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Interviewee: Arlene Ackerman and Jacquie Bogle Ackerman
Interviewer: Mary Merriman
Date of Interview: August 17, 2014
Location of Interview: Ackerman home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania
Transcriber: Sara Tyberg
Finalizer: Mary Libertin

Abstract
Arlene Ackerman was born in San Francisco, California, then adopted and raised in Lodi, California. Jacquie Bogle Ackerman was born and raised in northern Minnesota. Arlene became licensed as clergy with the Metropolitan Community Church in 1977, and Jacquie has supported Arlene by traveling with her when needed, performing odd jobs such as office work and driving buses in order to help financially. In this interview, the couple discusses their long journey in adopting a child as a lesbian couple while living in Minnesota together. They faced discrimination from their adoption agency, but after approximately nine months, they were finally able to adopt a baby girl named Amanda, and shortly after, moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Arlene and Jacquie explain the challenges of gaining parental rights for both of them and with raising Amanda as an adopted, biracial child of two LGBT parents. Despite that they became married for primarily legal reasons, the couple also discusses the emotional significance of their recent state-recognized marriage in June of 2014. Lastly, Arlene and Jacquie reflect on the gay rights movement and agree that they never thought that gay marriage would have been possible in their lifetimes, but they are grateful to see it happening today.

MM: And this is the Central Pennsylvania Lesbian Gay History Project, and the project is recording information about life in Central Pennsylvania over the history of LGBT people in the community. My name is Mary Merriman. And I am interviewing on the right, Reverend Arlene Ackerman and on the left, Jacquie Ackerman. The interview date is [laughs] sorry, August 17th. We are at their home, and again, we got permission to do the interview, and… [keys jangle] then you do have the right to decide how the interview is used and preserved at any point, okay?

AA: 'Kay.

MM: All right, so let's get started. Arlene, if we can start with you—just name, date of birth, parent… siblings, that kinda—just basic information, as much as you understand.

AA: My name is Arlene Ackerman. I was born in San Francisco [California], raised in Central California, and in pastoring, I've lived in numerous places with Metropolitan Community Church and for the last—[turns to Jackie] how long?

JA: 23 years—22 years.

AA: [turns to camera] 22 years, we've lived here in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

MM: Okay, and can you tell us a little—your date of birth…?

AA: February 22nd, '49.

MM: And how about a little about your parents, siblings…?

AA: I have one sister who lives in Sacramento, California. My parents are both deceased. Both of German descent, and they were both first generation folks in this country.

MM: And what country did they come from, or were they German also?

AA: My parents were German of German decent. My mother was of German decent, but born in Russia.

MM: Okay. And—

AA: I should say, and, I'm adopted. [nods]

MM: Thank you, and how—when were you adopted?

AA: I was adopted at the age of three months in San Francisco [California], and then raised in Lodi, California.

MM: Okay, alright. And Jacquie? Just your name, date of birth…?

JA: Jacquie Bogle Ackerman. I was born August of '49 in northern Minnesota. My parents are European decent.

MM: And what kind of work did your parents do?

JA: My father was a—worked in the mines—in the iron mines of northern Minnesota and did whatever work he could on the side. He hung wallpaper, did what he had to do to earn an income. My mother was a teacher, but didn't get her degree until I was 13, but she started teaching when she was 19 or 20, at that time all she had to do was go through one or two years of teacher's training in northern Minnesota, and she was the only one of her eight siblings that went to high school, even. And she had to go in this—around this small town and have a petition signed for them to pay for her school teacher in order to pay for her first job.

[Arlene nods]

JA: They both are gone—my dad died in 1960 and my mother in 1991.

MM: Okay. And siblings?

JA: I had three brothers—two brothers and a sister. Both my brothers are now gone. My sister lives in California in San Diego.

MM: I gonna continue with you, Jacquie, and just get through some of the history piece and pick up with Arlene, because I think back and forth is probably a little hard. How far did you go through school?

JA: I have a bachelor's degree and I took some graduate courses.

[dog barks and growls]

MM: Okay.

JA: And that's Ricky.

MM: And that's Ricky. We are accompanied by two dogs. [laughs] How about religious background?

JA: I was raised in the—initially, we went to the Baptist church, and then after my dad and my brother died, we went to the Presbyterian Church, just my mom and I. And then when I got into college, I didn't go to any church. I kind of explored different religions—all Christian, and then found MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] late '70s, and I've been involved in MCC ever since.

MM: Okay, and again, clarifying: MCC is Metropolitan Community Church?

JA: Right.

MM: Why the switch to MCC? What made the connection?

JA: Well, because MCC—by that time, I had come out, and figured out that I was a lesbian, and many of the other churches were not accepting of—of me because of that, and MCC was fairly new at that time. Its outreach is to the gay and lesbian community. It felt like a place I could actually feel comfortable and be myself.

MM: Okay. And—and how about coming out? How did that—did you—were you out in your family?

JA: That was—no, I came out in college, and that was just a process. It was actually—my ah-ha moment was when my roommate, with whom I was never romantically or intimately involved, informed me kinda in the middle of the night that she and some others in the dorm thought that I was going down the [makes air quotes] "wrong" path, and [laughs] when I asked her what that meant, and she explained, I said—internally, I thought, "Oh, that's what I am!" [laughs] "Yay!" I had a label. So, and it was a liberating moment at that time, because I hadn't had a lot of homophobic stuff growing up. That wasn't something I had experienced, so [nods].

MM: Okay. Occupation? What do you do?

JA: I do whatever I have to, to make a living.

[MM and JA laugh]

JA: Since I've been with Arlene, she's been a pastor since we've been together 34 years, now, so I go where her career takes her, and so, I've driven transit buses. I've done a lot of accounting and office work. Right now, I drive a school bus, and I'm semi-retired from most of the other things—and I knit a little bit [gestures toward knitting supplies] on the side.

MM: Okay, okay. Arlene, I'm gonna flip back some questions, get through the rest of the history piece with you, and you had talked a little bit about being adopted at three months old. In terms of your family of origin, can you talk a little bit about the experience of growing up—at three months, you're not quite aware of changes—or are you?

AA: I was pretty clear in about—it was kindergarten or first grade… the story goes that, in class one day, the teacher asked, "Who in your family do you look like?" And I thought about it, and everyone else seemed to know who they looked like in their family, and I… it was very clear that the only one who I looked like in my family was the parakeet. And I said that, because I have a crooked nose—it's better now—back then it was very crooked, and our parakeet's nose was very crooked, and of course, it made everyone giggle as it is some people in this room. And—but it also raised a big question for this little kid, so I went home, and said, "Mom, why is it that I don't look like anybody in my family?" And my mom explained, well, she said, "You know. We've always told you that you're adopted." That was the very first time that I remember hearing it those words. And so that, that really put me in kind of a whirlwind. I wish my parents would've talked more about it… both before I asked and then after I asked. After I made that one inquiry, it was hard to get my parents to talk about it. If you go back in time, this was the 60s—or the 50s, and you didn't—and especially in German community, you don't talk about feelings much, you don't… you just don't share a lot about family, history, what you went through… it wasn't until many years later I was able to get my mom to talk much more openly about the situation.

MM: Okay. And were you able to talk with siblings about that at all or?

AA: Well—well, my one sister, who was also adopted—we're not blood sisters at all. I went to my sister who's four years older… she simply had no interest at all in being adopted, and, therefore, she had no interest in talking to me about it. So, it really felt like I was shut off, and I desperately as a kid wanted to know. I had a lot of questions about who I was and where I came from, and it wasn't until I was probably 18 or 19 when she finally revealed what papers she had and apologized for not having had shared it before, so.

MM: How about just education? What's your background?

AA: My background's very eclectic. I've gone to six colleges and universities. I have one certification from the University of Pacific, but I never seem to stay long enough in one city to finish up which I regret, but that's the way it was.

JA: I keep telling you I'll give you my degree.

[everyone laughs]

AA: Right, right. Exactly. Now I was licensed as clergy in '77, and—with Metropolitan Community Church and have continued in ordained ministry to this day.

MM: Okay. And that was my next question, was looking at that religious piece. What domination or background did you grow up or how did that evolve? Or what did that evolve into?

AA: My parents, like I said, being of good German decent, came through the United Church of Christ, which was a little bit unusual in that part of California. I actually, when I was 18, came out to Pennsylvania, and did a training program for specialized ministries in Pottstown [Pennsylvania] and did some of the work here in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, but when 1974 came along, by that time, I knew I was gay—had known I was gay from the time I was about 13, and… by the early 70s, I was in a relationship, and the major thing that was missing—well, the two major things that were missing was a good church home and—and some answers around my birth parents. So, in 1974, we found Metropolitan Community Church, and I've never left it.

MM: Okay, all right. We're gonna—we're gonna-- kinda—first off, in terms of relationships, that was the other piece in this… family connections… are you still involved with family members, your sister…?

AA: Oh, very much.

MM: Okay, okay.

AA: Yeah, very much. My sister has been present at my first relationship blessing…

JA: She was a witness.

AA: And she was a witness. At our most recent wedding, she couldn't attend, but we were on the phone the day before.

MM: We're gonna start moving toward talking about current family and that will get to one of the topics—one of the primary talking topics…

AA: [whispers to JA] I need water.

JA: [passes water bottle to AA]

MM: …is talking about your relationship with Amanda. Can we just go ahead and hit off for a moment?

[video cuts]

MM: And I'm back again. This is Mary, Mary Merriman, and I'm back again with Arlene Ackerman and Jacquie Bogle Ackerman on the left, and we've been talking about some of their history in growing up and becoming aware of their own sexual identity. We're gonna shift circles and talk about family today, especially who's in the family. There's lots of pictures here, but if you can just talk about who's family today, and there will be a couple of events that we'll be hitting on in particular: marriage and [mumbles].

[camera adjusts]

JA: Well, in 1988, we decide we wanted to adopt.

[camera zooms in on picture of a child]

JA: And we re—we were living in Minneapolis [Minnesota] at the time. Arlene was pastor of the Church there. She did what she's really good at, and she called around to every agency in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area to ask their policy on adopting two lesbians. And—

MM: Excuse me—you were adopting two lesbians?

JA: No.

[MM laughs]

MM: I had to.

[mumbled voice]

JA: Well, their policy on arranging an adoption for lesbian parents… [everyone chuckles] Thanks, Mary. And she found three, I think, out of at least a dozen that she talked to that said, yes, they would work with us, but she would need to adopt and apply as a single parent. So, I forget exactly why we chose the one we did—whether it was closeness, or maybe we even put in three applications, I'm not sure, but only one ended up responding positively to the application. And, so we started the process, I think that was in August of '88 and by October, Arlene had been on television in a very positive expose on—"Positively Minnesotan" is what it was called, and she was one of the first guests that was featured, and that same week we appeared live on a noontime talk show, as a long-term same-sex female couple. That was also very positive. Someone in her adopting class saw us on television, contacted the agency, said, you know, whatever, "Did you know you're working with a lesbian?" And our agency began to put hurdles up, and they put up many hurdles. We got the home study done, and even after that, they put up more hurdles. By December, they

said there might be a possibility of two infants that were available in another state and within four or five days, they had gone to someone else. By January, they had fired our social worker from the agency and reassigned us to another social worker who happened to be her husband. I think that was January or February. And Arlene ended up then—they had also required us to have an addendum to our home study, which stated that, because we were a same-sex couple, there was no guarantee that we would stay together, so we were gonna use the kid as an exhibit of some form to further our cause… [laughs]. There was very strange things, and we could not prevent them from sending the addendum when they sent the home study, and so what we did instead was add a letter—whenever they sent the home study out with the addendum, they had to notify us, so we sent a letter—follow-up letter that spoke to each of the five things—the negative things that were listed in the addendum, and pointed out things like, "Did you look at the national divorce rate right now?" You know, and that being recognized legally by the state does not guarantee that you're gonna stay together long enough to raise a child. Lots of people would go on the radio and on TV—doesn't mean they're holding their children up as examples of whatever their cause is and like that.

AA: We addressed each of the additions.

JA: We addressed each of the things—the bullet points that they had on the addendum, and then the other thing with the new social worker—the work to find an agency that would work with our agency to provide us with the adoptive child stopped basically doing anything. So, Arlene did, again, what Arlene does really well, and she found out what she needed to do to find someone to work with our agency, and she called all over the country, and gave them the case scenario, and said, "Will you work with us?" and found a few agencies that said yes. And, we were about—I was about ready to give up hope in February… finally—and we just kept slogging—it was difficult—it was very much as rollercoaster. In April, finally, we got a call that there was an agency in Georgia that had a baby that was available.

MM: Jacquie, in April of what year?

JA: 1989. And the social worker called us to give us her vitals, and said we were like—he was saying, "Are you interested?" and we were like, "Absolutely, totally." The last vital statistic he gave us was her birth date which happened to be our anniversary date, so we were like, "Yeah, what do we have to do?" She—her name is Amanda. [camera adjusts and zooms in on pictures] She came home 20 days later after she was born. She came home when she was 20 days old. She's from Atlanta [Georgia]. I flew to Atlanta [Georgia] to pick her up. Arlene put the crib together that we had borrowed while I was going to Atlanta [Georgia]. I spent 20 minutes in Atlanta [Georgia] to get her. And, she's been our miracle kid, and she's grown up a little. That's her college graduation picture there. She just graduated in May with a degree in art history with a focus on curatorilogical—

AA: Curatorial.

JA: Curatorial work. She likes to set things up—exhibits and do that sort of work, administrative kind of stuff, and she is just now, in November of last year, she received a respondent to a notice that she had actually been receiving that she thought was a scam, and she had called the number to check, because it was from Atlanta [Georgia]. It turned out to be the adoption reunion agency, [camera pans out again] the city of Atlanta, and her birth mother was looking for her, and they said, "Do you want to talk to her?" and Amanda said absolutely. And that was in November of 2013, the week before Thanksgiving. So she—Amanda, when she talked to the agency, said, "Yes, I would love to talk to my mother," and the agency said, "Okay, you have to fill out this paperwork so that we can make the final connection. She got the paperwork, and there was a handwritten letter from her birth mother… that was supposed to have only non-identifying information in it, but they didn't white out everything. Her mother was a chef and had her own restaurant, and they left part of the restaurant's name, which was her mother's name, in the letter, and they left her mother's partner's name in the letter. So, Amanda and I—she in Baltimore [Maryland], 'cause that's where she was going to college, and I, here—got on our computers the Saturday before Thanksgiving and researched—put in the name, see if we could find the restaurant in Atlanta [Georgia], and see if it was that person, did they have that partner's name, and sure enough very quickly, we found her birth mother. And she, and—she went to bed wondering, "Okay, now I have to fill out this paperwork," and she called me—called us the next morning, and said, "I have the phone number for the restaurant, can't I just call it?" So, she ended up doing that, after much discussion—

AA: She waited until—

JA: She waited until afternoon on Sunday, and…

AA: And after I came home and talked with her.

JA: Yeah, after we all had had a chance to talk about it, because Arlene was adopted. I was not, so I wanted her to be involved in that question that Amanda had about whether she should go ahead and contact her birth mother immediately. So, when she called the restaurant, her birth mother had left about an hour before—their restaurant only serves breakfast and lunch, and it was three or four in the afternoon at that point. The manager of the restaurant said, "I can't call her, 'cause she laundered her cellphone last week and so—[chuckles] "but I'll find her and I will make sure she knows, because she's been excited to hear from you," because the reunion agency had let her know that yes, your birth daughter wants to talk to you. When they finally went to her birth mother's home, she was unconscious and she ended up never regaining consciousness, so Amanda never got to speak to her birth mother… and it was devastating on many different levels, but the wonderful thing is that her birth mother, turns out, is quite an icon in the Atlanta gay and lesbian, punk, skateboarding, rockabilly—all kinds of different, kind of fringe communities—she was—

AA: A character.

JA: —and is very well-known. They—the family flew us to Atlanta for her funeral, and there were over a thousand people that attended. She is—she's an icon and very, very well-loved, so this week, Amanda and her boyfriend are moving to Atlanta, 'cause she's just graduated, and she has opportunities, I think, that are better there than here for her career, and she has a whole group—a whole huge network of people that work in the kind of work that she wants to do. Plus, she has birth grandparents, and both Arlene and my parents are long-gone, so she's never had grandparents, so…

MM: So, a lot of big family to reconnect with, too.

AA: So a whole new family has sort of emerged, but we've also had our own family, which I think is true of most gay and lesbian people is if we don't have birth family that are supportive and nearby, we create family. And I think we set about and created family. We did so in Minneapolis [Minnesota]. We've done so here, and two of the closest are sitting in this room [referencing MM and the cameraperson].

MM: Thank you. One of the things—it's never easy is that, when you came to Lancaster [Pennsylvania], you managed to pick up a baby in Atlanta [Georgia], you were there for 40 minutes, did you say? You're putting together a crib and just did this whole span of life that's about 24 years long. When you came to Lancaster [Pennsylvania], then you were the adoptive parent yourself.

[AA shaking her head]

MM: Was it a single-parent adoption? Or you were?

[JA points her thumb to AA]

AA: I was the parent.

JA: We tried. They would only allow one adoptive parent, because we weren't legally married, and we tried to rectify that in Minnesota before we left, and it would have cost us way more than we could afford just to give the attorney a retainer to start the process.

AA: And it would have been—

JA: It would have failed.

AA: It would have failed. It was every indication we had been given at that point.

JA: And then when we moved here in '92, Amanda was three—

AA: Hold on a second, there was very good reason why Jacquie went to Atlanta to pick up Amanda, and it was because she knew how to change diapers on an airplane.

[everyone laughs]

AA: I had no clue yet how to do that. I mean, I'm teachable, but I need more than ten minutes.

MM: You're good on the—you're good on the crib.

JA: [laughs and nods]

AA: I'm really good on the crib, and the reason we didn't have the baby's room set up is we had gone through this gradation about, "There's a baby for you," and then being told a few days later, "No, that's all falling apart," and that actually happened a number of times to the point that people were saying, "Here, you can have the crib, here you can—we'll bring you this," and we finally said, "Folks, hold onto things, we know what we're gonna need to buy. The one thing we knew about for sure was the crib.

JA: We borrowed that.

AA: Right, that was a borrowed crib. And, we finally said, "Look, we'll set it up when we know for sure that the baby's coming. We could not bear in our souls to have everything set up and then be told one more time that the baby wouldn't be coming home. It was just too hard.

MM: Okay. Can you talk what it means though for one person to be identified as the adoptive parent in a relationship that was already a longer term relationship?"

AA: Yeah, we had been together nine years when we started the process.

MM: And why do you think they do that?

JA: And it was not legal in there then, so…

AA: They're crazy.

[MM laughs]

JA: When we came to Pennsylvania in '92, we tried that.

AA: They were crazy, too.

JA: We tried to get a co-adoption, a co-parents recognition, and it was like, no, there's no way.

MM: And why? What was the problem?

JA: Finally—because we weren't legally married that was…

MM: Okay, so it was the legal relationships again.

JA: Yeah, we weren't legally married. And they didn't recognize—we could've done the, finally, once Amanda was 13 or 12, we tried one more time, and the judge—judge's ruling to us, on paper—we never went before the judge, but we got an explanation of why we were being turned down—was that we couldn't—I could adopt Amanda as long as Arlene gave up her parental rights, because the state of Pennsylvania didn't recognize—couldn't recognize us as co-parents, because there was no legal relationship between us. And our attorney had tried to say this his—his interpretation of the Constitution was that we should be allowed this, and the judge said, no, that's not what they meant when they passed that legislation. Therefore, I'm not going to grant this unless Arlene gives up her rights.

AA: And the bottom line was there was no way we were going to give up any rights after what we had gone through for the possibility of gaining co-parental rights, because what if—the big what if is, what if they took away my parental rights, then we could lose our daughter, and there was no way we were going to do that.

JA: And the terrorism for me—we—there was one point where we had had an appointment with an attorney, and we'd had it for months, and the appointment was in early January, and I don't remember the year. But he called just before Christmas that year, and it was right here in Lancaster County [Pennsylvania], and he—there had been some news right then about gay rights, and I don't even know if it was about gay marriage, but it was about gay rights, and so there had been a lot of news media and talk in the Lancaster County area about whether or not we should be recognized—or that we're anti-Christian or that we're going to hell or whatever the issues that can come up around that. And he called us and he said, "I'm really sorry, but I've been thinking about our appointment, and I realize that I cannot represent you, because," as he explained it, my interpretation of his explanation is, "he couldn't go face his family at Christmas and have that issue come up and feel safe in saying 'I'm representing lesbians in a parental—co-parenting issue,'" and that, to me, that was a frightening moment to me, to me, that's terrorism. Because if something had happened to Arlene at that time, in that environment, legally, the judge could've given her to anybody. He might've offered her to Arlene's sister as Arlene's aunt—or whatever.

AA: [shaking head] Not a good idea.

JA: But—and I could maybe trust Arlene—probably trust Arlene's sister to say, hey, you keep her. But why would I have been put in that position? What was right about that?

MM: Do you remember what year that was?

JA: The adoption finally was possible in 2003, so that had to have been in 2002, I think. Or 2001.

AA: I think 2000—it was closer to 2001.

JA: Probably. And then finally the legislation changed—I think it was in '03.

MM: And changed to?

JA: In Pennsylvania so that co-parenting was allowed and that was due to a case that had a male couple and a female couple that they'd been working with for several years to get—get the issue clarified, and I—we knew the women, but we didn't know the men, but I wish I could remember the women's names.

AA: God bless them.

JA: But they broke the ice—made is possible—set the precedent, is what it is. And so, as soon as they set the precedent, we started the process to do the co-parenting thing, and before we went through with that, I changed by last name legally to Ackerman, so that the three of us would have the same last name. And this picture here is that second adoption, and that was in June of 2003. [camera adjusts and zooms in on picture.] And Amanda was 14 years old when I got to adopt her, so I was a long pregnancy on…

[everyone laughs]

MM: Very long pregnancy.

JA: Very long, but that, yeah. But yeah, that's when that happened, and that was—you know, the dam had broken at that point. There's was lots of same-sex couples going into the county courthouse.

AA: And the judge was very happy that day, and very supportive.

MM: And it was a different judge than you had been involved with before?

JA: Absolutely.

MM: There's been some change as well across this period. When finally the adoption was done in 2003, was there a change in the family at all, you think? Did you feel, did you sense anything?

JA: It was a change for me, I mean, I don't know if it was change for Amanda or Arlene as much as it was for me, because I felt like that weight was off about, you know, if something happens to her, now I have do have legal rights. Now it's—I felt safe.

MM: Okay, so it was a matter of giving you some sense of power and safety in that.

AA: And for me, I was able to relax a little bit, because if something did happen to me. I knew that our family was secure, and my job at that point meant a great deal of travel, and that can be frightening at times when you're on the road a lot, two or three times a month, I wanted to know that my daughter and my partner were secure.

JA: Yeah, we had—you know, and that was part of the reason I changed my name, too, because we—even with the adoption being finalized, we knew from experience that having two different last names added to the whole issue if there was an emergency, and we knew from when Amanda was young and had to be taken to the ER [Emergency Room] and they looked at the two of us and said, "Which one is her mother?" and we said, "Both," and they went, "Yeah, right." [laughs] And they would only let one of us in, so we had to choose.

AA: So, there's also a lot of other issues around having a biracial child, which brought those issues up on top of the gay issues. So, we've had to overcome a whole list of barriers, but I think we did that.

MM: I think you did, too. And anything about—all of that on in Lancaster County [Pennsylvania] and Lancaster County [Pennsylvania] is viewed as very conservative sometimes ultra-right conservative, Bible... any other contexts that make you think about what did Lancaster have to do with it—Central Pennsylvania? Did that make it better—worse?

JA: Lancaster County, in my opinion, is very mixed in terms of —on one hand, it feels very conservative and it seems to focus conservatively, but on a one-to-one basis, I've met a lot of people and interacted with a lot of parents, and they're supportive—I mean, I'm not one to just come out to just anybody. I don't come out unless I feel like I have a reason to, but I've had, since we've moved here, I've worked for probably six or eight different employers, and most of them, when I interview, I say I'm a lesbian. I say my partner's a woman, and for the most part, they either smile and never invite me back, which is fine, or they're like, "You know, you're here to work and that's what's important." On a one-to-one basis, I feel like I've been—like I've gotten support in many different ways. And when people take the time to ask about our story and hear some of it, they're very supportive—they're like, how could they do that? Why is it like that? Why? You know. And you just sit and commiserate with one another, but...

AA: Well, and even our neighbors—we're now on our third—we're in our third home, and in all of our homes, we've had support from our neighbors... and much of that had to do with did we take care of our yard?

JA: Well, I've also had employees—employers here in the county when I tell them that I'm a lesbian—I usually don't put it that way, 'cause lesbian's a trigger word for so much, but maybe say that my partner's a woman or whatever. And I've had employers or prospective employers say "Why would you tell me that?" or "Why is that—it doesn't matter." And, I say, "Yes, it does."

AA: Why is that important?

JA: Why is that important? Well, because, one real example is that I said, well on Friday, she has a procedure—an outpatient procedure and I need to go with her, so I'm going to need a half a day off, so it is real important. You know, it is a part of my reality and it becomes a part of yours if I'm your employer—employee.

MM: Just in terms of the co-adoption, anything else that you'd like to add that kind of cross your mind that maybe I didn't ask that was—going through a lot of topics—'cause it's an amazing story.

AA: You know, it was emotional, it was expensive.

JA: Yeah, it cost $900 for me to have my last name changed. Now, if I were—one of us were a man and we got married, it's what, $60? [laughs]

AA: And well, we also believed we'd ever be able to be legally married or we would've waited.

JA: So we didn't do that until June in this year. We waited awhile.

MM: So, that's move to that topic, because the story evolves.

[AA laughs]

MM: From 1988 to starting adoption to beginning to evolve and then moving to Lancaster and the co-parenting thing and Amanda growing up wonderfully and getting through college—a whole lot of people who have looked at adoption over the years have said, "I can't do that. Those kids aren't going to be successful, and that's totally been debunked."

JA: Wrong. There's a part of me that wishes Amanda were here, because I'd like to hear her perspective about growing up with two moms, but I do know that there were times as a parent in this family where she—we—I would ask her when she was in school, "Are you having any problems? Are the kids giving you a hard time? Is there anything you wanted to talk about?" and she was always very reticent about any of that, but then sometimes I would hear her telling to someone else somewhere else, and it would turn out that she'd been called out, you know. And then there was the issue—the first time she had a sleepover, a group of girls, and I said, "Do they know you have two moms?" and said this like three days out from the sleepover, and she's stopped and she looked at me, and she said, "Well, yeah," and I said, "All of them? Do they—I know some of them know, 'cause they've been to our house?" And she's like, "Why is that important?" I've said, "It's gonna be important, because they may get here or their parents may drop them off, and you know, lots of things can happen," and by that point, we had been—I think one of the turning points for her in understanding the difference of having two moms was having gone to the African-American museum in Washington, D.C., and they had an exhibit on slavery, and she got a new perspective and a new understanding of what it was like to have been a slave, and how it related to her and her ethnicity and we had talked about those things, and she had really gotten in touch with how unfair that whole thing was, and so she—she then related that to how unfair was for people to think different of us, because we were two women. So there was that moment of having to adjust as a parent how you—how you're bringing your kid up, and putting your kid in the position of, "I have to come out to my friends before I can have them over." And then there was also another moment in time—I

don't even know if Arlene's aware of this—I think Amanda was about 11 or 12. I was working for a Catholic Church at that time, and she was coming to work with me for the day, because her school was out, and I still had to work. Arlene was out of town. On the way to the church, I had to say to her, "You need to not talk about mommy," who's Arlene, "because these people don't know that my partner—they know that I have you—that you're my daughter. They know I have a partner, but they assume it's a man, and we need them to continue that." We don't—you know, I didn't want it to blow up into something else. [becomes emotional and AA takes her hand] And I felt so awful that I was telling... my kid to lie... it's not right.

MM: No, it's not.

JA: It's not fair and shouldn't have had to learn that... that stage. You know, you get to learn that kind of nuance when you get to be much older, but to tell an innocent kid you can't be honest about your parents, [camera adjusts and zooms in on photos] because somebody else may not agree with it...

AA: What did she say?

JA: She said, "Okay," and she was fine. She went on, you know, she did what she was asked to do. She accepted it as this is how we have to deal with this, and she didn't take it as, "Mom's telling me how to lie." I did.

AA: Right.

MM: I think Amanda did some amazing transitions right around that age. Part of it was transferring out of the school district and getting involved in the charter school that she got involved in and theater and all the gifts that emerged from it, but I've always felt that the greatest gift was the two of you and what she had already brought into herself. So, however she understands things, she's turned it into a song or a portrait that's just amazing.

JA: She accepted what I said. That she, you know, she understood that, yeah, we have to do this.

MM: She knew the history.

JA: We gotta do this, 'cause mom says this is how people—so like I said, it was me that was upset that I'm telling my kid to lie about something.

AA: But she somehow got it all. Either it was starting to date boys and if they weren't supportive of gay people, she didn't date 'em again.

JA: Well, she started standing up to people on the bus when she was in elementary school when they would call something gay or talk about the Spice Girls being lesbians. [laughs] You know, you don't do that. That's like saying people are niggers, you don't do that. So.

AA: Yeah, she's—as I think you've just said, she's very strong-willed. She's very strong-willed, she's very talented and she speaks her mind.

MM: Can we go on or do you want to take a break?

JA: We're good.

MM: Okay, I think the last topic then that I really want to get to is of course, the other big change, is marriage. Alright now, we all had an agreement. We were all waiting for Pennsylvania. None of us ever thought it was going to happen.

AA: Oh, our marriage!

MM: Your marriage.

AA: Oh, okay! I keep waiting for hers. I'm sorry.

MM: No, hers will come one day. Whenever she's ready. So you were married in this year?

JA: On June 20th on 2014.

MM: Okay.

JA: And that occurred—I mean, we were waiting until it was legal in Pennsylvania, but we also both turned 65 this year, and for—and Arlene's much older than I am. Her birthday's in February. Mine's in August.

AA: I'm six months older.

JA: So she is much older. But I decided we should take a vacation even though it was a big financial stretch for us, and so I, unbeknownst to her, made plans to spend a week at a cabin—or in a cabin in North Carolina in June, and so when I gave it to her for her birthday, we talked about it off and on ensuing weeks and I said, "Gee, wouldn't it be fun if North Carolina had legalized gay adoption." And, of course, they're still working on it.

MM: Marriage.

JA: Gay marriage. And, 'cause then we could have our honeymoon in this nice little romantic cabin, and a few nights later, Arlene said, "You know, it's legal in Washington D.C., and D.C. is on the way to North Carolina." [laughs]

MM: Those are really the good decisions for how you get married.

AA: Yeah, but understand something.

JA: We got married 32 years ago in a holy union.

AA: We did, and in our minds, we got married many, many years ago when we had our holy union and for us—

MM: And that clarifying for others [mumbles over AA]

AA: —that was our wedding. It was a religious ceremony done in our church with one of our pastors.

JA: With witnesses.

AA: You would've thought it was a regular wedding, and the only thing was that it had no legal rights whatsoever. But it did bring with it all of the spiritual rights and blessings.

JA: And commitment.

AA: And commitment. So, having this wedding, now, this year, meant for us finally bringing the legal rights—and especially at our age, where we really want to be sure that the other one is protected, so having it—we never really expected this to be the wedding we never had. In our minds, we had it. What was so amazing about this wedding is that it turned into being as emotionally...

JA: Significant.

AA: ...Significant, powerful... in ways I hadn't expected. I felt those first time around. I thought this would be a little more... you know, we called it an elopement. We—we—

JA: 'Cause we didn't invite a bunch people.

AA: You know, we invited nine people, and that was plenty. Our closest of friends were there. So, this was going to be a very quick ceremony for legal reasons...

JA: And the—

AA: —Turned into being much more than that for us.

JA: The day that we got our license in D.C. was actually the day that it became legal in Pennsylvania, that the judge overturned the prior ruling. So we kinda chuckled about that.

AA: Yes.

JA: We got married—

MM: You know, it was on the way to North Carolina and [laughs]

JA: Yeah, yeah, it worked out.

AA: That's right, that's right. So, our life has been an interesting journey. There's no question about that. For us, I think the great lesson is don't ever wait for the world to give you all of your legal rights. You pursue what is right for you, and you keep working at it, and somehow God blesses—other people are working on rights about the time you've either given up or you've spent 20 years working on things, and now the youngins are—are the crusaders, thank God. And times are changing, you know?

JA: Well, I think another bonus and another reason I wanted to make it legal was the whole issue of inheritance, because you know—

AA: Not that we have much.

JA: —we've both been very judicious in having—getting life insurance for one another so that the other one will be protected if something happens, but we have—we had to put it in Amanda's name as the beneficiary in order to avoid taxes, because without the legal recognition, I could live with Arlene, but she would've had to pay taxes on the inheritance. So now, we don't have to do that.

MM: So, like 15%, I think it is—non-legal.

JA: It is—it puts you—it depends which tax bracket it puts you in. Yeah.

MM: [mumbles] Are there other things that you would like to add to this? We've got about 10-15 minutes, I think.

AA: No, I'm just glad that—that... somebody's taking note of what history has been doing.

MM: I always thought, "You can't read this in a textbook." I've read stuff in a textbook that people wrote about LGBT history, and it doesn't come the same way—it's not the experience history. So, I love this project.

JA: Yeah, and it's one of—oral history as I think—like you said, much more valuable in so many ways, and I am—another thing we've talked about many times, and we've talked with you about is we—I never thought this would happen, that gay marriage would be legalized. I know—I figured the discussion was going to go on infinitum and now that it's—states are falling like dominoes, what's become clear to me is that the majority of people, I think—again on an individual basis have been supportive all along but weren't courageous enough or interested enough.

MM: There wasn't enough momentum, I think for them to seek.

JA: There wasn't enough momentum on the power levels, because now the judges, when they write their rulings in many different states, what I've read from the rulings, is that—you know, yes, there's absolutely no reason we should be denying these people their rights, and I think, "What? You didn't think that two years ago?" You know? [laughs]

AA: It's still—

MM: It's still technically not popular.

AA: It still concerns me that rights are different state to state, and that is still wrong.

MM: And that everything is on appeal to the Supreme Courts who are waiting for the next chapter to see how it's gonna come out.

JA: Yeah, to see if we're in a window or if the door's actually open and then staying open. Yeah.

AA: Who would've thought—I—when I was coming out in '74, I expected none of this. None of this. I did not think I would see this say, so...

MM: Well, praise God we are here!

AA: That's right.

JA: Absolutely.

MM: Thank you for your time, and we're going to conclude this interview.

JA: Thank you.