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Title: LGBT Oral History: Louie Marven

Date: March 29, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – Marven, Louie - 076

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Interviewee: Louie Marven

Interviewer: Katherine Morales

Date of Interview: March 29, 2015

Location of Interview: LGBT Center

Transcriber: Katherine Morales

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Abstract:

Louie Marven moved to central Pennsylvania from his hometown of Wappingers Falls, New York to attend Messiah College in 2003 and has lived in the Harrisburg area ever since. The school's conservative values and prohibition of "homosexual behavior" made Louie's time there complicated, and it wasn't until after he graduated that he came out. He then began working for the LGBT Center, taking on the role of Youth Director and Administrator when the Center merged with Common Roads, and then accepting the position of Executive Director in 2012. In this interview, Louie discusses his experience of being gay at an evangelical Christian college, recalling experiences both as a student and as an alumnus that have caused him to think critically about the specific issues of LGBT inclusion that arise from the environment of the school. He also talks about the issues that he finds most pressing for the LGBT community at the moment, what being out means in terms of his life today, and his hopes for the community's future.

KM: Okay, so thank you so much for doing this interview for us. This is the oral history project for the LGBT Center, and we're just documenting and recording the lives of members of the LGBT community. So my name is Katherine Morales. It's March 29th, 2015, and it is about 5:15 pm at the LGBT Center in Harrisburg. So Louie, would you mind saying your name for us and spelling it out?

LM: Sure, it's Louie Marven—L-O-U-I-E—Marven—M-A-R-V-E-N.

KM: Thank you. And do you verbally consent to being videotaped?

LM: Yes.

KM: Thank you. Okay, so to start, if you could just give us some background on your, like, family life, from younger—like, where you went to school, occupa—occupation, and everything like that.

LM: Sure. So I grew up outside Poughkeepsie, New York, in a town called Wappingers Falls, and I lived there my whole life until I went to college. So I came to central Pennsylvania to go to Messiah College. I was there 2003 to 2007, and then I stayed in the area and started working for the LGBT Center, where I now serve as the Executive Director. So I have—I have three siblings—I have a younger sister, René, and a younger brother, Tommy—so we grew up together, and then my mom got remarried when I was in 10th grade, and so I got another—another sister, a stepsister named Alex. Is this the kind of thing that I'm supposed to be...? [laughs]

KM: And so—can you repeat where you grew up again? I—

LM: Sure. Wappingers Falls, New York.

KM: Wappingers Falls, New York. Okay, and so you went—you came to Pennsylvania and just kinda stayed.

LM: Sure, so yeah—so I came in—yeah, in 2003 to go to Messiah College.

KM: In terms of, like, growing up, like, can you just explain, like, how you felt growing up, or when you knew that you were different, or in any case, like, how you kind of relayed that to your family member?

LM: Sure, so I actually wasn't out until after college, so when I was growing up, I was really involved in my church youth group and that in that sort of scene, and so, you know, I guess in retrospect, you can sort of—or I can sort of think back about, like, “Okay, I can document that I definitely was gay and had some sort of consciousness of that,” but sort of did a lot of work to, you know, ignore those sorts of things, because the groups that I was involved in, the faith communities that I was involved in—it wasn't an okay thing to be—to be gay, and so I didn't want to be like—you know, like those people. And so—and then, when I chose to go to an evangelical college, that was also not [laughs] a great place for someone to—to come out, so I actually just waited—I made—I remember making a conscious decision toward the end of my college tenure that I was just gonna kind of wait it out and come out afterward.

KM: What made you, kind of, choose a college that would be—if you already kind of had that feeling that you couldn't just come out and couldn't just be...

LM: Yeah, so, you know, like I said, I was just—I was involved in a youth group community, and Messiah was just a school that we would hear about that was a really great school to go to, and I made a visit and really liked the campus and just really liked the vibe, and I got a scholarship. And so it was just this—this thing that—that happened, and like I said, I was part of that community, and so it did—it made sense to me, sort of, but I wasn't—even though I sort of had this inner sense of being a gay person, you know, that wasn't, you know, a motivational factor in choosing where I would go to school, for example. And so—and like I said, I didn't want to be—I didn't want to be gay, I kind of just thought that maybe these were, you know, feelings that, if I tried really hard, they would—they would not be there anymore, as opposed to, you know, an identity. So I didn't really have that sense of—of—of “gay” as an identity. It was more just this thing that I was feeling that maybe would—maybe would not be there if I really tried hard.

KM: Would go away, probably. Yeah.

LM: Sure, yeah, or if I was in the right kind of faith communities, or in the right kinds of communities, then I could, you know, do something better, or be something better than a gay person.

KM: So, like, at Messiah—like, I don't necessarily know how religious it is, or anything, but how did you feel there? How did you forge relationships?

LM: Yeah, so, Messiah's just a really interesting place. You know, in—in the work that I do now as the Executive Director of the LGBT Center, I sometimes get interviewed about LGBT topics at Messiah, and it's just an interesting thing to—to explain to folks, because I think—yeah, like—kind of what you just—what you just said, folks don't really know what—what that's like, to go to an evangelical Christian school. I think it's a very particular experience. So Messiah's a really interesting school. I remember some of the youth group members that I went to youth group with were very nervous that I was going there, because they understood it as a very liberal place where people would go and—and lose their faith, and— [laughs]

KM: Oh, really?

LM: And so it occupies this interesting place in, sort of, the evangelical Christian college world, where to certain people it's, you know—it's very—it's very liberal and out there and they talk about social justice, and, you know, these kinds of things, and then to other people, it's, of course, you know, the opposite, like, “Oh, that's a really conservative thing, that you would have visiting hours when boys and girls can go in each other's hallways,” or [laughs] you know. So that's all, of course, just a different kind of perspective, so—but it is—it's an—it's an interdenominational Christian school, and so they did have an overt policy that there was no sex outside of marriage and no homosexual behavior. [laughs] And so, of course, that was written at a time when—you know, when that language was probably more—more cutting-edge than it sounds now [laughs], so it sounds really archaic, and of course it is really archaic. So I think there's an interesting effort to articulate, you know, what that means, and how we—you know, how we live as Christians today. But for me, like, I had a great experience at Messiah, for the most part, like, I met really great people, I felt like I got a really great academic experience. You know, that—Messiah has a Brethren in Christ tradition, which is rooted in Anabaptist theology, which has a strong peace tradition, and so that sort of spilled out into campus life and talking about pacifism and social justice, and so for me and for a lot of other people, we got really into that scene. You know, I was an English major and sociology major, and so, you know, like anyone in college, you know, you're kind of exposed to new ideas, and you're thinking of things, maybe, in a new way, and for me, and I think for a lot of other people, by the end of that four-year experience, you get to—I got to a place where I could say, “Hey, we have, on campus, a gender-inclusive language policy. It's an academic standard. And I participated in racial justice roundtables, and I've thought critically about poverty, and how I live in the world as a comparatively affluent person. And so, like, I've done all this other work considering social justice and what it means to me and how I live in the world as a Christian,” which is something that I would have identified as at the time. But for me, like I said, and—and I think for lots of other people, you get to the end of that experience, and you think, “Well, what about this other thing? Like, what about—what about the LGBT community?” And—and so, in any case, something that also happened for me at the end of my college experience was that a group called Soulforce came through with a program called the “Equality Ride,” and it was just really interesting timing. So that group—they—Soulforce is a national organization that works to end religious-based oppression of LGBTQ folks, so—

KM: Oh.

LM: Yeah, so they had, like, sort of this youth brand of activism called Soulforce Q, and their flagship program was the Equality Ride, and that was modeled after the Freedom Riders of the '60s, which were a racially diverse group of folks who went to different college campuses that were racially segregated and just sort of showed up and did direct action and started conversations. And so it was modeled after that, so it was LGBTQ folks and allies—

KM: And this was at Messiah?

LM: They—they came to Messiah while I was there.

KM: Oh.

LM: Yeah, so the bus was, you know, a group of—a group of folks that was bringing this conversation different places. So in some places, in places like, you know, Bob Jones [University] or Liberty [University]—the Bob Joneses and Libertys of the world, I should say, I do not know what happened specifically at those schools—but they would do things like, kind of, sort of draw a line in the sand and say, “If you cross this line, you’ll get arrested,” and then they would do some sort of direct action, and do, like, some media thing. For other schools, like Messiah, you know, the administration would welcome them to campus and try to demonstrate being a hospitable, you know, loving, Christian community, and so they would do some programming. So I was a senior when they came to Messiah, and there was all this stuff going on on campus, like, there was a real sense of anxiety, I think, administratively, around, “How do we construct a positive experience?” And so, to me, maybe being a little bit more cynical about what that meant, you know, it was clear that, you know, there’s—there’s that real desire, I think, in spaces like Messiah, to—to kind of have it both ways, where you kind of stick to your roots and kind of are a champion for the people who want you to do that, but you also want to come off as being really nice and polite. [laughs] So I—I sort of saw that happening. And I was also an RA [Resident Assistant] at the time, so I think was even on some, like, host committee for the group, and so there’s all this stuff happening. [chuckles] My—my friend was asked to be on a panel for a program for two of the Equality Riders and a student and an administrator, I guess, and so they asked her to be the student on the panel to kind of talk about LGBT topics at Messiah and in the world.

KM: This is fascinating. Interesting.

LM: Yeah, and they—and she, you know, agreed to do it, and then sort of told the administration that she—“Just so you know”—she sort of said, “Just so you know, I sort of agree more with the Equality Riders than with the school,” and then they got a different, you know, student to do it. So they sort of said, “Well, we’re just concerned about your safety.” So that was the sort of thing that—that we were experiencing, and then there were some of us on campus—and again, this is all before I was out, so I—to me, this was, like, an experience of coming out as an ally, right, which was a very daring thing—it felt like it was. It felt like a really big deal to me, that I was sort of known as a student leader, and that I was an RA, and that I was on this host committee, and I was thinking about, like, “At the end of this culminating experience

of being at this college where definitely a dominant theme has been, like, doing the right thing in the world [chuckles], how can I do right by LGBT folks on this campus?” And so there were some folks who were wearing, like, T-shirts in solidarity with the group that was coming to campus, and they were really innocuous—they were, like, three couples of stick figures with, like, a heart over each couple, and then one was, like, you know—two females, two males, a male and a female—something like that. And so a bunch of us wore the shirts the day that they came, and—

KM: What was their reaction?

LM: It was sort of, like, just a non-reaction, I guess, at that moment, but afterward we definitely got chastised—or not—not everyone, I should say, but I know—for me, I did. I sort of got a talking-to about, “Oh, you’re—you know, you’re checking out in your senior year, and, you know, you’re a student leader, and so you were supposed to represent the school,” and stuff, and—yeah, which I understood, like, I know—I sort of, I guess, expected that—that kind of thing to happen, which is why we all chose to do it. But, I mean, nobody who wore a shirt was in—got in trouble or got suspended or anything like that, it’s—I don’t want to paint the wrong picture. But it was a really interesting time, because the Equality Riders really, by virtue of being physically there with that conversation—really forced the campus community to ask a lot of questions about who we are: “What does this mean?” “How do we talk about this?” “How do we disagree with them in a way that is, you know, kind and hospitable?” And then for other folks, you know, they were anonymous online people telling Soulforce to “Please come to my campus, because I feel really alone.” And so there’s this really dynamic conversation happening, and I think it was really inspiring. And it was, it was really inspiring to see other young people who were just so bold and who were just showing up in spaces like this and having conversations. I had never seen anyone do anything like that before that was, like, direct action, you know, activism. So—so yeah, I think that part of what I was experiencing in—in the midst of that conversation, campus-wide, was thinking about, like, “Well, what is this rule? Like, what is this rule on campus that there is no homosexual behavior?” As offensive and silly as that language sounds. [laughs] “Like, does it mean that”—I mean, essentially it means that you can’t be in a relationship with someone, but it was a really—

KM: Or just like, if you have that, to, like, press it down. Like, if you have that desire, you’re not supposed to have that, type of thing?

LM: Yeah, it was—it was sort of a tran—transic—transitional time, I guess—transitional time in the way that Messiah articulated that. I think, at the time—I think, because of—through my eyes, through my experience, because of Equality Ride showing up, it moved, kind of, the broader conversation to a place of, “It’s okay to identify, but not behave.” [chuckles] Which sounds really silly, but that actually was a significant movement. So it—it really forced administrators and others to articulate, like, “Well, yeah, what is this? What do we think about LGBT people? What do we think about LGBT students?” Of course, they don’t hire openly LGBT staff, but it’s—and I think it’s still sort of there. I can’t speak to it, besides what I’ve experienced, but I—yeah, so there was this sense, I think, maybe if you talked with the folks who went to Messiah, which I—which I have, you know, through some of this—some of my work at the Center. I’ve talked with—I got to meet people who went there in the ‘80s, ‘90s, and had

really different experiences, really negative experiences—overtly, like, “You can’t be gay, you know—you have to go to therapy and talk about this and change this.” That sort of thing. That doesn’t happen there now in an overt way—I mean, I don’t know what kinds of messages people get, but it was this—this process of, I think, collectively saying—I guess, “We think it’s okay if you say that you’re gay, or if you say that you’re a lesbian, or you say that you’re bisexual”—forget transgender, I mean, folks then, they didn’t [chuckles]—they didn’t have any idea about what that is. That wasn’t really even—it—the language of “gay” was really the language that folks were using. So I’m sure that transgender students have a—

KM: Well, were there—was there a community, like an LGBT community, at Messiah?

LM: Yeah, no, so, I mean—the community piece, I think, is really interesting. That was part of the conversation, too, like, “Okay, so you”—so Messiah, in its sort of PR [public relations] angle on this wanted to be seen as nice, Christian people, right? [laughs] Who are hospitable to their LGBT student body, and so—one thing that Soulforce tries to do is—to leave behind a network after they would go through these schools on the Equality Ride. And so one significant way of doing that is to start a Gay-Straight Alliance, to start a GSA, and so I know that there was—when I was there, there was one, and of course, later I found out that there were many different iterations of underground groups, but since they couldn’t become formal clubs—and this was even, like—Facebook just became, like, a thing. [laughs] So there weren’t ways for people to connect, really, and it was scary to kind of seek that out, and so that isolation was really perpetuated by not being able to have something like a club, and so—I think there was, you know—one staff person said, “Okay,” like, face-to-face to the Riders, or whatever, when that was happening. I remember we—we met, we had a meeting, and it was really amazing to see it happening on campus. And I guess someone who let us have the room got in trouble or something, so we even met at a married couple—professor—a married couple’s house afterward, which was really interesting. But that was the first time that I—I guess I knew of gay people on campus, but that was the first time I had ever been in a space where people were openly talking about being part of the LGBT community. And, of course, I was coming out as an ally at the time, so. [laughs]

KM: So they didn’t know? They had no idea?

LM: I mean, I’m sure people knew. [laughs] But no, I mean—I wasn’t out in any way, and I have a lot of respect for the people who were—who were out through that process, and I just think that they’re amazing for being out on campus. And I sort of—I wish that that was me, I wish that I had been able to come out and do some real great work on campus and cause some trouble—the good kind of trouble. But I—

KM: Well, it sounds like the administration was very—like, aware of everything that was happening.

LM: Yeah, I mean, there was definitely a—I think an effort to—to control the conversation, for sure.

KM: Yeah.

LM: I was also, like—I was running a—a service trip, one of those short-term missions trips that I now realize do more damage than—than good. [chuckles] But I was signed up to do one of those over the summer, so even though I was graduating soon, I still kind of had this commitment—this two-week commitment. And so I think that sort of kept me in Messiah mode, and sort of in the—in the closet, I guess. But—so once that was done, I just started coming out to my friends, and—I think probably a lot of them—probably a lot of them knew, but I didn't face any—like, all my Messiah friend are—were very open, very accepting, and very interested in how they could become advocates, so I think that that's an interesting thing. I think people I meet in the community now are like, "You went to Messiah? That must have been terrible," and—yeah, like, I do—I do wish that I was in a place that I would have gotten the message that "It's okay to be—to be queer, and—and here are some supports for you." Like, I definitely have a certain amount of resentment that I—I didn't find myself in a place like that, but I met the best people, and, you know, they're still my—my best friends. So it's just a mixed bag, it just is—it just is, you know? [laughs] It's not...

KM: Yeah. I guess I just have a few questions, like, in terms of that, like—so, you know, I go to Dickinson College, and I'm just thinking about, you know, how people express their sexuality there, and kind of how, like, the hookup culture and everything like that—but if you're at a college where, you know, that's discouraged...

LM: Yeah. Right.

KM: Do you think that helped you, like, stay, like, in the closet, and not have to—or do you think...? Was it—was it easier, 'cause it—like, you told me you weren't ready, to, like—and I know that, you know, coming out is just, like, your own process, of like...

LM: Yeah. And when I say I wasn't ready, I think that—it's not like I was sitting in my dorm room thinking, "I am gay, and I am not ready to come out." It was more just like an ignored, suppressed thing. So if—like, I sort of wouldn't let myself go there, if that makes sense. So—but yeah, I think that—if—and I guess you're asking if, like, the culture of campus helped kind of keep—

KM: Like, helped ignore. Like, helped—yeah.

LM: I mean, yeah, absolutely. I mean, there wasn't—I wasn't getting messages that—"It's okay to be gay." And that—I wasn't getting messages that, "If you were out, there would be people who wanted to make sure that you were safe and accepted." Things like that.

KM: Was there, like, pressure to date or anything like that?

LM: I had a girlfriend in college—yeah—I don't know that I felt pressure to. I mean, yeah—it's a complicated thing, like, you like to be with someone, right? I mean, that's just a thing that people like to do. And so, you know, I don't regret that or anything, I know a lot—[laughs] I hear a lot of, you know, especially gay men talking about how gross, and like—[laughs] it would

be, you know, to be with a woman or to date a woman, and I don't—I don't share that [laughs] experience.

KM: [laughs] I'm glad.

[sound of something falling]

LM: But—so yeah, I did—I did—it's just my phone, it's fine, yeah.

KM: Oh. [laughs]

LM: So I had a girlfriend in college, but...

KM: Do you guys still talk?

LM: Yeah, I mean, not really, like we're friends on Facebook, but. [laughs] But I definitely felt like I needed to—I—I—and it seems silly now, as someone who is doing work in the LGBT community [laughs], like, this isn't the kind of message I would want anyone else to hear, but for me, at the time, I really thought of my—my college tenure as, like, its own chapter, and then I was just gonna graduate, and then I was gonna have a new chapter, where I was out, and that was just how I understood that life was going to be.

KM: I think that's pretty normal.

LM: Yeah, yeah. And so—like, I didn't want to totally disconnect from my college experience, 'cause I have—like I mentioned, I have so many friends, especially, and I—I felt like I, you know—it was four years of my life, right, and it—it was really formative, and I felt like I learned a lot of great things, and I had a lot of great experiences—I got to study abroad, I got to do all kinds of, you know, activities on campus. And so I really appreciate all of that, and I don't want to completely disconnect from that, but at the same time, I knew that that wasn't going to be my community anymore.

KM: So I heard when you were speaking about how you identified as Christian, do you still identify as Christian, or...?

LM: [shakes head, chuckles] No.

KM: How did that...?

LM: No, no—it's sort of interesting, after—after college, I moved into an intentional community with some friends who I went to school with, and so—that was a program called the Sycamore House, which is still in existence, and it's connected to St. Stephen's Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Harrisburg. So they had a house that they were trying to use for ministry, I suppose, and the idea was that young people could be taking sort of a gap year and doing service and living rent-free and, you know, doing volunteer work in the Cathedral community, and in the broader community. So that's where I came out, and [laughs] started to slowly come out, and of

course, when I took the job, I—I was still living there when I started working for the LGBT Center, so that was—that sort of accelerated some of that process, and that was an accepting community. And so I really appreciated that, and I—I thought that I would continue to be part of that faith community, but just ultimately decided that that wasn't an identity that was important to me. I don't wanna—yeah, nothing specifically happened from that community that—like, it's a really open place, and I—I really value that experience, too. But just kind of in my own personal development, I—I sort of—

KM: So you—

LM: Gradually decided that I wasn't going to be [laughs] a Christian anymore, or part of a Christian community, or that I didn't need a faith community. You know, I think that for a lot of people who identify as Christian, when they come out, they really want to know that they can be gay and a Christian, and I affirm that for people, I think that's great. But I'm just not interested in—in people telling me that I can be gay and a Christian. I think that's—I know that, and I don't—I don't really care anymore. [both laugh] You know, like I—

KM: Yeah.

LM: I don't meant to be so blunt about it, because it's so, so important to a lot of people, and I—I think that's—you know, if that's important to you, then that is something that you should pursue. You should pursue being part of an affirming faith community. But, to me, I don't—I don't need to know that—that Jesus thinks it's okay that I'm gay. [laughs] Like, it just—it doesn't—it doesn't matter to me. [laughs]

KM: So while you were at Sigmore—

LM: Sycamore House, yeah.

KM: Sigmore House, that's when you started working for the LGBT Center.

LM: Yeah, so it's—yeah, it's sort of a funny story to think about. I really am so grateful for that experience, it—not only did I get to live rent-free for two years with my friends and meet a lot of great people at St. Stephen's Cathedral, but I really got to meet people in this community in sort of like a networking kind of way, as we were, you know—we were young and looking for jobs and things, and somebody who was on the Vestry, which is sort of like the board of an Episcopal church, was also and is also the president of a local Community Foundation, and sent us a job description for this new position with the LGBT Center, which was sort of an upstart at the time. Of course, I found out later it had gone through this incubation period at the Community Foundation, and they were ready to hire a part-time office worker, and I was an English major in college and was looking for editing and writing jobs, and so we got that our—at our Sycamore House email account, and—this job description to be the “Office”—I think it was—the job title changed so many times, but I think it was articulated then as “Office Manager-slash-Writer,” so that caught my eye. And that was in 2008, and then, very quickly after that, the—the board of the local LGBTQ youth-serving organization, Common Roads, came to the Center's board and said that it wanted to pursue a merge, and so—Common Roads has been around since 1993 in

the community in various forms, and we ultimately did merge early in 2009, and they had no staff at the time, and so I was a part-time employee of the Center, and so the part-time youth coordinator position that was vacant and my part-time job were sort of mashed up to create a Youth—a Youth Director and Administrator position. So I was the only staff at the time.

KM: Oh wow.

LM: And [laughs] still pretty new to the community, it's sort of a funny thing to think about. And we had a couple different staff come and go over the years, and then it was in 2012 when I took on the role of Executive Director.

KM: So you said earlier that no, having a position at the LGBTQ—LGBT Center kind of helped you come out. How did that go for your family, like, how...?

LM: Really good. I mean, it was sort of a non—it's sort of a boring thing, a sort of story, to tell them that I was gay, I mean—yeah, I'm just really lucky to have a family that just wanted me to be happy. I remember my mom being concerned that I would, you know, be safe, you know—typical sort of parent thing, but never was there a conversation of, you know: “Are you sure,” or “No, you're not,” or “This isn't okay,” or anything like that. So fairly non-dramatic, especially compared to my Messiah peers who I knew were coming out, but yeah.

KM: Well, it sounds like most of the pressure to not come out came from, you know, college, or—and that environment.

LM: Sure, yeah.

KM: But your family was really open to it.

LM: Yeah, it wasn't as big of a deal. Yeah.

KM: Yeah! That's nice. So in terms of—you're—you talked—like, you have a partner?

LM: Mhm.

KM: So talking about, like, your current family, and, like, are you, like—have you ever been married, or...?

LM: Sure, so—so my partner, Shaun Espenshade—we met in 2009 at an LGBT Center fundraiser called “FAB,” the Fall Achievement Benefit, so it's our annual awards benefit gala, and a friend of his was co-chairing the event, and he brought him to the event because he wanted him to meet me.

KM: Oh!

LM: [laughs] And—and so we did meet, and I invited him out on a date afterward to another Center event, which has sort of become a theme for our relationship—I'm always bringing him

along to—to work things. The second event was really funny, it was—[laughs] there's—there was this drag show at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] that they were doing as a fundraiser for our youth program, Common Roads, and so of course I was, you know, going to—to be supportive of the students who were doing that, and to say thank you and all that, and we had, you know, a certain number of seats in the front, like, VIP seats or something. [laughs] Just a cute thing that they offered to our students, and I was just having a hard time getting the youth in our youth program to come, and so I started to invite volunteers—they said, “Just invite some volunteers.” And so I invited this person who was chairing the event, who introduced me to Shaun, and he said, “I can't go, but you should ask Shaun, this is his phone number.” And so I brought him, and he got this sort of lucky seat on the aisle and got danced with a lot, and—like, he was a really good sport about, 'cause he's so—he's just—he's just a shy, more reserved person. Maybe not shy, but he's a more reserved person, and so this was, like, a big thing, that he wanted to, like, be cool on this date, but also not be danced with by the drag queen and sort of be in the spotlight where everyone in the room is looking at him. [laughs] So that was our first date, which was hilarious, and—and yeah, so we—we are not married. We live in Harrisburg together. We bought a house in March 2014, so we live here. Sort of just fast-forwarded through...

KM: So you said you got married?

LM: No, we did not.

KM: Oh, you didn't get married?

LM: No, I was only saying that because—because of you asking.

KM: Oh, okay.

LM: But no, we didn't. [both laugh]

KM: So you didn't get married. Is it because—so, 'cause I know, now in Pennsylvania, people are allowed to get married now, which is, like, great—

LM: Yeah, yeah.

KM: So you guys are just in, like, a partnership, or...?

LM: Yeah, we like the word 'partners.' I know a lot of people—a lot of people who get married say, “Well, husbands now,” and—I mean, that's fine if you like that word, but that's—that feels icky to me, I—I like the word “partners.” I think it's a great expression of, you know, who we are in a relationship. Like, I said, people can pick whatever words they want, but even if we did, you know, get the papers signed and stuff, I think we would still say partners.

KM: Yeah.

LM: I just think it's—it's just a little more queer. I just like it. [both laugh] Yeah.

KM: Well, how do you feel, like, I—in class, we kind of talked about how in the gay community, the topic of marriage is kind of, like, debated, you know, just, like—you know, you're just trying to be, like, “normal” or, like, why—like, you know, so, how do you feel about...? You know.

LM: Wow, so yeah. I mean, my—[laughs] My PC [politically correct] response as the Executive Director of the LGBT Center is that, you know, like, I definitely think people should not be told they can't get married because they're partners of the same gender. I definitely think that's nonsense. You know, I do—I do wonder about: Is a society where we can and do get married as gay couples, for example—is that what we—is that what we want? Is that a good goal? Is—is it still okay that that's how people can combine their assets and get insurance and things like that? So. [laughs]

KM: Yeah.

LM: I definitely affirm that people—if people want to get married, they should get married, and that's great, and there shouldn't be the government telling them that they can't. But it's not as important to me as I perceive it being to a lot of other people. [laughs]

KM: Yeah.

LM: And I—I'm sure we will. I mean, I'm sure we will at some point. But... [shakes head]

KM: Well, in terms of, like, other, like, civil, political, or just, like, any other things that you might think of, like—is there anything that you wanted to talk about, like, politics, like...?

LM: Like that I think are important, or...? [laughs]

KM: Yeah, that are important to you and you feel like relate to your identity as an LGBT...

LM: Yeah, well, you know, a lot of what we hear about—a lot of what we're talking about now is workplace nondiscrimination and nondiscrimination in public accommodations and housing and House Bill 300, which isn't a new conversation that—you know, I do a lot of community education—myself and other folks have been talking about this in the community for a long time, 'cause I find that a lot of LGBT folks don't—don't even know that in Pennsylvania, this is the case, which is interesting. I think that's so important. I think people should be able to—to work and to rent an apartment and to use public services, and I think that it's a—a great goal that affects our whole LGBT community, versus—marriage, for example, impacts people who want to become legally connected through marriage to someone of the same gender as articulated on paper. Whereas, you know, not being able—not being fired because you're queer or trans, that—that impacts everyone. Of course, it doesn't impact me that much. [laughs] Like, I'm not gonna get fired for being gay, which is a funny thing to think about. So, I mean, that doesn't impact me directly as an employee currently, but it does—it is something that I value as part of a queer community, that we would be able to...

KM: So you're saying because you're—you work here, that that's not necessarily something you're worried about now, but...?

LM: Right. In my—yeah, in my personal life, in a very, like, singular way, I'm not, like—I'm obviously not concerned about being fired for being gay, but—but I think that's just a much—much bigger issue. And again, that's not to disparage people who—who fought for marriage and did a, you know—did a lot of great work, and I—I respect that work, and I think it's great that we have it in Pennsylvania, so I'm certainly happy about that, but—but I get more excited about the non-discrimination stuff. [laughs]

KM: Yeah. It is exciting. Does your, like—have you ever had a time when your LGBT identity, like, influenced, like, other aspects of your life, like, not related to what we've talked about, like, education and everything? But maybe like social, family, spiritual? Like, I know you talked about your identity, but in any other way.

LM: Yeah. Hmm. I guess—I don't know why I'm having a hard time with this question. Could you—could you say it again?

KM: So like, has there ever been a time, like—so we briefly talked about your—your coming out experience with your family, or, like, your time at Messiah, but has there been a time when, like, it affected other aspects of your life with your family, or just socially, like... Or, I know that you no longer identify as Christian, but just in terms of spirituality, how that's affected.

LM: Sure. So, hmm. Like, I guess being out is not—it's interesting, I—like, I said, I do a lot of community education, so I go—I do a lot of training, professional development, that kind of thing, in schools and colleges and social service agencies, and—and talk about coming out as a life-long experience, and it's not just this, you know, "I was in the closet, then I came out, and now I'm out," and so I always—I always use myself as an example when I do that, because people perceive me as a very out person, of course, because, you know, I do this work, you know, I comment in the media on LGBT topics as a representative of the Center, my name is associated with, you know, the Center on our website, and things like that, and so I'm a really out person. So folks will perceive that I'm—that I'm out all the time. But I do notice, like, you know, just walking around, like, my partner and I are a lot less likely to be affectionate, like, you know, holding hands or whatever, in public. You know, when we bought a bed [laughs], it was a hilarious experience, just—you know, I—I wonder if, like, the other people in the store are like, like, moving—like, leaving because they see two guys buying a bed together. [laughs] I don't—like, I think about that stuff. I like to think that it doesn't stop me from just being who I am, but it's definitely, you know—being an out person is still on my mind when I navigate the world in different ways, and so I very much don't want to be a person who goes and does those sort of, like, domestic things alone, just by virtue of, you know, wanting to have a more comfortable experience for everyone—I definitely want to be someone who's pushing—pushing those boundaries and making sure that people have new experiences, and—and maybe kind of the ability for me to do that would make the world better for somebody else who—who can't, in some sort of way. But it is something that, you know, that I still do think about. For all the messages of, like, how the world has progressed so much, and—like, we had—we had an experience at our home where, you know, one day we noticed a broken lightbulb in our—in our

backyard, or—it's like a—it's like a deck. It's like a little city backyard that's sort of decked over. And so we saw the broken lightbulb. We thought, "That's strange, the wind must have blown it there." Then a couple days later, my partner was up in—in his office, sort of with the light on—it was before we had curtains, you know, we were still kind of moving and settling in, and so it was—it was dark, but the—but the light was on, so he was sort of, you know, visible, and somebody had thrown, like, a water bottle, like, sort of full of water, at the—at the back window there, while he was in there, and so he had told me that this had happened, and so we were like, "Oh, we have—we have a neighbor who doesn't like that we're here, and maybe that's what the lightbulb was about," like, don't want to make assumptions about anything, but—all right. So we're sort of, like, on our guard about that, and then one day, I guess, within the same week, I was out back and—sort of fussing with, like, plants, I guess, like—fussing with our little herb garden. And I started to hear, like, I guess [laughs]—so there's the back of other houses, you know, in the other row, so I started to hear a sound from the—the porch, like, the kid who—whose bedroom is there would, like, open it and make a noise, like a "Ha!" kind of sound and slam the door, and—"Okay, kid just being dumb." And—and then I started to hear things falling on the deck, like, what sounded like coins dropping, like he was throwing them on the deck, and so I would hear them drop. And so—and then Shaun came out, and I was sort of saying, like, "This is a weird thing that's happening, right, this person is sort of taunting us," and another coin hit the deck, and I sort of wheeled around, and I—you know, I yelled something back, like, "All right, that's enough," and then he yelled "Fag" back at us [laughs], and it was like, "Whoa, that was—"

KM: Are you serious?

LM: Yeah! So that was just a really jarring thing, of course, to hear, but also, like, we live there, and it's not like somebody that you're passing in the street or something [laughs]—it's like "That person lives there and we live here, and that just happened." So it was a really...

KM: Do you have a lot of experiences like that?

LM: No, not at all. No. And so Shaun went over and talked with—

KM: The parents?

LM: The parents, yeah.

KM: Wow.

LM: It was—it was great, yeah, I had just gotten back from a run, and I was like, "Don't go over—over there if you're gonna be mean, like, let's talk about it," and I went up to take a shower, and then when I got back he said, "I went over and I talked to the dad and mom, and I think everything's all right." He said the dad was sort of like, "Oh yeah, I guess that was my son." [laughs] The mom was sort of—the mom apologized. And nothing like that's happened since. So that was a great outcome. I mean, if we're gonna have neighbors, right, we want, like—I want to be part of, you know, the community that I live in, and I wanna have good relationships with the people that live around me, and—so I thought that was—you know, given

that some people have these feelings toward us, apparently, I'm glad that at least something could break the ice and give us a reason to—to be introduced to them as nice people who just don't want to be having things thrown at them. [laughs]

KM: So do you feel like you're kind of, like, in your neighborhood, like—people are aware of your identity?

LM: I mean, I would guess, yeah. I mean, there's other LGBT folks in my neighborhood, and I—I feel very safe. I mean, that story sort of—as—on its own, it sort of paints a very negative picture, but that's, like—that was a—a singular experience.

KM: Okay.

LM: You know, we like our neighbors a lot. [laughs] Yeah, that just came to mind because you were asking in sort of—in other—in other places, and I don't—that just—that just popped into my head. [chuckles]

KM: Are there any, like, other important events or turning points in your life that you've had?

LM: [sighs] Yeah, wow. So... I think taking on the role of Executive Director after I'd run the youth program for a few years was a really huge thing. I had—I think our community in central Pennsylvania is just really interesting, I'm—you know, I'm an outsider, I'm not from here. I mean, I've lived here for a while now, but I'm not from here, and I know that I've just learned a lot, of course, through doing this work, about different efforts in the past and kind of the way that the Center sort of started up, and so—I guess I'm not sure where I was going with that, but...

KM: It's an important time, so.

LM: Yeah, yeah, so I—it's an exciting time to be doing work in the LGBT community, but I also saw a lot of volatility, like, with our—within our own community, and I always think of it as, you know—there's, like—there's so many townships in Pennsylvania, and so there's just, like, a million, like, local—local control situations, right? So I think that really seeps out into our community psychology, of, like, how we think of ourselves as a community or not, and so I think that's reflected in the LGBT community by us having so many different organizations. [laughs] And so historically, the Center was—like I said, incubated at the Community Foundation, and—over a long process of talking with different community stakeholders, which community—which included all the different community groups, and—I just think there was always a lot of infighting in our community, and—we had an Executive Director that lasted four months, and she came and—and left after four months, and it was really volatile, and I just—I perceived the community—I perceived leadership in the community as a volatile thing that I didn't want to be a part of. I just sort of wanted to do my work and not get caught up in any of that. [laughs]

KM: And then you got your position?

LM: Yeah, and so through this experience of having a previous Executive Director, you know—after she left, you know, I was the only employee again, and I was doing things like representing us publicly and doing fundraising and, you know, crafting our message and making decisions about programs, and—and so some of the folks in our—on our board said, you know—you know, “Do you want to take on this position? We want to offer it to you,” and I, you know, decided that I could do that, you know, “I’ve actually been doing some of the work,” and I know I had a lot to learn, but I decided to—to take on that challenge, which was just a big—a big thing. [laughs] And I feel like I’m still learning how to do it every day—you know, it’s a small—we’re—we’re a small—a small nonprofit. We have two staff now, as opposed to just the one, and we’re in this space, so we had been in a church office building on the third floor downtown for a long time when the Center and Common Roads merged—Common Roads became the youth program of the Center in 2009, and so we were just in an office at the Community Foundation, so we moved into their operation and—it was just not a community space. And so, you know, in 2000—in 2012, when I took—when I agreed to take on the role of executive director in what I previously perceived as a volatile community—[laughs] “Who would ever want to do that”—I said, “You know, we’re going to have a new strategic plan, and we’re going to move to a community center,” and I’m very proud that we did that, both of those things within that first year, so that’s—that’s when we had our first community center in—in Harrisburg. We moved in the summer of 2012, and now we have our programs that operate out of this space, and that led to the ability to start new programs, because we could actually invite people to a space. At the old place, we couldn’t—we couldn’t do that. There was a youth room, but it was—it was not a place people could park, it was not accessible in any way. It just wasn’t community space, and so I think that movement to just an actual space where people could see and get behind and say, “Yes, I can envision myself participating in programs in this space” was just really important.

KM: Well, it sounds like you helped kind of implement, like, some change for the Center?

LM: Sure, I’d like to think so. [chuckles]

KM: Are there any, like, challenges that remain?

LM: Yeah, for sure. I think that it’s a huge volunteer undertaking for anyone who’s involved in the Center, so unpaid staff—we only have one other paid staff—so we just can’t do all the work that needs to be done, so our board members or volunteers just commit a lot, you know, of—of time and energy and money to make sure that we can be here, and I think that—that’s challenging, because, you know, folks can burn out, and you know, we have folks who have limited—limited resources, limited capacity. And so that’s always going to be a challenge. Funding—funding this work, I think, is a really big challenge. We are driven mostly by individual donors, which is really exciting, because we are really of the community, but that’s also—that’s also a lot of work, and that’s also really challenging. So I think that, you know, the—the scale of what we’re trying to do, sort of in the face of limited resources, is always going to be a big challenge, but.

KM: So I think we touched upon a lot of the things on the list.

LM: Yeah.

KM: Do you have anything else that you feel like we've missed, or anything you feel like you wanna really, like, talk about that we hadn't gotten to?

LM: Yeah. I don't—I don't know. I feel like I spent so much time talking about Messiah, which is so interesting, 'cause it's just—I know it seems, historically, like an interesting—an important thing to talk about, but it's not—I don't think about it that much anymore. [laughs] I just sort of am beyond that. That's really interesting. I guess, on that note, I—I'd love to talk more about my interaction with the college since having graduated, if that's okay?

KM: Oh, yeah, that's really interesting. Yeah.

LM: So something that I used to do as sort of a—a little, I don't know, activism-ish kind of thing—was I would submit my work information to, like, the alumni magazine. [laughs] Just to sort of, you know—“We're here, we're queer” kind of thing. And I thought that this was very bold at the time. [both laugh] So I would do that, and of course, they would not publish it, and [laughs]—and so then I would just sort of wait and be—you know, kind of be a nice, patient person and—and say, “You know, I noticed that I keep submitting this, and it's not—it's not published in the...” And just sort of make the person at the other end of the email—probably some poor work study student, it's not even like an administrator or anything like, you know what I mean—but I would, you know, really—I was—I was interested in forcing them to answer, and to say why that was the case, and so, you know, sometimes I would get, “Oh my gosh, we get submissions from so many different angles, so if you just send an email to this address!” And it was like, “Oh, wow! Thank you! Okay, I'll do that.” [laughs] And so I would do that, but of course, it would never be in there, and I never expected it to be, and I also don't really care whether or not I'm in a dumb magazine. [laughs] It's like, it doesn't really matter to me, but it was sort of, like, the way that I was continuing to engage this topic, and so I really wanted them to think about it, I really wanted them not to just move on past the LGBT conversation because Equality Ride had happened and it was just, like, this thing that was over. I really wanted to keep that happening. And—and we were having this underground GSA that had formed meeting at our—our community house in Harrisburg, and so I was still really thinking about the students and wanting to make sure that I was sort of doing my part to—to change the world, right? So. [laughs] To make these folks kind of articulate to me and kind of have—have the boldness to at least say where you're coming from, instead of just trying to come off as a really nice, polite Christian. [laughs] So, you know, eventually, I—I mentioned something to some of our volunteers that I had been doing this and that they don't publish my name in the—in the thing, and she served on the board with the College President and said something to her—I didn't ask her to do that. [laughs]

KM: Oh, really!

LM: Yeah, but she sort of, I think, offhandedly said that, and I think probably the College President was pretty embarrassed, because I imagine that this happened in front of other people. [laughs] And so I got some outreach, and the person—the President—she reached out to me, she sent me a Facebook message, saying, “You know, my friend so-and-so told me that, you know,

this thing happened, and that you're upset about it, and I—I would hope, based on our past relationship, that you would come to me with any grievances, so if you ever want to talk about it, you know, let me know.” And I said, “Well, you can certainly understand that I don't feel totally connected to the College, but sure, I'll take you up on that, like, we can have a coffee and talk about that.” And so we did, and I sort of said, you know, [laughs] “When I was a student, the things we kept hearing were that, you know, this homosexual behavior policy was sort of like an alcohol policy, in that it's not saying that it's wrong to be gay, or that it's wrong to drink alcohol, but we're asking that you abstain from this behavior during the four years that you're here.” And so I said, “If that's the case, and I, as far as you know, followed these rules, like—how far does the long arm of Messiah reach out and govern my life now? Like, I—I'm using the skills and knowledge that I learned in my classes and in my experience at Messiah, and I take that to work with me, and I—I'm doing social justice work locally in the community.” So those are the sorts of questions that I was asking, and—you know, and she was very nice, very—she's a really kind person, and was saying, “So, I hear you—I understand—I know we have a policy about not publishing same-sex partners in the—in the magazine, but I don't know that we have a policy about publishing folks who work in the community, so I'll—I agree with you, and I'll see what we can do.” And of course nothing happened from there. [laughs]

KM: Oh, it didn't?

LM: So, I mean, I left feeling really positive, but—but nothing happened. And so, you know, I—I understand, like, the things that people say and that it has to do with, you know, trustees and funding and these kinds of big, institutional things that keep institutions the same, right? So, I get that, but it's not—I guess that's not enough for—for me to stop talking about it. Then a couple years later, there was a student who was in the news for having experienced some negative things on campus related to his—his being out. Which was just cool—

KM: In Messiah?

LM: Yeah, so for me to, you know, think about, like: “There's an out person who's kind of causing a stir!” But of course he didn't have a very positive experience [laughs] while—while being out—things like—he found his ID card, like, cut up and urinated on, and—things like that. And so—like, he was there on, like, a full tuition diversity scholarship, and—was in the news for, like, leaving that because his experience had been so bad, he didn't want free education there because of—because of his experience. So—

KM: Wow.

LM: And this just caused a lot of conversation, again, in the alumni community, in the campus community, I imagine—I wasn't there. But I got to [laughs] give some comments in the local media, which was just an interesting thing, to be talking about my—my experience and the experience from other people that I've—you know, that I've heard from about what we want to change, and—a friend of mine had this idea to start an—like, an online petition to change, and so I agreed to work with her on that and sort of formed this little online community called “Inclusive Alumni,” and we had a bunch of folks sign up their name and class year and a message, and I forget how many people we got to do it, but it was sort of interesting. There was

a Messiah alumni Facebook group, and somebody commented—somebody from the administration commented about local news, you know: “This is happening in the news, we’re aware of it”—whatever sort of institution-speak that they were doing to get out in front of it, but then when I saw that, I got—I got the idea—it occurred to me that if I posted something, like, everyone would see it, so I posted a link to the—which, obviously, it just, you know, hadn’t occurred to me until I saw that, and I thought, “Oh my gosh, they’re bringing the conversation to Facebook, like, you know, I could just post the link to our petition,” and that started a whole thing. But that helped us reach people from other classes, and so—people were coming out and sharing their stories through this little comment field that we had on the website, talking about how—how amazing it is that there’s—that they feel a sense of community with the Messiah community, that they feel like there are others. I had people privately message me on Facebook saying that—one person messaged—I’ll never forget this. One person messaged me from a different country—he lived overseas—and said, “Thanks for what you and everyone are doing on the petition and on the visibility. I can’t sign it because, even though I don’t go there anymore and live in a different country, I still just don’t want to put my name out there and be associated with the school, and I don’t—I just am afraid for, you know, the backlash, and I—I’m just not out enough to do that, but thank you for—for doing this.” [laughs]

KM: So that person—was that person—did that person identify as—?

LM: Sure, right, yeah. So this was a gay—a gay person, who said, “Hi, I’m—you know, I went to school with you, I don’t know if you remember me, but I’m gay. I live in a different country now. I just want to say thanks for doing this. I’m not going to sign the petition, because I—I’m not out enough to put my name on it, but—just thanks for—for bringing this conversation to the public.” And so...

KM: That must have felt really good.

LM: Yeah! It was—I mean—and things like that, you know—to me, like, I—I eventually came to a place where I don’t really care what Messiah does. [laughs] Like, I really want students there to be safe and to not have negative experiences coming out or being out or being completely, authentically themselves, and—and not facing violence or any sort of negative things for—for being LGBT, but—but, like, I’m not gonna be a big cheerleader for the College if they do change their policy. [laughs] I mean, I just—I’m past that. I’m—I kind of—I feel like they’ve had their chance, and I do want them to change so that—but wanting students to—who are LGBT and who are there to have good experiences and wanting people who are still really suffering from the effects of being part of a non-affirming faith community, you know, I—that kind of brings me back always to the conversation, but I—otherwise I definitely don’t wanna be—be connected. But—but that was a great experience of hearing from somebody how—how this was important to them that we were doing this work.

KM: So they had no response to the petition and all that stuff.

LM: I mean, we—I mean, I think—I always sort of knew that it wasn’t gonna result in any direct change. I think that what’s gonna happen eventually is that these kinds of schools are going to become obsolete, as a new generation of people is wanting to have a Christian college

experience, but to them that doesn't mean that it's wrong to be LGBT. And so I think that there's a lot of people who are growing up like that. And so I think that eventually people are—these institutions are just going to have to change, or they're gonna have to not exist. How long that takes, you know, I don't know, but I personally think that that could be a great market if you were the only one—if you were the only evangelical Christian school in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities to be accepting—

KM: Oh.

LM: I feel like people would really want to be part of that.

KM: There isn't?

LM: No, I mean, there's no...

KM: Oh.

LM: There's different conversations happening at different places at—at different levels and in different ways, some better than others. But I—I mean, maybe that's naïve of me, but I sort of think that there's a market for that one where people who—not necessarily are LGBT, but people who just don't want to go to a place where [laughs]—where they, you know, part of the rules are that you can't be involved in homosexual behavior. [laughs] It just sounds so icky. But I think that they're—I like to think that, that there could be a good market for that. [laughs]

KM: I think so too.

LM: That's not how other people think. [laughs]

KM: No, I hope so. I hope so. So I think that's all. Like, if you have anything else to add?

LM: [shakes head] No, I feel like I've done a lot of talking about myself, so. [laughs]

KM: Some good talking. Do you have any material for the LGBT community that you might share with us? I know you work here, so you probably have donated.

LM: Yeah, I don't have anything right now. I—I've been—as we—any time we go through documents and old stuff, we always have a—like a—a trash box, an LGBT History Project box, and a “keep here” box. So we're always giving—we're always giving new stuff, and—actually, now that I'm talking about it, I really should try to track down some—some Messiah-related archives for the archives, but—since I work here, that's always on my mind, so. [laughs]

KM: Yes. Yeah, I'm sure you'll get to it.

LM: Sure.

KM: Do you know of any others that you think we should contact and interview?

LM: Yeah! [laughs]

KM: So...

LM: Yeah, I do. Yeah, and this is something that I'm kind of always telling people about.

KM: Do you want...

LM: Is it—do you need to get it on camera?

KM: You can tell us, like, afterwards, if you'd like, or—I don't know if you want the names on record, but.

LM: Sure, I mean, I—I sort of have a pipe dream of having a whole, like, bunch of Messiah alumni telling their stories about—about what they've done on campus and in the community, so.

KM: Yeah, I think that'd be cool. Like, maybe you could email, probably, the names?

LM: Sure, I can do that, yeah.

KM: And then I'll make sure—

LM: We have an underground, like, Facebook group, too—

KM: Yeah.

LM: Like, a secret Facebook group, so I'll post—

KM: And then they'll just get contacted. Of course, like, it's all volunteer, so it's not, like, an obligation.

LM: Right.

KM: But if they're interested, that would be really great.

LM: Yeah, absolutely.

KM: Okay, so if you could just sign this consent form. [hands LM a paper]

LM: Yeah, great. [starts writing]

KM: And just, like, put all your information.

LM: That was really fun. Thanks for interviewing me.

KM: Thank you for being so, like, willing to talk. You were very open.

LM: Is it...29th.