burnt out and felt like I needed to take a break. I think probably the thing that was, there was an emotional component to that too. I did a lot of work on public safety issues that came out of the work with the Gay and Lesbian ACLU. They had a project where they worked on hate crimes and we had some hate crimes initiatives I can tell you more about, but --And then being on the Public Safety Committee, the Gay and Lesbian Public Safety Committee with Atlanta City Council. Gotten really involved with hate crimes issues.

And initially we had this effort where we were trying just to get statistics on hate crimes. So we set up a toll-free statewide number. People could call and report that they were victims of hate crimes. And we were just trying to gather statistics. Because there was no requirement in law in Georgia for anybody to record hate crimes and to document that hate crimes occurred. And we tried to get hate crimes laws passed in the legislature and they didn't even want to talk to us. They said, we don't have a hate crime problem. How many of them are there? And nobody could tell them. The City of Atlanta had an ordinance actually that required them to collect hate crimes data, but they were the only jurisdiction in the state that did. And it was kind of iffy what they did, because there was no definition and state law in Georgia what hate crimes were.

So I think it was sometimes confusing to their officers. Somebody got beat up by somebody and robbed and the person was saying, "You get what you deserve, you faggot," while they're beating them up. They dealt with it as a robbery and it wouldn't get reported as a hate crime. But as I was doing this statistics, I was the one that took the calls off the recorder from the 800 number and would call people back and ask what happened to them. And I went through training on how to document hate crimes and gather hate crime statistics using the Department of Justice crime reporting methods. And I would talk to these people and I'm getting this information and I'd wanted to get it to create statistics. And they wanted somebody to talk to, they were victim to crimes and sometimes they'd been really badly beat up or hurt or had ongoing injuries. They're traumatized. They're afraid to go out of their home. And I ended up spending lots of time talking with hate crimes victims. So then I thought, well, maybe I need some victims advocacy training. And I went to a governor's office, a criminal justice coordinating council. They distribute a victim of crime funds in the state for victims of violence. And they work with victims assistance programs throughout the state. They have annual conferences. I went to some of their conferences and I started acting as a victims advocate and giving people somebody to talk to, helping them apply, even if they didn't have medical insurance. Helping them apply for victims assistance funding to pay their medical bills. I arrange, I found a group of gay and lesbian psychologists that would provide free counseling to people who didn't have medical insurance that were crime victims.

And so where all this was going is, this talking with people who had been beat up and abused and were victims and just horribly traumatized. It really wore me

down. And I got to a point where I just needed a break. And I said, "I don't think I can do this anymore. And I think I need a break from everything." And decided to step back and stop being involved in the community for a while.

AG: Can you talk a little bit more about what you accomplished as part as part of the Public Safety Council and with the hate crimes before you decided to take a step back?

JG: We accomplished a lot of good stuff. So there's a book I gave you a copy of where I helped publish one year hate crime statistics for Georgia jointly with the National Association of Anti-Violence Programs, which was a loose organization, loosely formed umbrella group over gay and lesbian anti-violence programs around the country. There were, depending on what year it was, there would be fifteen, sixteen, up to twenty, twenty-four programs around the country. And there were organizations that worked on hate crimes. Some of them just gather statistics. Some of them also provided victims assistance. And some of them also dealt with same-sex domestic violence issues. So in working with the Gay and Lesbian ACLU, that was their project to put this 800 number and try to get the statistics and start documenting what was happening.

We were able to pull together information and to document and get some data, what was going on in the state. So we accomplished that. When I started doing the victims assistance stuff, I felt like I was doing something good for people. I was helping them deal with what had happened to them as crime victims. A lot of times they were afraid to reach out and go to other victims assistance programs, because people that are hate crime victims, a lot of times when they're attacked because of who they are, they worry that the attackers represent the values of the communities they live in. And they're worried about being revictimized, they're much less likely to report that they're a victim of crime to the police. They're much less likely to go to victim assistance programs and ask for our help. What they do a lot of times, and they are also much more likely than victims of other crimes to have a longer-term post-traumatic stress disorder from it.

And a lot of times they would just kind of withdraw and stay in their house and, and suffer, so I felt good about helping give them somebody to talk to who they felt safe talking to because it was a gay and lesbian organization and helping them access services that were available to them to deal with. So that was something good that came out of the gay and lesbian initiative through the Gay and Lesbian Chapter of the ACLU and the hate crime work.

And went on and I kept working on hate crimes over time. And eventually in 1997, Bill Clinton had a conference on hate crimes. And it was worked with attended meetings at the White House, a couple of sets of meetings and help with members of the National Association of Anti-Violence Programs so its N-A-A-V-P, anyway the umbrella organization, that group and I as a representative from the group in Atlanta, helped plan that conference. So Bill Clinton had a conference at

the White House and had people from all over the country and that drew attention to hate crimes. And so we helped get more attention on hate crimes. And there were hate crimes laws passed in a lot of the states. We didn't have one in Georgia at the time. We did get one passed later on which the Supreme Court threw out.

I can tell you more about that if you want to know, but we were able to get more attention to it. And through the data collection where we were able to convince the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, who's responsible for collecting crime data in Georgia, we were able to convince them to add hate crimes to the standard crime reporting forms in Georgia and begin collecting data on it, even though they weren't required to by law. And so the GBI added that on their forms. And they had training programs for the police department trainers, the different law enforcement organizations around the state who could then go back and train their departments. They had training on hate crimes and recognition of hate crimes and hate times data collection. They brought in trainers from the FBI to the State Police Academy for that training session.

And I got to go, I was invited by the FBI trainers to go attend, along with a person from the ADL. So it got to attend. So, that was something we accomplished. I had meetings with the Centers for Disease Control and doctors in the administration at Grady Hospital, at Grady emergency room. Got contacted by them. I didn't know how they found out about what we were doing, but they contacted me at one point and asked if we would meet. And they were wanting to establish protocols for dealing with hate crime victims, that they would then put out as guidelines for doctors in emergency rooms around the country. So that was something that I think came out of that and we accomplished. And that pretty much is all hate crime stuff.

There were other public safety issues I ended up getting involved with because of the working with the Atlanta City Council Public Safety Committee, Gay and Lesbian Public Safety Committee. Prior to the organization of that committee, and they were actually created, I think a year or two before I was involved. And the city ordinance that created them there allowed for there to be twelve or fourteen members, but there was never more than six or seven people there. They had trouble finding people who are willing to come and as I said, sit in what can sometimes be just long boring meetings.

So there was a guy Phil McDonald, and then another person David MacDonald, and I that were oftentimes the only ones there at the meeting. But over the years, we were able to, to do over, I guess I was part of that group for three and a half to four years, we were able to accomplish several things. One of them was that when people were victims of hate crimes, they did call the police. Sometimes the police wouldn't investigate, they take their information down. And they wouldn't investigate the crime. There were cases where people were attacked or brutalized by police. There were allegations of police brutality towards them because they were gay or lesbian. And through those meetings, we were able to get the police

to add gay and lesbian sensitivity training as part of the Atlanta Police Academy, as part of their standard training and also the ongoing training that officers went through. We were able to get them to address some of the allegations of police brutality, attacks that had come from police officers. There was one guy that was a hate crime victim that I dealt with one time, is one of the people that -- He'd been attacked. And after being attacked, you can imagine you'd be really angry that you'd been attacked. And when the police came, he was angry and the police took his anger as being directed them and ended up telling him calm down. And when he wouldn't calm down, they put him in handcuffs, and he got even angrier. And then they beat him up with their night clubs for resisting arrest and charge, took him to in jail. And here he'd been a crime victim, so we were able to get the police to recognize some of those kinds of issues.

I mentioned the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and their annual victims assistance conferences they had here in the state of Georgia. After attending their conferences, and they found out about what I was doing, they asked me to put on a workshop one year at the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for all the other victims assistance persons, professionals around the state to talk with them about this particular issues for gays and lesbians, dealing with gays and lesbian crime victims and hate crime victims. So that was something, a way though to get some sensitivity to special issues out there among professionals who were dealing with people all over the state. There were also-- gays and lesbians in, historically and back at that time, it was much worse than it is now. People again, were closeted. A lot of times they wouldn't report they're victims of their crime because crime reports are public information.

They didn't want -- You left a gay bar and some people mugged you outside the gay bar and robbed you and beat you up. And then you report it and then that report, it becomes public information. And if he gets into the newspaper or something, then you might get fired from your job, because you don't have any protection for employment because you're gay and lesbian, and -- still not in Georgia. So people would sometimes be victims of crimes and not report them. We provided a organization that people could come to if they were afraid to report and we could sometimes encourage them to give information to the police. But we could also sometimes help them provide information in a way that would preserve some anonymity for them so that they could get over this fear of being victimized.

And that really made a difference. If you look in the early 90s, late 80s, early 90s, the most likely place to be mugged in the city of Atlanta was in two to three blocks of a gay bar at bar closing time. There were people who would come and they'd go around gay bars and mug people, they would come out, they'd been drinking, they're a little tipsy, and they knew that they weren't going to get caught because most of the time people didn't report. An example of that is there was a bar called Burkhardt's, it's on Piedmont Road, it's still there. I had a guy that contacted me and he had been robbed at knifepoint leaving Burkhardt's at two o'clock in the morning, going out to his car. So two guys came up, put a knife to

his throat and robbed him, and he was terrified and he didn't want to report to the police. He again, he was afraid of being outed and losing his job or, or something, but he thought somebody needed to know about this. And he called and told me about it. He said, I know this isn't a hate crime, but so I took his information down and talked to people in the police department and told them about it. And they said, we'll see what we can do about it.

So they set up a stakeout in the Burkhart's parking lot. And at closing time, the week after this had happened, this guy, I think it may have been like on a Friday night or a Saturday night. So they had people out there hidden in the parking lot. And sure enough, there's a kind of a creek down behind the bar. These guys came up from the edge of the parking lot from behind bushes in this creek and came up to somebody with a knife. And the police came and arrested them. When the police were interrogating these guys, they admitted to having been doing this for weeks and as best they could remember, they had robbed over twenty people, and not one of them had reported to the police. So we were able to help make place a little safer for people by giving them somebody they could talk to without being afraid of being outed and get the information back to the police. So, that was kind of useful.

A couple other things that worked on without as much success, they didn't catch the people that did it, but there were murders. There were gays and lesbian people being murdered and could have been hate crimes, might not have been. But we worked, there was probably a serial killer that's never been caught, still, that -- at least fourteen people we know the person killed and they were targeting Black female impersonators. The Black nightclubs had young -- and they were usually older teen or young twenties, gay men that did the female impersonation shows across -- and there was someone who was going to these shows and -- not sure what happened exactly -- meeting them after the show or something, but was killing these people. And over a period of seven or eight years, we were able to -- We started putting together where people in the Black community, in the Black gay and lesbian community came in and talked to us and said, "There's these murders going on and nobody's doing anything about it. And the police weren't investigating it." At the time that we were approached, they knew of seven or eight murders. And we went to the police and started asking about these murders. And they were -- You see, sometimes you watch television and the crime shows, and a prostitute is murdered and the police don't care much about it because it was a prostitute. Well, they didn't care a heck of a lot about Black female impersonators, transgender people. Transgender people are still probably the most marginalized group in our community. And we were able to, put pressure on the police and say, you need to start looking into this, and these murders look like they're connected. You know, it's all targeting the same kind of person, the same place. And the police did start investigating it. They put together a task force to investigate the crimes. And over time they pulled other records we didn't know about together. And as I said, came up with probably fourteen murders have been



committed by the same person, a serial killer. And then the murders stopped for three or four years and then started again.

And they told us at the time that probably the person had been in prison or moved away, but then they stopped again and they never have caught anybody, but at least they investigated it and they gave a little bit of dignity to the persons who been killed. Prior to this happening, us getting involved and getting the police and putting pressure on them to investigate it, one of the persons who was killed had been reported as missing by friends and the police actually went to her house. She went by, her nickname in the community was Precious. And I think there were articles written in Creative Loafing about her. The police went to her house and the door was ajar. And they went in and walked around in the house and there was nobody there. And they said they couldn't find anything. And you know, they didn't know who to contact, other family, you know, they didn't know if there was family around or whatever, and they just kind of closed the case. And maybe a week later, neighbors called the police and said, there's this horrible smell coming from the house. And Precious was dead inside the house. The person had murdered Precious had thrown laundry on top of her and the police officers, she was there in the house when they walked through the house on the missing persons report. And in the autopsy report, one of the things they found was a boot mark on Precious, which they at first thought might lead to the killer and it turned out it matched the boot of the police officers who had walked through the house. They had stepped on Precious walking through the house. They weren't particularly interested in investigating.

There was another string of murders that happened in Atlanta, where someone was targeting -- There was a street in Atlanta called Cypress Street, which back in the 80s and 90s was a street where male hustlers hung out and people would go pick up male hustlers there. Again, people that the police didn't really care about, didn't want to have much to do with, but there was somebody who started murdering people on Cypress Street. And there were, during a period of three, two or three months, there were three different men that were murdered on Cypress Street. They would be found with their pants down and their heads smashed in with a hammer. Somebody was, apparently they were hooking up with a hustler. And then there was a pair of people that were there and then somebody would come and bash them in their head and rob them. And again, the police had kind of, they had those murders recorded and they had the reports, but they didn't have them assigned to anybody to investigate. And we were able to put pressure on a homicide to go and investigate those. And they investigated, that's another one, they never found anybody, but at least we got them to investigate. Part of that particular set of murders, we called a rally and called out the police in a protest and had speakers that spoke about, they gave some fiery speeches about, enough, you know, when are you going to start protecting us? We're citizens in this community too. And we ended with a candle light ceremony for the persons who had died, that they may have been there, picking up hustlers, but they still didn't deserve to be murdered.

And I guess the other thing that I would say came out of all that is there was this safe sex initiative, because of AIDS. There's all this stuff to talking to people about young gay men and about having safe sex. And I started going around and talking to organizations and groups about safe sex too. But my talk was all about being careful who you met, who you went home with and what things you could do to protect yourself from being a victim of crime. One of the things I brought with me as a crime brochure about what to do if you're a victim of crime, how to prevent being a victim of crime. And we published a little brochure that we put out in all the bars and some of the gay and lesbian businesses for people that try to help make people be a little safer. That's a long answer I just gave you.

AG: Well, can you tell us more about any of your recent or current community involvement?

JG: I'm still working on public safety issues. After the break that I took, I really enjoy being involved in the community and I get a lot of satisfaction out of feeling like I'm doing something for my community. So there came a point where I decided I wanted to get back involved and do something. It was really after my partner, Gary's death, there's about a year where I was just kind of a mess after that. But when I started really getting over that grieving process and I decided I wanted to get back involved in community, and that would be kind of a good thing to do to help give me something to focus on.

So there was an organization called let's see, the AIDS Survival Project, and they had a thing called the, Thrive Weekend. Jeff Graham, who is currently the head of Georgia Equality was head of that organization at the time. The AIDS Survival Project originally had started out as a National Association of Persons with AIDS and then changed and became AIDS Survival Project. But they did a number of things. They helped advocate to get medications for people who couldn't afford medications, housing for people with AIDS that were disabled. They lobbied at the legislature trying to get more funds and both at the state legislature for housing and for to preserve the Ryan White funds. And I don't know if you're familiar with those, but the federal funds for the Ryan White Act that are given out to the states as block grants to use for drugs and housing and things for people with AIDS.

They, also had these things called Thrive Weekends. And when people were given an AIDS diagnosis, they usually expected they're going to die. This is a death sentence you're going to die, which changed over time because of the availability of drugs, effective drugs. But people still, even though there was these drugs that were available and you weren't necessarily going to die, that change from people finding out that they were HIV positive and knowing they could live. That change from, to that from thinking, okay, this is a death sentence. I'm going to die. And I'm going to die a horrible death with awful illnesses -- That took a while for it to sink in. And I think even now probably some people that are finding out they're HIV positive, probably think, "Okay, I'm going to die."

The Thrive Weekends were designed to tell people, look, you're not going to die. You can live. And you can not only live, you can thrive. And it was a weekend workshop that was free put out by the AIDS Survival Project. And then we provide, they had doctors come in and talk about medical issues. We'd have people come in that were experts on social security and talked about if you were sick enough that you were eligible for disability, how to apply for disability and talk about insurance issues and dealing. We had sessions that were, where we talked through about how to talk with people you met, that you wanted to date about being HIV positive and even had sessions on talking about do you -- in discussing the pros and cons of telling people you worked with and your friends and your family, and they had nutritionists and came in and talked about nutrition and things to do that would help enhance your life and make you live a better life.

So these Thrive Workshops were designed to take people who thought they're going to die, which a lot of times people who thought they were going to die and live this and have horrible illnesses -- So I volunteered to talk to Jeff and we'd been friends. Jeff was one of the founders of Act Up in Atlanta. And then Jeff worked with Act Up. And then he became the director of a Survival Project. And now he's director of the Georgia Equality. He's one of the people we're really lucky to have in Georgia, great person. And he and I have been friends over the years. We've stayed friends, but he told me, we have all these different things we can do. And we have this volunteer coordinator. Why don't you come talk to our volunteer coordinator and you can see what all we do and what things you might like to do?

And so I ended up, it was the Thrive Workshops and part of the workshop. They had all these professionals come in, the doctors and nutritionists and lawyers and social security, disability people. But part of it is too, was that these people, you're having to go through this adjustment in life. You think you've just got a fatal illness and you're worried about, what's going to happen to me? And you're worried about, who should I tell? So part of it was you would have, there were sessions on nutrition and then a break, and then a session on legal issues. And then you would break into smaller groups. And there were a little support groups through the week here. And a get together. You had the same people in your support group through the weekend. You could sit through and talk about what's going on with you emotionally. And I became a support group facilitator, so a support group facilitator, and set up person and clean up and sweep and mop the floor afterwards person. So I did that with AIDS Survival Project for about two years.

The AIDS Survival Project no longer exists, and I didn't do anything else for a bit. Jeff Graham became the director of Georgia Equality. And out of just the respect that I have for him, I started getting more interested in Georgia Equality. Hadn't done a lot with them, and they had been kind of a struggling organization that had leadership and board issues. And they were doing some stuff for the community, but not a lot. And with Jeff Graham there, I felt like they were going to do more.

So I have volunteered and I do -- I work their booth at Pride, I work there booth at the Inman Park, some of the neighborhood festivals. But the other thing that I've done is to continue to be a -- Because I've spent hours and hours and hours, and money out of my own pocket, getting training on dealing with victims of crime. And Rob Pitts was a Fulton County commissioner. At one point he was in the City Council. And he had asked me to be on the Metro Police and Atlanta Crime Commission, and I didn't do it at the time. But I really got a lot of expertise on public safety issues and crime issues, especially relevant to the gay and lesbian community and hate crime. So I volunteer for different things that come up that Georgia Equality needs, but I also try to stay available as a organization expert within the organization, as a volunteer, an expert on public safety and health hate crime issues. And so when something comes up, I'm a resource that they can rely on.

I review the Department of Justice, the FBI hate crime statistics as they come out each year and look for trends in the statistics and especially focused on what's going on in Georgia and provide a summary of that information to Georgia Equality. There's not a lot of interest. There's limited resources for the organization, Georgia Equality, and there's limited resources for ADL and NAACP and all the organizations have to decide what they want to work on. And hate crimes is not one of the things that's high priority right now. So there's nobody working on legislation, but at a point, if that comes up, that there is some opportunity to work on and an interest in getting hate crimes bill passed in Georgia, then I would be a resource and somebody that could go and testify before the committees that would hear it in the legislature, for instance, and provide expert witness information. So I continued getting that information.

I have met, through Georgia Equality, hate crimes -- Some of the people that are targeted more recently have been immigrant groups. The Sikh community has had -- There was a temple up in Wisconsin where the guy came in and shot people and -- Sikhs, the men -- a lot of them wear this kind of turban, head -- For whatever reason, the people who don't like Arabs and Muslims think that Sikhs are Arabs and Muslims. And there's been a huge increase in hate crimes against immigrants, Latinos, and with all the immigration talk that's going on, and against the Sikh community. And against Arab Americans. Georgia Equality had a meeting with a person from the Department of Justice that asked him if he would meet and talk, because they knew we had some expertise on hate crimes. This would have been in 2012 and asked me to attend the meeting with the person from the Department of Justice, talking about how we might provide some of our expertise and reach out to and work with the immigrant community, and the Sikh community, on hate crimes. And so we had some meetings to provide some of our information and exchange ideas with them and with the Justice Department.

The other thing I did -- All the time I've worked with and talked with the police officers, they have a thing called the Atlanta Citizens Police Academy. I'd never ever had attended it and actually attended it this last year, it's ten weeks of

training, one night a week with the Atlanta Citizens Police Academy. You'd go out to the police academy and they bring in the people from every part of the Police Department and go through and talk to you about how they do their jobs and the legal framework that surrounds them. And give you expertise on what the police do and why they do it the way they do and how the Police Department's organized. And through that, I've got to meet the current setup, police chiefs, and deputy chiefs and zone commanders, and the head of homicide, and whatever. So I had that sort of expertise there waiting if something comes up where we need somebody to interact from our community, I'm available.

And then most recently last year, Rob Pitts, as a Fulton County Commissioner, contacted me again and asked me to be on the Citizen Advisory Board to the Fulton County 911 system. So I'm an appointed member of the 911 advisory board now. So that's what I do now. Not a whole lot. It sounds like a lot. It sounds like a lot, but it's once a month meetings and stuff. It's not -- I don't do nearly as much as I used to, but there's a whole lot of other people who do stuff now, too. There was a time when there weren't very many people doing stuff so we had to do a lot more.

AG: What are your perceptions on current activism in the gay community?

JG: It's grown up. It's matured. Activism at the time that I started -- And you go back to the Stonewall riots in New York -- Activism started as people getting angry and saying, enough, we're tired of being treated like this. And it was pushing back and it was expressions of anger. And a lot of it was demonstrations, and street stuff, and marches and rallies. And some of that still goes on, but -- And also it was done by groups of people who got together and said, did you see what happened yesterday? I hate that. We should do something about it. Yeah, let's have a rally. And a group of friends get together and you'd have a rally.

Activism, there's some of that still that goes on, but what's happened is our community has grown. A lot of the activists who were activists in their twenties, Jeff Graham I mentioned, who's been an activist his whole life, I think since he got out of college, and founder of ACT UP here in Atlanta. Now he's the executive director of Georgia Equality Project. And he goes to the legislature and lobbies, and he knows how to write bills. And he knows who the people are that support us and who they don't. He knows how to talk to people, and he knows how to train other people.

Where, activism in the days when we were marginalized and invisible and people -- it was okay to treat us badly. We're reactive and we were angry and we didn't have a place at the table. So we made lots of noise and had big demonstrations and rallies. We're not going to let you just ignore us. We're going to be so noisy and loud you have to listen to us. And we're going to make so much noise, the media has to listen to us. We've grown past that. Now we have people who -- we have a seat at the table. We have people who do listen to us. We have people who

are friendly to us who are political leaders and community leaders and religious leaders. And we have organizations that are -- They've got budgets and directors, and we have people that know how to write laws and how to access things.

So it's different now that a lot of the activism now is being done through organizations and by organizations, organized by professional -- professionals who are, to some extent, have a seat at the table and are working within the system. Instead of being angry people who are marginalized and left out, who are working outside the system.

AG: And where do you see it heading in the future?

JG: I went to the Netherlands in 1996. David and I went to the Netherlands during the Olympics. We rented our condo out to the German Olympic corporate sponsors of the German Olympic team. We stayed here part of the Olympics, but we went to London and Amsterdam with some of that money. And while we were there, I met this guy, this young guy, who was an editor of the gay newspaper in Amsterdam. And talked with him quite a bit. David and I both talked with him, but he and I connected mostly. I don't think David was as interested to talk to him as I was. But we talked a whole lot and spent part of an evening and part of the next day he came and he said, let me show you some places around Amsterdam. And in the process of talking to him, he was -- I'm guessing he was twenty-seven, twenty-six, twenty-seven, somewhere in there.

I asked him at some point, I said, "Are you out to your family?" And he says, "What?" I said, "Are you out to your family?" And "What? What do you mean out?" And I said, "Well, do they know that you're gay?" "Well, of course they know I'm gay." And later on talking some more, I said, "How was it when you came out to your family?" And he's just, "What's this out again?" I said, "Well, when you told them that you're gay, was it difficult?" He said, "I didn't have to tell it. They just know. No, it's not difficult." He didn't get the questions. The Netherlands has been friendly, gay-friendly, and people have accepted gays and lesbians in the Netherlands probably longer than most other countries. Or it happened earlier in the Netherlands for reasons I don't know. Anne Frank's house is in Amsterdam. Anne Frank was a lesbian. A lot of people don't know that.

But these questions didn't make a lot of sense to him. He didn't have to come out because there wasn't anything to hide because it's perfectly okay. And he has experienced a life, it's very different from what mine has been as a gay person and what even gay people are here now. And that's where I see things going in the future. I think that it's going to become -- We've had this gay community and we've had gay culture, and I think, to some extent, it's going to disappear and we're going to assimilate and be part of the bigger culture and become a non-issue. That may not happen as much as it's happened in the Netherlands because of the attitudes of people who don't feel comfortable with, and in some cases, don't like gays and lesbians because of their religious beliefs. And I think the

Evangelical community of Christian -- Evangelical Christian community in the United States probably will keep that from happening as quickly as it I'd like for it to happen. But that's where eventually things will go. And even they will come around.

My brother is gay, also. My younger brother, Jay, and his partner, who -- They got married like two days after the California law. They live in Long Beach, California. Two days after the California law, the judge released the stay and said, people can start getting married again, and the law was overturned. His partner is a United Church of Christ Minister. And my sister and niece and nephew are Evangelical Christians and young Evangelical Christians have gay friends, and they don't understand why they're -- Some of them are actually upset with the religious teaching that they've grown up with because they don't understand why their friends are being treated so badly. So even they'll come around.

AG: Can you talk about how the AIDS epidemic has impacted your life?

JG: Oh gosh. It's been an impact in lots of ways. When I was living in Des Moines, Iowa, hadn't moved out this way yet when I first started reading about the gay cancer. There was this -- They knew the gay men were getting this disease and dying. They didn't know what the disease was. It was just kind of scary, but it was this little fringe thing. And I kind of knew about it and you'd read about it in the Advocate or something, but didn't worry a lot about it because didn't know what it was, and thought, well I don't know. It's mainly -- It was happening to gay men, mainly in San Francisco and New York, by the time I moved toward this part of the country, I was in Knoxville before I came to Atlanta.

And there was a guy that I met and I dated while I was in Knoxville and real nice guy, his name was Joe Nemus. And after I moved here, he became sick. And he -- There were beginning to be some drugs, experimental drugs, available but they were really strong. They had bad side effects and he got what's called neuropathy in his feet. He could -- It hurt horribly to stand up. He couldn't drive anymore. He went from being this young, happy, healthy guy to being very debilitated, couldn't do anything in six or seven months and in ten months he was dead. And so there was this sadness.

And then here in Atlanta, when I was involved with Friends Atlanta, the organization, gay and lesbian social recreational group, we had 450, 500 members. And there was somebody from our group during the late '80s, early '90s, that was dying all the time. It became scary worrying about it. But also it was taking up resources and energy in our community. All of a sudden, instead of fighting to be treated fairly, for -- not discriminated at work or -- All of our efforts started going into trying to raise money for AIDS research, and provide support for people with AIDS. And it was something that just really drained the community and drained the resources. But it also -- I was saying earlier about most people are apolitical, gays and lesbians are apolitical. Being apolitical goes

away when you have to fight for your life. And AIDS activism really energized and helped build the activism within the gay community to work for all kinds of stuff.

But there was a period there where it was just so difficult. We were going to a memorial service or funeral, it seemed like at least once a month and sometimes more than one a month, for a period of several years. And I had close friends that I saw that died. And some of them, some pretty awful deaths, the infections and diseases that they would get when their immune systems broke down. Some of them are really just horrible there. And then saw people treated, in some cases, wonderfully by their families when they got AIDS and other cases, families that didn't want to have anything to do with them.

There was a guy that was an editor of the Gay Center newspaper in Atlanta. There used to be a place called Atlanta Gay Center on 12th Street. And they had a newspaper they put out, it was pre-Southern Boys, pre-Etcetera. And his name was Ralph Ginn, G-I-N-N. And Ralph was the editor. And when I worked on the help line at the Atlanta Gay Center, I became friends with Ralph. He would be there a lot of the evenings, the same evenings that my shift was on the help line, working on the newspaper. And Ralph got AIDS and his family didn't know he was gay.

And when he became so sick he was in the hospital, he told him not only that he's gay, that he had AIDS. And they said, we don't want to have anything to do with you. And they not only said they didn't want to have him to do with him, they went to all his extended family, to uncles and aunts, and others and they said, he's not our son anymore. We're not having anything to do with him. And if you have anything to do with him, we won't have anything to do with you. So they put pressure on the rest, his whole extended family, to shut him out and disown him.

And Ralph was actually -- There was a Time Magazine article about what was happening with AIDS and how badly people were being treated that had AIDS. Ralph was one of the people featured in the Time Magazine article. And there was not a person from his family when he died, but he had twenty-five or thirty friends from the community that were there with him. And it -- His family didn't even, they didn't -- Had no interest even in picking up his body or planning his funeral or anything. He put paperwork in place to allow friends to take care of his remains. And it was kind of sad what his family did to him. So things like that we had to live with.

It was kind of weird -- I don't know if you have grandparents that are living, but as your grandparents, they're older and you go visit them and you haven't seen them in a while. And you sit down and you start talking and invariably, they're getting older and their friends are dying. And they say, do you remember Julie Smith? You know, she passed away two months ago. Oh, and do you remember Sam whatever, he got cancer. I don't know if you remember. Yeah, he died of



cancer. And you'd hear this discussion. My friends in our twenties and thirties talked like that. When we get together and say, oh, did you hear about -- And it occurred to me at one point, it's like we've become old early in life because all our friends are already dying. That doesn't usually happen to people until they're a lot older. But that's what life was like there for a while.

So it changed a lot of things because of those kinds of experiences, it gave us something to focus on and work for. I was mentioning about public safety stuff earlier, and I left actually one of the things off that we accomplished in the Public Safety Committee with the city council. There was a guy that was head of the Department of Corrections, Tom Pocock, and really nice guy, and he was willing to listen to us. He was a very open-minded person. And if you told him something was a problem, he would listen. And if he understood it was a problem, he try to fix it. And they used to -- The early drugs that came about had these really tight schedules. You had to take two of these every four hours. And if you missed it by more than a couple hours, you would start building up resistance to the HIV and the drugs would become ineffective.

So not taking your drugs on this tight, really close schedule, you'd die. You could -- The drugs would become ineffective and they would become resistant, the HIV to the drugs, and you couldn't take them anymore. And the police had this policy whenever they would arrest somebody, if you had any kind of medication or drugs, they didn't want medication, drugs in the jails. So as part of the intake process into the jail, they would take anything you had on you and throw it in the trash and throw it away. And so that was one of the things that we were able to talk with him about is, look, you're killing people when you do that to them. And we were able to get them to change the intake process and the jail system to where they would, if somebody had AIDS medications, they would stop the intake process and bring one of the jail nurses in and looked and see if those were drugs for AIDS and verify that they were. And then rather than throwing them away, the nurse would take custody of the drugs and find out what the schedule was they needed to take them and give them as they needed them while they were in the jail so that they wouldn't die.

We were also -- I mentioned about the Thrive, the people who were at the Thrive Workshops that were coming in, when I was working with those in the early days, it was gay men that were primarily AIDS victims, gay men and IV [intravenous] drug users. And that's -- You still see that, but that's changed over time. And there were these Thrive Workshops. There were Black women who had men who they'd had sex with who were also secretly having sex with other men. And they'd become -- There was Black woman with children who were HIV positive. But there was also, in this country, we arrest people and put them in prison for small amounts of marijuana. There were young Black males who had been arrested for things like having a small amount of marijuana and put in the prison system and had been raped and made HIV positive while they're in prison. That was three-fourths of the people who were at these Thrive Workshops. So the AIDS gave us

something to focus on. That that was something else that we worked on was trying to change the prison system and the jail system and make condoms available.

So it did all those kind of things that affected us in that way. It personally affected me, I'm HIV positive. I used to go get tested once a year. If you're a sexually active gay person, you kind of should do that. And for several years the tests were always fine. And I was not doing any crazy stuff, I wasn't using IV drugs, and thought that things would be fine. But at some point, and I quit going as often, and I had skipped two or three years and went to get a test one day, one year, and thought, I haven't done this in a while, I need to go do that. And that was a very scary thing, by the way, you go get this test if you had any reason to believe that you might be HIV positive, going and getting a test and then waiting for the results, the results used to take two weeks. So you had to wait for two weeks afterwards. And that was kind of a lot of anxiety.

But anyway, I had gone two or three years and I went and got tested and then found out I was HIV positive. And it was kind of a shock. And I had to adjust to that. And it's affected me personally, and then I have to take medications and you have to -- Medications are much better now, they don't have some of the horrible side effects they used to have, and there's a variety of medications. So if you do build up a drug resistance to one medication, you may be able to -- If the HIV becomes resistant, you may be able to take something else. But the drugs all affect your -- Most of them affect your liver because your liver processes the stuff that you in some way can affect your kidneys and other things. And there are some side effects, but I have to have regular -- I go every six months, it used to be just every three, but now I go every six months, I have to have my complete blood workup done to check and be sure that the drugs are not adversely affecting my liver. And in the back of my mind, nowadays, HIV is a manageable, mostly manageable, illness. But there are still things you have to deal with because of it. And some people do get worse side effects than others. And if at some point it starts impacting your liver and you start having liver damage from taking the medications, you have to stop taking them.

And so for anybody who's HIV positive, one of the things you know is if you reach a point where you can't take any of the medications anymore, then you have about two years left to live. So it kind of, in a way, that's a bad thing, but in a way it's kind of a gift too, because it puts you in a position of appreciating life. And most of us, especially when we're younger, we don't think about what's some of the stuff that's most important to us. We get worried about paying our bills and whatever it is that we do on a day-to-day basis. And we lose track sometimes at what's most important to us. And when you are in touch with your mortality, it kind of helps you refocus on what's most important in life, and be sure that you do the things that are important in life, that you're doing something that you want to do. So, that's a good side of it.

So I kind of rambled there with the answer to that, but it's had an impact in a lot of different ways. I don't know if you were going to ask about the AIDS quilt or not.

AG: Yes, actually. Our question was to talk about your work with David Greer on the Names Project quilt.

JG: So it's kind of -- And I mentioned it because it's connected, and that's the Names Project quilt. There was a guy out in San Francisco that came up with this idea to make a quilt with the panels that were memorialized of people who had died from AIDS, which is a really cool idea. I don't know how he ever came up with that. But the quilt, I've helped make panels for some friends that we put on the quilt and other people put panels from all over the United States and all over the world now, too. And it started, the Names Project was in San Francisco and the quilt was in San Francisco, but there was this really strong Names Project chapter here in Atlanta. And as the quilt got bigger and it got to be harder to move it around and display it and store it. I mean, it's gigantic, it takes a warehouse to store this thing, in a big warehouse. In 1987 at the March on Washington, they displayed the quilt on the mall in Washington, the big grassy mall. It won't fit there anymore. It's too big. They couldn't display it there now, it's been too big to fit there for ten years. Sadly, because so many people have panels on it.

But during the time period, there was so many people were dying. The first time that it was going to come to Atlanta, and Atlanta had one of the large gay communities in the United States. So they decided that they were going to have a display of it here in Atlanta. And the first time it was brought here, it's been here two or three times, and it's here permanently now, but it was at the World Congress Center in this big, huge space and they had the quilt there and there was plans to have it. David and I volunteered. They needed volunteers to help work on the display of the quilt. So it was there through a weekend. It was there all day Saturday and Sunday through a weekend. And we both volunteered and they wanted everybody to dress in white. So that you didn't -- You were the people, the volunteers are all white, and then there's all the color in the quilt. And I'm not quite sure why that was, but so we had white shorts and white t-shirts on, and we had volunteered. We both, we'd had lots of friends who had died and wanted to be there for that reason. And it just seemed like an important thing to us, something to bring -- It brought attention to all the people that had died, but it also was a real amazing way to remember the people who had died too.

And we volunteered for a shift on Saturday and a shift on Sunday. I think they were three or four hour long shifts, probably four hours. So we get there on the Saturday and they say, oh, you're assigned to the Georgia room. So what this was, they had this big, main body of the quilt and the World Congress Center in a huge ... It was huge, it was like a football field size quilt. They had panels that had been made over the last year for people who had died in Georgia. And they had them in a separate room, and they were there so that people from Georgia who were here

could go and easily find those. And at the end, they had a ceremony where they then join those to the rest of the quilt.

And so they said, you're in the Georgia room. And we said, okay. So we go to the Georgia room. We were, as volunteers, what we were was monitors. We were there to keep people from stepping on the quilt, if somebody crazy came in from trying to do anything to damage it, go get the security people, whatever. But they had boxes of Kleenex everywhere, like this box of Kleenex down here. And they said, this is a real emotional experience and you may have to help somebody, take them to a seat to sit down, or talk to them. They may need somebody to talk to.

We didn't -- I don't think we knew exactly what we were volunteering for when we volunteered, but we worked in that Georgia room and it was a steady stream of people coming through who were looking for the quilt panels for friends and people who had died. It was four hours of hundreds and hundreds of people crying. It was probably the most intensely emotional thing I've ever done. Just literally hundreds and hundreds of people, just a line of people coming by crying for four hours. It was -- We kind of like just completely emotionally, physically exhausted at the end of that day. And leaving there. I remember telling David, "I don't know if I can come back tomorrow." We did. Or we came back and told him we can't be the Georgia room. But that was, to this day, that's still probably the most intensely emotional experience, one or two that I've had in my life.