

**LGBT Center of Central PA History Project
Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections**

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

Documents Online

Title: LGBT Oral History: Becky Boone

Date: November 25, 2014

Location: LGBT Oral History – Boone, Becky - 008

Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Interviewee: Becky Boone

Interviewer: Lonna Malmshemer and Don Fitz

Date of Interview: November 25, 2014

Location of Interview: Becky Boone's home in Harrisburg, PA

Transcriber: Sarah Goldberg

Proofreader: Sara Tyberg

Abstract:

Becky Boone, who identifies as heterosexual, was raised in a religious family that was accepting of homosexuality, although they rarely discussed it. Her involvement with the Pembroke United Church of Christ in Harrisburg and as a parent of a daughter participating in Common Roads theater productions has encouraged her to become an advocate for the LGBT community. In this interview, Becky discusses her early understanding of LGBT couples, her church's experiences with families unsupportive of the LGBT community, and her experience during the rejection of DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act]. She also describes the process her church underwent in order to adopt a policy of being "open and affirming" toward LGBT members. During this voting process, Becky screened documentary films and brought transgender individuals to speak at her church in order to increase awareness for LGBT issues and to expand the inclusivity of her community. Additionally, she describes the gratitude expressed by LGBT individuals for her church's religious support at Pride festivals. Becky also admits that the passage of marriage equality so quickly in Pennsylvania was pleasantly unexpected.

DF: Okay, we are now interviewing Tom's wife, Becky—Becky Boone, who will give her side of the history. [laughs]

BB: Okay. Well, yes, both of us were raised pretty much that this whole homosexual thing was a non-issue. I was raised in a United Church of Christ family and my mother was a choir director and church organist, and that's how I found out there were some people who were gay, because almost every church organist who was male that she introduced me to, she'd say, "Oh, he's a little different," and that's how she would couch it. "He's a little different." She would not say gay or homosexual, but oh, you know, "He has a different kind of lifestyle." When you were interviewing Tom, what—what I was reminded of us was when I was a senior in high school there was a photo in TIME magazine of two men marrying or having some sort of union in Hawaii and for some reason this was interesting enough to me that I cut it out and put it in my scrapbook. I just thought it was such a curious kind of thing. I wasn't against it, it just—I just didn't understand quite what that was about at that point, and that would have been '71. So, I went to Penn State, and if there was a gay community there, I wasn't aware of it.

LM: I promise you, there was.

BB: I'm sure there was, looking back now. People did not talk about it then and now, in going to high school reunions—I went to Conrad Weiser in Robesonia [Pennsylvania], which was a pretty conservative high school—now I found out who was gay and who was a lesbian and back then, you just didn't talk about it. Numerous of my teachers apparently were gay, and we just never knew it or talked about, you know. My mother has told me, "Who do you think those

schoolteachers were—those female schoolteachers who lived together? They were lesbians.” But nobody ever talked about it at that point. In moving to Harrisburg, I lived by myself for a while, but then I moved in with friends of mine. It was a man and a woman, but he was gay, and she knew that going into the marriage, but they were going to try to work it out. This was back in probably ’75, because I think there was still a lot of that, you know, “Gee maybe—maybe if we got married, it’d all work out,” and, of course, it didn’t, because eventually he left, and he now has a partner, and I’m friends with him on Facebook [laughs], so you know it’s a lot of fun to keep up with him. But in thinking of what Tom has said—I can give you the church angle, because, yes, I’m a member of Pembroke United Church of Christ, and when our Synod of the United Church of Christ pronounced—I guess it was in the early ‘80s, mid ‘80s... they were looking at marriage equality at that point, and that’s when our churches really started talking about this, and our minister brought up the topic and led—I think it was a three-week kind of Sunday school... topic about marriage equality, and at that point—this was back in the ‘80s, several families left the church, and they were furious and kept pointing to biblical... you know, edicts—you know, different verses in the bible they’d pick and choose about this... and you can’t argue with those people. I mean I don’t know what we would have said to them. What was interesting personally to me was one was an interracial couple. Both who have been divorced and remarried, and I think the bible is very clear about, you know, divorce, adultery, or whatever, and the other couple was also a divorced couple remarried, so you know, it was curious to me that with their own backgrounds, clearly that we’re in opposition to biblical teachings that they had no problem writing these horrible letters to members of our church saying that they were leaving, and, you know, we were not following the Bible. At that point, I assume there were certain women—I don’t know about men, but women in our congregation who I, you know, I’m fairly certain were lesbians, but nobody—nobody talked about it. There was an assumption, I guess.

DF: Was this your father’s church?

BB: No, no, no, no—this was in Harrisburg. There was the assumption that they were lesbians, but nobody—nobody talked about it, you know, they just lived together and whatever, and it was really none of our—we thought it’s none of our business. It’s really none of our business, and then—I’m trying to think of moving on to our daughter everything that Tom said was certainly the case with her—much more open about homosexuality. It’s funny, the guy—first guy she went to the prom with is—it turned out when he went to college, he came out, and she said, “No surprise there,” she said she probably could have told him he was gay [laughs], but he wasn’t ready to hear it. A lot of her friends in the theatre were out, even, you know, in high school, which is just amazing to me when I look back at my own high school experience. It just never, ever would have been talked about. She was very pleased to be a part of that Common Roads play and had gone there to Common Roads to rehearse at that point... very, very thrilled to be in the middle of a controversy of their—their first night performance with the religious folk out in front of the open stage.

DF: Talk more about that.

BB: They had signs. I think it’s the same gang that shows up at Pride—at the Pride Festival, but, you know, nobody even—they just walk by them anymore, it’s... you know, you just kind of

ignore them, and I've been told from—who's the gang with the umbrellas? Who're they? Oh gosh.

LM: I forget what they're called.

BB: What are they called?

LM: UU [Unitarian Universalist] Church was doing. They're gone now.

BB: Yeah. They're good people. Aren't they doing it?

LM: No, I think the Center's taking over that organization.

BB: They're—they're wonderful. I heard them speak. They were wonderful, and I guess from their experiences, hearing their experiences being at Pride... being at different kinds of festivals—the woman who spoke whose name escapes me right now—said when she'd come home she'd have to take a shower after all the horrible, horrible things that had been said to her, but now it's—I just don't get that sense anymore. People just walk by these protesters, and they'll all, you know, “Biblically you're going to hell,” and all this stuff, and they're very graphic about sodomy, and it's like [gestures], you know? People are starving! Let's talk about the people—

LM: Don't you wonder how they know?

BB: [laughs] I'd rather talk about the people who are starving that we're doing nothing for, you know, that kind of thing. To me, that's much more what Jesus had in mind. You know, we always say Jesus said nothing about homosexuality, there's nothing in the Gospels about homosexuality as far as what Jesus had to say about it, so... so then, in our church, the whole thing kind of went underground for a while. We didn't talk about it, we said, “Yeah anybody who comes here—it's—it's fine, you know, we'll be open.” And maybe we were, but then we had two women join who were openly lesbians and partners, and they said, “Uh, uh, you can say this all you want, but until you actually take it to a vote, this will not be considered safe, because our friends have gone to numerous churches that said they were open and welcoming,” and you know, “as soon as people said they were gay, they were shunned.” So, we went through the process again. I was able to bring in a woman who was transgender, and that was a fascinating story, and people listened to her and to her partner. I showed *So [sic] the Bible Tells Me So*. I went to—they had an opening screening of that—it was made by—have you seen that?

DF: Mhm.

BB: Yeah, it was made by a guy from Camp Hill, apparently, and they, like, had a premiere performance of it locally at Market Square Presbyterian Church, and I went to see that, and that was so well done, and I showed that as part of our educational experience at church. It was mostly preaching to the choir though at that point, because I think people who were really against the whole marriage equality—

DF: They wouldn't have come.

BB: Yeah, they were not members of our church anymore, anyway. We saw the movie *Normal*, which is one of the best movies I've seen about transgendered folk. It's just really well done with Tom Wilkinson and Jessica Lang. Yeah, really, really well done. And I always offer that to people as—when they're wondering about transgender, what's that all about. So, at any rate, we decided to take it to a vote again at church, and that was in November—three years ago this month. It was unanimous that we would be open and affirming. We're the only Harrisburg association UCC Church that is opening and affirming. St. Paul's UCC in Mechanicsburg, which is the Mercersburg Association, they are, but I just found out this week two more of our churches in our conference are now open and affirming, and a lot of them are studying the issue, and you know, we're all sitting around saying, "What is the big deal?" you know? Why is this even an issue in a church? It just should not be an issue in a church, but...

DF: Are you doing weddings?

BB: Oh yeah, yeah. We have—our pastor recently left after 41 years, and he had done weddings previously. No one that I know of has asked to actually get married in the church, but that would not—that would not be an issue. Since we've become open and affirming, we've gotten more gay and lesbian members of our church and as far as I can tell, everyone feels very comfortable. Once again, it's kind of a non-issue. I remember, however—you know it's funny, 'cause people say things, and then you think maybe they do have an issue. We had a couple of families that quietly left, but we were never quite sure... just recently within the last year who left. You know, it's hard—I don't think any of our families would say at this point that's why they left. I think there's much more of a—almost embarrassment that they're not there yet maybe? I don't know.

DF: What's the make up of your congregation? Are they mostly over 50, are they mostly white?

BB: Mostly white. There's some interracial couples there. Mostly, you know, 40s and up. Then—but we have a large group of younger kids now, all of a sudden. It's a pretty transient community there. Most of the people who come to our church do not live in Pembroke, they live elsewhere. I'm trying to think... yeah, some of the families left, we weren't quite sure why they left, and I don't think they would ever say that they left, because of the vote. Oh yeah, one gentlemen said, "Well, what—what happens if you know, soon all our congregation is gay or mostly gay?" And, it's like, would that be a problem? [laughs] So, people say things from time to time, and you're like, "Okay, they're just getting used to this whole idea, I guess." Other than that, I'm thinking at school, we have openly gay—I have openly gay coworkers, supervisors, and others.

DF: What's the position of the intermediate unit? Is there a position?

BB: There is no position—there better not be a position, or they're going to lose one of their administrators from what I can tell. They cannot fire—I guess that—

DF: Is that part of your—?

BB: I think that's part of education—I think that's public education. I don't know. Because they're—

LM: Well, anyone else can in Pennsylvania.

BB: Yeah, I mean, we have—we have—I mean, our supervisor just got married to his partner this summer, and people know that in general. I don't think that—I don't think our board would fire anybody because of that. I can't imagine that would happen. Because there is quite a—there are quite a few folk at the top that, you know?

DF: Is it part of the race/religion?

BB: I don't think so. I know it isn't in Pennsylvania yet, that's the next... next fight. Oh yeah, that's the other thing with the whole marriage equality thing, I didn't think we'd get to that point in Pennsylvania this fast, that just blew me, because Ted—Ted Martin came and spoke to us about this—I guess after we had passed—when was that? I'm trying to think. It was about two years ago in summer session Sunday school—he came and talked to us, and he said, “Oh, it's going to take a long time,” you know, “We don't expect this to happen in Pennsylvania for years and years and years and years and years,” and then wham! Bang!

DF: Thank God for elections.

BB: Yeah, there you go.

LM: Judge Jones.

BB: Yeah, the other funny story I have is I dropped into the LGBT Center when they were voting on DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act], when the Supreme Court was voting on DOMA, and I went and sat down, and Louie was like, “Everybody come sit down—sit down up front and watch this.” When the pronouncement came down that, you know, DOMA was illegal or whatever—unconstitutional—I was sitting next to Hava [Lynn] Pell—do you know her? Yeah, and we—we high fived, and we ended up being in the paper. And Louie says, “It figures the only two heterosexual people in the Center, and they get their pictures—they get their pictures in the paper.” So, whenever I see Hava now we high five. It's kind of a fun thing that we do, but yeah, pretty much like Tom said, my family—non-issue... non-issue. It was never—it was never anything that created problems. I have two brothers. My older brother... he's got some other issues, so I'm—I'm not sure at this point what his feeling is about it. My younger brother is a musician and a nurse and married and has two kids, and I'm sure it's a non-issue for him, too. It's just not anything we talk about, you know? There's no drama around this issue in my family, which is nice. It's nice to be raised like that. So that's... I think that's it, unless you have any more questions.

DF: You got anything else?

LM: Fundraising was mentioned and your participation with the Center—how are you—how have you been involved?

BB: Okay, the LGBT Center?

LM: Yeah.

BB: Okay, just—

DF: Is that how you know Louie?

BB: That's how I know Louie. I know Louie from the Center and also from Pride Fest. I started—we—our church when we took the... yeah [gestures]. We marched in the Pride parade, and that was a big deal.

DF: Your Church?

BB: Yeah. That was a big deal, and then they stopped having the parade, which we were really disappointed, because we had this big banner made.

DF: Was this after the Church vote?

BB: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. We had this big banner made and everything and we had all these little rainbow—all these rainbow things to fly in the air and all that. But like I said, our church, Pembroke U.C.C., has paired with Saint's Paul's U.C.C. for the last—I'm not sure – three years, I think? At the Pride Fest... to hand out literature and just listen to people, and what has impressed me is people will come up and say, "We're not really interested in Church, but we are so glad you are. We are so glad you have a presence. Thank you so much." And then we give them a freeze-pop [laughs]. We've had some nice discussions with some of those folks, and they're really glad to see a religious presence, and there's—there's quite a bit now. The Lutherans are there now, and the Presbyterians have a stand at the Pride Fest, and I love that event, because it's a lot of fun. There's a lot going on. There's a lot of color [laughs]... a lot of interesting t-shirts... gives me a chance to get into that whole scene just for a day, but other than actually, you know, writing checks to LGBT, I'm not involved per se at the Center at this time.

DF: Okay.

BB: Okay.

LM: Thanks.

BB: Did you guys have fun? We had fun.

LM: He's still here, yeah.

[train horn in the background]

DF: Now, I need to get you to sign one of these also

BB: Yeah, Ann's from Bradford County.

DF: The release down to the interview signature, down to that point.

BB: Okay. I just can't believe you had happy talk. That is just too funny.

DF: That is so crazy.

BB: Oh my gosh.

LM: Do we have permission to use your video?

BB: Sure.

LM: Good.