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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: Kathy Fillman

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Interviewee: **Kathy Fillman**

Interviewers: Marge Forrester and Barbara Miller

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**Abstract:**

Kathy Fillman was born in Coatesville, Pennsylvania to an Irish family that had their own business. Although she describes her childhood as idyllic, Kathy lived with her grandparents and three cousins due to her mother's alcoholism and attended a Catholic private school until the seventh grade, when she started living with her mother again. Once Kathy graduated from high school at age 18, she immediately began working in order to leave her home where alcoholism and abuse were major issues. She worked a number of odd jobs, including being an employee at Pepperidge Farm, a manager at Hess and Atlantic Refining and Marketing Corporation, and an assistant at John Barnes. In this interview, Kathy describes reconnecting with and supporting her mother, now deceased, who battled cancer on numerous occasions. She also discusses her interest in spirituality and healing, her involvement in civil rights during her 20s and 30s, as well her positive experiences with the health care industry in appropriately dealing with her and her partner's needs. Today, Kathy is recovering from several health issues but is optimistic about her own future as well as the future for younger generations of LGBT-identified individuals.

**MF:** To start out Kathy, we're just going to ask you a few basic facts about, you know, where you were born, your parents, family, siblings...

**KF:** Okay, well, I was born in Coatesville, Pennsylvania in the hospital there, but I grew up in a small—it's a very small place called Loag's Corner. It's the intersection of 82 and Route 10. And—no, not Route 10. 82 and whatever. But anyway, we were an Irish family that did farming, and we had our own business, and so—I lived with—I lived with my grandparents. My mom wasn't around a lot when I was young. But, you know, pretty much at that time, it was sort of an idyllic life. I, you know—we had ground, and we had an acre garden, and, you know, fruit trees, and, you know, all this equipment we played on, and we had mounds of sand and dirt and, you know, so, my co—I didn't have any siblings. It was myself and three cousins. We lived, you know, my grandparents' house was here and their house was there.

**MF:** Like a compound, huh?

**KF:** Yeah, yeah. It was a—actually it had been a blacksmith's home. It was built in the early 1800s or late 1700s even, maybe, I forget. But the kitchen was like—the hole in the wall was a hearth, and you know, in the wintertime it would get—snow would be over our heads, and the electric would be out, and we'd use that and bring snow in and, you know, melt it for water and all that kind of stuff. So, that part of my life was pretty idyllic.

**MF:** You mentioned your mother wasn't around a lot. Where was she?

**KF:** She—well, my—that generation—my gra—my mother, my aunt, and my two uncles, they were pretty much drunks. [chuckles] And, so I spent a lot of time in bars when I was a kid. Probably more time as a kid than I did it as an adult. But—so they were, you know, they were always out drinking somewhere.

**MF:** But when they came home, that was her home as well? Your mother's?

**KF:** Yeah. Mmhmm... yeah. I remember as a kid, like, going up to her bedroom and just like opening her eyes. [chuckles] She must have really hated that, but I did it. You know, I just wanted to—to be around her.

**MF:** Mmhmm.

**KF:** My—my father—well, he's not my father. George Fillman was—my mother was kind of made to marry him, you know, cause it was, you know, the 40s... late 40s, early 50s, and, you know, my mother divorced George. He was in Korea. He came back from Korea, because they had to amputate his leg. He had cancer, and the cancer had spread. So—but my mom had divorced him before that, so my mom was, you know, a divorcee in the 50s, which was, you know, when I went to Catholic school, that was like, oh man. [chuckles] And they—in Catholic school, I mean we—my cousins and I—and there was a couple other kids in the neighborhood that rode—you know, went to Catholic school, and they didn't like us much there. You know, most of the... the people that went there were, you know, the kids were—their fathers or mothers were doctors and lawyers and, you know, all this kind of stuff. And so they didn't—they felt they could treat us any way we wanted, you know. They certainly weren't going to pick on the rich kids. So, if they'd get frustrated, they'd take it out on us. Whatever was handy... a book. You know, I—in my story, I referred to them as middle-aged mutant ninja nuns. [chuckles] So...

**MF:** So you didn't have any protectors?

**KF:** No. Not there.

**MF:** And what—so it was farming that supported your family?

**KF:** Well, it was the—my grandfather had started out as a farmer, and he had—he got rheumatoid arthritis at a very early age, and so, I think, you know, when the kids got older, they helped. But, they couldn't, you know, they couldn't keep it, so that's—I think that's when they bought the blacksmith's place. And, we had an acre of farm there, and we rented ground for a while and planted tomatoes and beans and stuff like that and then sold them to Hunt's. And then we'd get these big cans of, you know, vegetables and things like that from them. And we'd can, you know, everything. Which—that was pretty cool.

**MF:** Yeah.

**KF:** So my grand-

**MF:** Do you still can?

**KF:** I haven't. I can, but I haven't in a while. I haven't—I haven't had any garden for the past few years. I've had a lot of medical issues going on, so... but I'm pretty healthy now so...

**MF:** Good.

**KF:** This is my last week in PT.

**MF:** Good.

**KF:** So, I'll be able to do a garden this year.

**MF:** So, you were in Catholic school until what age?

**KF:** I went to seventh grade. So, I guess about 12 or so. And then—you know, it was like hell on earth there.

**MF:** What made you make the switch?

**KF:** I—well, there were two things. I would—my mother had married... Clarence Snyder, and he was a—a—a sergeant in the army. And so, they traveled, and again, I stayed with my grandparents. And, so at—I would visit them in the summers, wherever, you know, wherever they were. And so, they were in West Virginia when I—when I left, you know, I went down for the summer. And, you know, not realizing that they were always on their best behavior when I was around. It was though—I really didn't want to go back to Catholic school, and I really wanted to have parents, because I had never had parents, you know. I love my grandparents to death, but it was, you know, it wasn't the same as having—you know, everybody else had parents. So, I asked them if I could live with them, and they said yeah. You know, so I did, and again, that was hell, 'cause they were... they were both drunks. My—he was a raging alcoholic and very abusive. So, that was, you know, until I was 18, that was pretty traumatic being around that all the time.

**MF:** You ever feel you could go back to your grandparents?

**KF:** No, 'cause they had—by that time they had sold the place, and they were, you know, living in a trailer. You know, they retired and... so, no, I didn't feel like I could go back there. And you know, at that time, we—they didn't talk about abuse. And, you know, they always, you know, if you call the police or something—at that time, it was only the state police, so it would be, you know, hours before they got there. And then they would just say, well, you know, he's having a bad day, try to... [chuckles] you know. But, yeah, I mean, we'd have knockdown, drag out fights. And he would, you know, pick on my mom, and then... then I would get mad, and [chuckles] so that went on the whole time I was in high school. And as soon as I was 18, I—I left.

**MF:** And what about your identity? And your sexuality?

**KF:** Well, I think

**MF:** How did that come...?

**KF:** Well, I knew...

[mic falls off of Kathy's shirt]

**KF:** Oops, sorry. I knew it about age five that I was different. [laughs] But I didn't know what that meant. And I remember, in Catholic school, somebody called somebody queer, and I didn't know what that meant. And I asked my grandmother, and she said that's when men and women do bad things. So, I still had no clue what queer was, but I wasn't allowed to use that word. [chuckles] So... yeah, I mean, as a kid, you know, growing up and watching TV in the 50s, you know, it was all Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, and, you know, all the guys that, you know, and... but all my—I wanted to be like, you know, suave and debonair, I didn't want to be the women. I always had crushes on them, [chuckles] so... and—and my cousins and I would actually, like, we would watch a war movie or something and we go and act it out. If we watched a good movie, we'd go...

**MF:** Play soldiers.

**KF:** Play soldiers, or, you know, act out whatever movie we had watched. That was kind of, you know, that was fun.

**MF:** So, you're age five, you know you're different. At what point did it become more clear to you?

**KF:** When I was in high school. You know, all my crushes were on women there. And there was one particular women—woman, we had—we would write notes back and forth. But I had no—no inkling that she was gay. And then I found out later that one of my friends that I, you know, in high school that I hung out with, that I knew was gay. They had had an affair, and the woman's parents found out about it and really ostracized her. And I guess everybody in school knew it. I didn't know it. You know, so I was friends with her. So then, people started calling me queer, and I was like, you know, “What—what did I do to—that you would, you know think that?” But that's 'cause I hung out with, you know... this woman.

**MF:** Mmhmm.

**KF:** [chuckles]

**MF:** So in terms of your family's awareness? Is that...

**KF:** I came out to them when I was 21. And the first thing out of my mother's mouth was, “What did I do wrong?” And I was like, “Well, I can think of several things. [chuckles] But, nothing having to do with me being gay.” So, yeah, when I was 21, I came out.

**MF:** And, you—were you still living with her at that time?

**KF:** Oh, no, no. I had left when I was 18.

**MF:** Oh, that's right, you did say that.

**KF:** Yeah.

**MF:** Sorry.

**KF:** So, yeah. I mean it—it—it really wasn't a big deal. Other than my mother saying, you know, "Oh my god, what did I do wrong?" But, you know, my aunt and uncle who helped raise me, they—they embraced me and, you know, even though it was against the religion, you know, grew up Catholic. And... and my mother, you know, she—she accepted it. And, my mother stopped drinking when she was like 50. Stopped smoking, everything cold turkey. And, you know, we had a great relationship after that.

**MF:** Wonderful.

**KF:** And she actually moved up here so we could be closer. And... so, she died in 2009. But she would come over, we would do, like, the New York Times crossword puzzles together and, you know, just—she would hang out here. And, she got—well, she had cancer like four times in her life and beat it every time. But this last time, she had lung cancer, and she couldn't beat it. But she—she stayed with us. We—we were, you know, her caretakers, and it was cool. We had—the women's chorus came in and sang to her. And J. D. Womak, who's a friend of mine—she came in and played some countries songs that, you know, my mother loved. And, it was just—it was just great, you know, having her here, so...

**MF:** Well, that's wonderful. It's great you could be there for her.

**KF:** Well, on the other side—I mean my mother's unc—my mother's brother, my uncle and his wife... were really... nasty about it. You know, they taught me that water was thicker than blood a long time ago. And, even though, I mean, we—we had our own baseball team, softball team, and there was, you know, more than a half of it were—were family members, you know, cousins and stuff like that. And then we had a couple other people that wanted to be on our team, and they were gay. And my aunt just harassed them until... 'til they didn't want to play anymore.

**MF:** Aww.

**KF:** And so, you know, it's still to this day I don't really—you know, I'm polite to them, but I have no desire to be around them or...

**MF:** And are they nearby?

**KF:** They live—well, they live in Elverson [Pennsylvania]. They also have a house in Florida, and they have one up in the mountains so...

**MF:** So, you left home at 18. What was your career path at that point?

**KF:** Well, I had been—I had got a job at Pepperidge Farms, and I was working there on the midnight shift. And I took a year off and worked at Pepperidge Farm, and then I went to College of—in Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. And I was going to be a gym teacher. I got in about two and a half years, and then my mom got sick again with cancer, and she had—they had taken her lymph glands out, down here [points to lower waist], and while she was in the hospital, the hemovex, you know, that was supposed to pump things weren't working right, so she got an infection. And so, my next stepfather was too... too cheap to have a nurse come in, you know, and—'cause she had to have the wounds debrided every day and repacked and stuff like that. And then—like three times a day—so I quit school, and I took care of her. And I went to Pepperidge at night and... she got better, but the money was good, and I didn't go back to school. So, I worked at Pepperidge for a few—quite a few years. For a few years. Went to school and then worked at Pepperidge while I was doing that, but knew that, you know, that—that wasn't for me. So, I had various and sundry odd jobs along the way. But, I got these books on massage and then that really interested me. So, I started reading, and then I would practice on my friends, and they were—they were real good sports to let me do that. [chuckles] And so I did that for a while, you know, while I was working, you know, other jobs. And there weren't any massage schools to go to at that time, that, you know, I knew of. Not in this country, anyway. And I—I had—I had worked for the... Hess organization, the—the gas stations. And I was an assistant manager. And then the woman that had hired me, she left, and she went to Atlantic Refining and Marketing Corporation, and she called me about being a manager, so I did that for probably ten years or so. I was a general manager. I had stores in—down the Main Line... and up in Ephrata [Pennsylvania] and Lancaster [Pennsylvania] and places like that.

**MF:** Wow. And how was your work relationships in terms of your sexual identity? Were they cool with it or was—were there issues?

**KF:** Yeah. I mean I didn't really, you know, I didn't really... talk about it with, with—the woman that hired me to begin with was gay, and... and, I don't know, I always—I tried to hire gay women, because I knew that they were competent. [chuckles] You know, and I had—and I had, twice in my... my history there I had two perfect audits, where everything was in place, and I don't think that's ever been done. But just, you know, hiring competent women in sensible shoes as Robin Williams said. [laughs]

**MF:** [laughs] Okay, well sounds like smooth sailing, in a way.

**KF:** Oh yeah, and you know, it was my hippy dippy days, so you know, we partied a lot. I tried a lot of different things. But there was nothing—you know, the only thing I really liked was smoking pot, and I never really liked anything else. And after that in 1990, you know, I worked, pretty much the 80s—late 70s, 80s, I worked for Atlantic Refining and Marketing Corporation, and I left there... I just—I just couldn't take it there anymore, 'cause it was like an 'ol—good 'ol boys network there. And I knew as a general manager, I had pretty much gotten as far as I was gonna get in the company, and they had no problem, like, ripping off your ideas and, you know, taking credit for it... stuff like that, so I just—I gave her my two weeks' notice. I had no idea what I was going to do. And a friend of mine had a horse farm, and, you know, I grew up with

animals and horses and riding and stuff like that, so he said, you know, come and work for me until you figure out what you want to do. So I did, and then that was back-breaking work from like 5:00 a.m. until, you know, 6:00 at night, and all kinds of stuff. You know, hauling and cleaning and grooming and...

**MF:** Mucking out those stalls.

**KF:** Mucking, yeah. And so I started looking in the paper, and I saw this—this job for John Barnes Myofascial Release. And I, you know, I'm thinking it has to do with the face and, you know, they were looking for an aid and I was like, well you know, I could do that. Cause I had, you know, I was making pretty good money working for Atlantic and Refining Corporation, and then it was like downhill from there, you know. But anyway, I took—I went—I had scheduled an interview, and I was working at the barn. And the person that was supposed to relieve me never showed up, so I had—you know, I couldn't leave. So the next time, you know, I rescheduled the interview, I told them what had happened. They were very gracious about it. So, the next time I scheduled the interview, the person that was supposed to relieve me was late, so I didn't get to go home and, you know, change, take a shower. I went right to the interview in my horse clothes smelling like, you know, whatever, horses and dung and all kinds of things. But I got the job and, you know, having no idea what it was, but it was John Barnes who was a pretty much a world famous PT. He started myofascial release. And so I got to work there. I got to be his aid, and he... when you first started to work there, you have to take the first class, so you know what you're talking about when you're talking to people and for me this was like, this is, you know, this is what I've been looking for. This is the missing piece in massage. So, I, you know, I started—I took all his courses. And I got to be—help teach, you know, the courses and stuff like that. Not teaching but, you know, his—help out with the courses.

**MF:** Teaching his own staff?

**KF:** Yeah, teaching—well, no not the staff. But teaching... he's taught, I don't know, thousands and thousands of PTs, and once he saw how well I had adapted and, you know, as a massage therapist, he started teaching—opening it up to more people; massage therapists and anybody that has a license to touch. Dentists and doctors if they're willing, nurses, you know, all kinds of people. And it's just, you know, it's just so amazing being—working on the connective tissue and putting a person's body back in space when they've been—you know, the way it should be, when they've been told that, you know, there's nothing you can do, it's all in your head. You know, we've given you pills, we've tried everything, you know, we did surgery and nothing works, so it's all in your head [chuckles]. You know, we've done everything we can. And so it's just amazing to see people, you know, go from being bent over like this [bends down towards table] to, you know, being like this. [sits upright] So, that's what I did.

**MF:** At this point, where were you geographically?

**KF:** His office was in Paoli [Pennsylvania], but I was living in Reading [Pennsylvania] at the time. I had a house in Reading [Pennsylvania], and so I was commuting quite a bit. But I loved the work, so... but in 1995, I was like, you know, that's—it's time. And so I'm—I met Kathy

and came up here, because this was a good area. You know, he doesn't—didn't have anybody up here doing anything and so...

**MF:** So you had your own practice? Or you worked with someone else?

**KF:** Yeah, I had my own practice.

**MF:** But you're retired now?

**KF:** Yeah, and retirement disability. I have rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes, and I just had... Well, this year—last—2012, I had knee replacement surgery, and this year I had, in April I had crushed my big toe and shattered the bone. And then I had a hernia surgery, and now I'm just done with—I had reconstructive surgery on my ankle. So, this will be my last week of PT, so...

**MF:** And are they doing it right?

**KF:** They are.

**MF:** Good.

**KF:** Or I am.

**MF:** Is there anything that you can actually do for yourself?

**KF:** Oh yeah, I work for myself all the time.

**MF:** Good.

**KF:** So... and Jane is very much into essential oils, and so she's been teaching me about those, and I've been using those and the sheer—the thieves that you've smelled when you came in. That's a really good antiseptic. You can clean with it, and it's really good for your lungs, so I had put some on my hands and, you know, you inhale in and exhale it out, and everybody's been sick around me, and I haven't been sick at all this year, so I'm a happy girl.

**MF:** Good. So, have you been an activist in any way along the way?

**KF:** Well, yeah. In my earlier days, we did a lot of protesting, and it was—it was scary during those days. I remember there was a bar in—a gay bar—the first and only gay bar in the area, I think it was in Pottstown [Pennsylvania]. And, you know, you had to—they had kept the door locked, and you had to knock to get in and, you know, you had to say who you were and just—it was crazy. And one night we were there, and it had been snowing really bad while we were in there, and somebody came and busted out the windshield of one of my friends' cars. And you could see the footprints. You know, I wanted to call the police and follow the footprints, and nobody would do it, 'cause it was a gay bar and you know, they didn't want to get in trouble and, you know, so it was... I mean we went there but, you know, it was scary. You never—you never knew.

**MF:** When did that sense of fear start to taper off for you and your friends?

**KF:** Well, I don't know that we—it was scary, but I don't know that we were ever fearful. We—I mean I have friends, you know, that I've known for 30 years, and, you know, we sort of, you know, grew up together from our 20s and 30s on, and I don't remember any of us ever being really fearful. We always stood up. Even when we harassed, you know, we always stood up for ourselves.

**MF:** So, you had a good support system?

**KF:** Yeah, we did.

**MF:** And that helped?

**KF:** That helped a lot. You know, we did a lot of stuff in Philadelphia, you know, in the beginning. Protests and marching and parades and, you know, all that kind of stuff. When I came up here, I mean, you know, I met a lot of people. It was really, really good community. I did a lot of work with the men's chorus and the women's chorus. I did a lot of stage managing, you know, for them, and I stage managed a couple times at the Whittaker Center. But, you know, I'm kind of... kind of retired now and taking it easy. You know, I still... I still go to Pride and that kind of stuff. I haven't marched in any of the parades. I've been a, you know, a looker. [chuckles]

**MF:** It's your festival.

**KF:** That's right.

**MF:** You can enjoy it.

**KF:** Right.

**MF:** So, you have some hobbies. And you have other things that occupy your time now?

**KF:** Yeah, I mean, you know, the last few years it's been a lot of medical issues, so I have—I'll have my gardening, and I'm hoping this year to—I belong to an organization called Soul Support Systems. It's a non-profit organization that—it's having nothing to do with any real—particular religion. It's just a spiritual people. And we—we do—we just bought 95 acres in North Carolina, and we're going to put a retreat center there, so it's pretty incredible. So, that's going to be my hobby this year... is working on the land.

**MF:** Are you going to move?

**KF:** Maybe, eventually we'll move down there. I don't know. That's the plan. They're planning on putting, you know, housing and stuff in.

**MF:** And locally, do they meet in a building here or...?

**KF:** Well, we've done—we've done stuff here that—the founder is actually in Vermont, but we usually—I mean we travel all over the world, all over the country. I've been to England, Ireland, Scotland, France... you know, traveling with Soul Support, and it's really teaching people that we all are connected, you know, and we can connect very easily on a heart level and sort of reintroducing you to your soul, you know, and we have different modalities for that. But one of the—my favorite is called soul recognition, and it's a—it's a way... to have a safe place to let go of anything you don't need to hold onto anymore, and you don't—you know, whatever's stopping you from going forward in your life. You know, whether it's, you know, victimhood. And in all my time as a kid and all the tough times that I had, you know, I never—I never felt like a victim. You know, it didn't—it never—you know, until you—I guess when, you know, when you get older and you start listening to, you know, what psychiatry and everybody has to say, and at that time, you know, everything was blamed on the parents. But at some point, you know, you have to take responsibility for yourself and, you know, and I guess I've always had that response—you know, had that responsibility, because a lot of times it was, you know, okay who's the mother here? You know, is this the mother or am I the mother? Because there was a lot of times when—when I took care of my mother. So, I've always, you know, been that—sort of had that responsibility. I never... you know, I never blamed my mother. I knew that she was doing the best that they could, you know, at the time. So with soul recognition—and we've been doing it lately in warm water pools, where you have the degrees... this probably has nothing to do with any of this, but anyway... We use a 96—94 to 96 degree water and bring you into the water. And there's always at least four facilitators with you; people that have been trained in this work. And I've been doing this work now since 2001, and it's—I always think of it as a chance to rebirth yourself, you know. And it's—it's doing whatever you need to do, whether it's yelling, screaming, cursing, crying, you know, whatever you need to do to get rid of all that anger that, you know, we've always been told to stuff, you know... you're not good enough, you're not pretty enough, you're not this, you're not that, you're not athletic enough, you know, whatever it is, and we—we take that in as kids and we stuff it, and we stuff it, and as adults, you know, we're stuffed up to here and, you know, you get... like, I don't—you know, you just want to—you're just angry all the time, or you don't even know—or you, you know, you think you're a victim. And victimology, you know, when you're a victim, your brain releases chemicals that feel good when people go like, "Aww," you know, "Aww, I'm so sorry for you, you know, that you went through all that," and so it feels good, you know, to be a victim, but it's—it's, in the long run, you know, you need to take responsibility and get rid of all this crap. And so this allows you to do that in whatever way, and we do it with you. You know?

**MF:** [inaudible]

**KF:** If you need somebody to struggle with, we'll struggle with you, you know. And it's just amazing at the end to—you know, we take pictures of what you look like, you know, before you start, and then we take a picture when you're done, and it's just to see the change in people. You know the radiance that, you know, they... sometimes it's like, "Oh gosh, you look ten years younger." [chuckles]

**MF:** So, you had a very interesting career path, and you're still pursuing different things. It's very exciting.

**KF:** Oh, yeah. You know, you're never done learning [chuckles].

**MF:** That's right. Lifelong learning.

**KF:** Yeah.

**MF:** And it's interesting that you're helping people with this work, yet you yourself didn't feel that you had baggage to cast out.

**KF:** Well, you always have baggage. I mean I, you know, when I had my—

**MF:** But you had—but you worked your way through it as you went.

**KF:** Yeah.

**MF:** It sounds like.

**KF:** Yeah.

**MF:** Did you go through the process, yourself?

**KF:** Oh, yeah.

**MF:** Okay.

**KF:** And, you know I've done soul recognition several times and each time is different. Sometimes—sometimes they can seem really violent. It's almost like, you know, people think they're—you know, what is that, when the head turns?

**MF:** Exorcism?

**KF:** Yeah, exorcism. You know, and it's not. It's just really letting you let go. You—helping you. You know, we're not doing it for you, but we'll help you do, you know, whatever you need to do. And, you know, some people just lay there, and it's like, okay.

**MF:** And are there elements of Wiccan...?

**KF:** No, uh-uh, that's got nothing to do with it. I mean, if you're a Wiccan, it doesn't matter.

**MF:** So, just...

**KF:** But it's, yeah...

**MF:** All different—people from all different backgrounds.

**KF:** Yeah, yeah. It doesn't matter what your religion is. Or what your BS, your belief system, is. Bullshit. [chuckles]

**MF:** That's good.

**KF:** You know, really—really all you need to know is, you know, we're all—we'll all connected, we're all, you know—it's one race. It's the human race. You know, it doesn't—you know, we all came from the same place, whether you belie—you know God, or—or whatever you believe in. You know, God is God, it doesn't matter whose God it is [chuckles].

**MF:** All right.

**KF:** Or if you even believe in God.

**MF:** So, what is the biggest change you've seen in your history regarding LGBT issues?

**KF:** Well... well, I mean everything is out in the open now. Before, everything was so hidden, you know, you didn't let strangers know that you were gay, and you didn't, you know—you went to a gay bar looking over your shoulder. You know, you—somebody found out you were gay, they could harass you, they could fire you; I mean they still can, but it's—you know, people are just, I think, becoming more conscious. At least everybody, but the GOP. [laughs]

**MF:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about in your journey?

**KF:** Well, I can, you know, like when you were saying what changes. I mean, young people coming up and coming out at an early age and saying this is who I am and you know, standing up for themselves, being brave. You know, I just—I think that's just a wonderful thing and... just, you know, it's a wonderful community up here of people, and there's always somebody if you need help. You know, there's always somebody you can call to help, and that's one of the things I love about this area. And just, you know, people in general being more conscious and aware that, you know, it's—you know, like they say in the Bible, there's two... two... two things in the Bible—it says, you know, talking about homosexuality and what you should do, and there's like seven or eight things about homosexuals, [chuckles] that they should be aware of. People are being, you know, they're stopping—stopping taking the Bible literally [laughs]. And picking and choosing, you know, what to use. Not everybody, but, you know, it's a lot more open for people and with Unity [Church] and places like the UU [Unitarian Universalist] Church that accept. And even, other religions. I'm not a religious person at all, but I do—I do love my spirituality. And if, you know, people want to—I mean, it just seems like organized religion, to me, has really done more harm than good. And having been raised Catholic in the 50s, 60s, I can attest to that.

**BM:** What do you think of the current Pope?

**KF:** I love him. I just—you know, he's—he's what a Pope should be. You know, he's giving back to the poor. They're not just talking about it. And, you know, speaking his mind and just telling people, you know, get over yourselves. [chuckles]

**BM:** I guess I was wondering... you were saying how positive you think the changes have been.

**KF:** Mmhmm.

**BM:** Has that been a surprise to you? That—some of those things?

**KF:** No. I mean, I was—I was very surprised when Pennsylvania said yeah, you know, gay marriage is fine. I mean, that was a surprise. We thought we, you know, would be waiting a few more years for that, so that was cool. But that was—I mean it's—it's been a gradual change and as- you know, as my generation has gotten older, you know, we've—we've gotten more outspoken than we were. You know, baby boomers, and so it—it's, you know, each—each generation, it's gotten easier because of what the generation before them did.

**BM:** Mmhmm.

**KF:** So, you know, I think it's gradual. I would say the only real surprise was the gay marriage in Pennsylvania.

**MF:** Are you finding anything for yourself now as an older person that you need? Or that you didn't expect or... you know, supports or services or things that are out there that you're finding you can get or can't get, or is there anything...?

**KF:** I don't—I don't think there's anything out there that I couldn't get if I needed it. I think, you know, this area is pretty, pretty well covered with, you know, whatever... whatever you need. You know, I know there's, there's a few lawyers around here that do elder law and, you know, LGBT, you know, rights and... you know, friends of ours just got their wills made out, so we were talking about, you know, having that done. And having gone through with my aunt and uncle and, you know, being power of attorney and being, you know, their advocate. It's—that part is interesting, because it's teaching me a lot about, you know, your needs as you get older. Right now, there's not—there's not too much I need. I just, you know, I just want to be healthy and get out there and get the garden done and, you know, get the house taken care of and things that I haven't been able to do.

**BM:** How about with the medical community? Because you talked about all the health care and the issues that you had, what have you found in terms of acceptance in the medi—or have you come across anything?

**KF:** No, I really haven't. Everybody's been—you know, it's Pinnacle Health system that I've been using and, you know, we're very frank with our doctors, and, you know, I've never felt like, you know, I've been slighted or, you know, that somebody had a problem with me or...

**BM:** Okay.

**KF:** So, you know, I guess I've been lucky. But it's also, too, you know, I think how you present yourself as well.

**BM:** So, I guess I'll go one step further with that. So, how do you feel like you present yourself that you maybe don't have—haven't come across some of that—some difficulties that other people have about...?

**KF:** Well, I don't know. I think I'm pretty easy to talk to. I'm a good listener. And, you know, people talk to me. You know, nurses will come in that I don't even know and talk to me or, you know, people in the grocery store will just start a conversation, and, you know, I think it's maybe not how you present yourself, but the—the sort of energy that you're putting out there. So, if you're putting out positive energy, you know, and it's not fearful and, you know, you're not pulling in, because you're afraid of what's going to happen—I think if you just open up and let that—let them feel your positive energy... and I think, you know, I think we all can do that. It's one of the big things we teach, you know, in Soul Support is how to feel your energy and how to feel other people's energy and, you know, have it interact with...

**MF:** Following up on what Barb was saying, what about you and your partner. Have you found any legal hurdles? Like if you needed her to be available to you during your health crises, has there been any issues like that?

**KF:** No, absolutely none, and again...

**MF:** Now are you—do you have legal paperwork? Like is she your...?

**KF:** No. We haven't—we haven't... well, not yet. When we go get the wills done, we'll do all that. But there's never been any problem about, you know, her coming in or... I mean the only reason that we haven't gotten married is because of... she's on disability; she was a teacher and had a brain injury and couldn't teach anymore and, you know, with my health issues, it's—financially, we're better doing it this way than if—if we combined everything, so...

**MF:** I just wondered, like, there's the HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act], the healthcare privacy act, you know, so if she would call the hospital if you were in the hospital.

**KF:** Well, she's on all that paper work, so everything like that has her name on it.

**MF:** You put her name on it.

**KF:** Yeah.

**MF:** What changes remain to happen? Is there anything you would like to see happen yet?

**KF:** Well, I mean, I'd like the whole world to just, you know, take a breath and say, you know, we're all humans. It doesn't matter, you know, whether you're gay or straight, or, you know, bi or transgender, you know, I just—I would like the whole world to see—just be who you are. And then—I mean that—that's the biggest thing, I guess just... you know, I'd like to see some changes with, you know, in like every state to offer marriage to people, you know, if they want

to be married. You know, and I'm sorry if our—you know, if our wanting to be married, you know, messes up straight people's, you know, four—four marriages or something, you know. [chuckles]

**MF:** And I—one thing you men- that came up that you didn't experience is that there is still that issue of employers, and making sure that they can't fire someone arbitrarily for their sexual orientation.

**KF:** Yeah. That and, you know, housing, and they can still throw you out so, yes, I'd like to see that addressed, and I hope Governor Wolfe, you know, will... he seems like a pretty good guy so far, so I hope he...

**MF:** Yeah, I'm encouraged.

**KF:** Mmhmm.

**MF:** I liked his choice for Surgeon General, is that the right title?

**KF:** Mmhmm.

**MF:** Alright, if there's not anything else, I want to thank you for sharing your story Kathy, and if you think of anything later, you can let us know.

**KF:** Okay. I hope you got something you can use there. [chuckles]