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Interviewer: Lonna Malmshemer
Interviewee: Brian Patchcoski
Date of Interview: July 2, 2014
Location of Interview: Carlisle, Pennsylvania
Transcriber: Sara Tyberg

Abstract:

Brian Patchcoski was born in Scranton Pennsylvania, brought up in a very strong Irish, German, and Polish Roman Catholic family. Brian progressed through high school, working for a Catholic church for 10 years and expecting to go into the priesthood until he left the Diocese of Scranton to get his education at the University of Scranton and Penn State, then continuing on to work at Penn State for five years. Afterward, Brian was the Director of the Office of LGBTQ Services for Dickinson College for two years, then accepting a position as Associate Dean of Students and Director of the LGBT Resource Center at Cornell University. In this interview, Brian discusses his journey managing himself, his sexuality, and his religion. He also discusses how he became involved in social work for the LGBT community in college, how supportive faculty influenced his development, and how he has handled the challenges of educating within largely rural, conservative areas. For the future, Brian hopes we will remember the important strides made by past advocates while acknowledging how much farther we need to go to achieve equality. He also praises the LGBT History Project, hoping it will continue to reveal marginalized voices in Central Pennsylvania.

LM: I am Lonna Malmshemer, and you are Brian Patchcoski, and we are here to have a little history interview for the LGBT History Project that— [mumbles, cellphone rings]

BP: It's on the—it's in the bag. Laying on your bag. [laughs]

LM: It doesn't matter, but the project has been going for about two years. We're trying to get a historical record of the experience of LGBT people here, actually I think probably I would say post-World War II.

BP: Yeah.

LM: But of course, things have changed dramatically in that period of time. So, we're gonna start at a pretty remote place.

BP: Your phone—your phone is just behind you.

LM: Oh, that's all right. And that is, I want to talk to you about your family origin and about your growing up and about your schooling before college and what kind of connections you had in your family of origin in your early development. Now you can take that as you want and I'll

prompt you, I'll have questions as we go along, but we don't have a standard sort of... we want to go with the person. Ok? So, where were you born and when and so forth?

BP: Sounds good. So, I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, so northeastern Pennsylvania early 80s, and so I think being in Scranton area, for me, a lot of my developments—my family is very Roman Catholic, so my identity was brought up very Christian-centric, Roman Catholic ideologies. And so, you know, I had very strong grandparents. My father's parents, very Polish—first generation Polish parents, and wonderful people. Very strong-willed. And then also my mother's parents were Irish and German, but did not talk to the German ideology very much, but talked very strongly about the Irish background, and I think those pieces were really influential, I think in that area, I think the nationality pieces, the ethnicity pieces in northeastern Pennsylvania were huge. I grew up on Polish food with my one set of grandparents and the Irish meat and potatoes on the other side, but then along the religion piece.

LM: Great food.

BP: Oh, it's wonderful food! It's not very healthy food on either side, I'm like—calories were never, I think, accounted for in that—in growing up. Lots of grease and oil, but it was—it's—that's what made it really wonderful—and cabbage.

LM: Noodles and—

BP: Exactly. Everything was just wonderfully—

LM: Golumpki. [laughs]

BP: It's good! And you know, I think—I'm glad that I can do a few of those things, still, but my sister has taken on the fresh, homemade perogie making and all of that stuff, so that—the traditions live on, even though my grandparents are all deceased. I think growing up in northeastern Pennsylvania, though, it was a very... I think people thought they were open, I think the faith communities that I was brought up in thought they were open, but they really weren't as I grew up. I think going on through elementary school to public elementary, public middle school, public high school—while my cousins went to Catholic school, so we were the outcasts in the family, that we went to public school, because my parents wanted us to have a different interaction and didn't feel like the Catholic schools in the area were giving as a holistic or well-rounded education. And I think I tend to believe it. In terms of just the diversity and the interactions that I was able to have in those environments. They were influential, but growing up into middle school into high school, went to church all the time with my family. Ended up working for a Catholic church for over 10 years, and working in the Catholic church eventually I—my path led me into the discernment process for the Catholic priesthood. So, during middle

school through high school was really on the path thinking I was going to be a Roman Catholic priest. Went through the discernment process, was accepted into the seminary towards the later end of high school, started doing seminary weekends and doing that work... and then, it was towards the end of high school right when I was going into—it would have been college area—I was transitioning in full-time seminary status was informed that the seminary I was at, St. Pious the 10th in Dalton, Pennsylvania, was closing. There weren't enough priests. And the reason why I went into the priesthood—or wanted to go into the priesthood—was really because of the community-building, the relationships from birth until death that we really fostered within those community environments, and I think it was that ministry that I felt called to—and, you know, during this time, I was also doing hospice work, I was working in a long-term care facility, and I think those are areas that I think eventually I might go back to. The hospice population is huge for me, I think doing this with LGBT communities eventually is a place I want to do this with, and I think this—I think this is all part of the journey, and I think going through this when the seminary was up for closure, the Diocese—the Diocese of Scranton that I was with gave us the option. They said that you can continue with the program or you can go and do your undergraduate work and graduate work wherever you want it. And so I went and kept the option open. I visited the seminary they were transferring all the seminarians to—was St. Charles Borromeu in Philadelphia. Went and took my parents who are really, really close people in my life, my mother especially—we went in, and my mother wasn't allowed to go past the front vestibule area, because she was a woman. So, I was coming from this seminary that was very liberal-minded, very open, very embracing to a seminary that was very conservative, very dogmatic and ideological of certain traditions within the Catholic church, and I think that was just such a trigger and a moment that I just could not—when my mother wasn't allowed to tour with me, it was an instant "no" in my mind. And there was also priests in the Diocese that I was very close with that kept saying, "Don't go there." And they wouldn't give me reasons, but they said don't go there. So, in the end, I made up my mind, and I said I wasn't going to go. I declined the program and then finished my studies at a Catholic Jesuit institution, the University of Scranton, for my undergraduate work. Went in thinking that I really was still going to be a priest. Was still doing theology, philosophy, and math, 'cause I like math, and it was just fun, and after a while, I had a counselor and academic advisor/counselor say, "Why don't you take this counseling class? You have another elective free." And it happened that I loved this class, but it was in that class that I had a professor challenge me that you could be LGBT and religious. And, during this time, I knew in my mind since middle school that I was gay. The priesthood thing I wasn't hiding from it, it was just—I didn't feel the sexuality piece was something that I was gonna embrace. I felt more so that I was going to be—I wanted to be ministering to people, I wanted to do this, and then the other piece wasn't really important at that point. And so this professor, who she knows—she was this person to this day—that she started challenging me, and I was at every office hour at every appointment to challenge her with my rhetoric that no, the Catholic church says no, you can't do this, and I'm doing this, and it just can't happen. At this

point, she—I did not disclose I was gay at this point, but I think she had a pretty good notion that I was—eventually came out to her, and she was one of the first people I came out to.

LM: So it was a struggle for you?

BP: Oh, yes. It was a tremendous struggle, and I think going back, one of things I didn't say was when I was in middle school, one of the things that my mother had said was, probably the most—probably the hardest thing for a mother, or for her, to experience is if one of her children were gay or lesbian. So, I held that through middle school, through high school, and I knew that I couldn't—I couldn't say anything, and that my family was so very strictly conservative Catholic that it was just—I couldn't say it, and... I think even my father's brother who's gay—he's HIV positive, had a very long—he still—he's I think facing some more recent challenges with his status, but I think he was never embraced, and I knew that as a person in the family, so watching that and knowing that throughout my life was just—it was something that I carried with me, and I think I know, eventually—I was eventually really out at my undergraduate institution, but very closed at home. So, I was playing the two lives, and things that I think undergraduate students still do today, but I think playing those dual lives—on campus, I backed away from my faith, I backed away from my religion, I gave up on that, because I couldn't find a place in the Catholic church that I could be this. During my time at the undergraduate institution I had a priest call me a faggot in a theology class, because I was then out on campus, but it was okay, because he was a priest. [chuckles] I also had a priest in confessions or reconciliation tell me that I just need to pray this away, and after awhile, I kept getting these messages, but I felt like I could be this—I still felt like God was in my life, but that religion wasn't—that church was not right for me at that time. So, after awhile during undergrad, I, you know, was then challenging administration as—at the University of Scranton of the 28 Jesuit or Catholic universities in the U.S., they are one of the most conservative, and that's because of the ties to the Diocese of Scranton, which is also ultimately more conservative than other Diocese. So, looking at that, anything in terms of moving forward with support for LGBT communities wasn't there. I had administrators behind closed doors tell me, “I support you, but I can't support you outside of these doors, because I'll be fired.” I had faculty who I knew were LGBT behind closed doors, but couldn't be LGBT outside of those doors, because they weren't tenured. I also had tenured faculty who were LGBT who wouldn't say anything about their identity, because they were still afraid of being dismissed by the college universities. So, all of those messages were really hard, and as a student, I figured, “What could they do?” They wanted my money for tuition, so started challenging a bit, eventually secured an external grant to do diversity work on campus, and it was really good publicity for the university, but it wasn't so good publicity, because they had to do it. So, it was more of a rebel thing, which was kind of fun. I think the grant itself was really nice in that it was starting conversations around diversity, and we had planned to bring in a speaker who was going to talk on gay Christianity and LGBT issues in Christianity. We thought it was a nice fit for the institution type but also this issue that no one was talking about. The only discussion about this

was in the women's center after hours in the dark, pretty much—and that was unsatisfactory to me. So, we thought this speaker was going to be helpful. A day before his arrival, the university canceled his contract, he wrote a huge article in the New York Times about the university and how they canceled the contract, which was not very fun for the university, but as a whole, they were not moving forward.

LM: Let me ask, you got this grant to do this work... how did you know you could get a grant and how did the institution know that you were applying for it?

BP: [chuckles] So, they encouraged leadership experiences, and I think, you know, I... one of the things that I think I've done throughout my career and my own development is—I like working with in-systems to challenge systems, and I think this is what I did during that period. I had administrators and faculty behind the scenes, behind those closed doors saying, "Did you see this opportunity? Not saying that I'm supporting this opportunity, but you should really look into this." And, "oh, let me review that grant proposal for you," or "let me do this"—wonderful people. Still people I go back with and we do breakfast with them whenever I'm town, because it's just—it's those people who were able to work from behind the scene where they could and knew that they could make the change. Yes, I was used, but I think it was a good utilization! [laughs] And I think that those opportunities, that grant stuff, really started moving things forward, and it wasn't them doing it, but it was them doing it.

LM: What would that—what time—where—when? When would that be?

BP: Late—early 2000s and late 90s, yeah. And that was—I think this—and I think Scranton is still a very conservative area.

LM: Now, I was going to go back to that, because you started out saying you grew up in an area that thought it was open.

BP: Yeah, I think thinking it was open—and I think that's some of the mentality, I think, you know, there is this mentality that we welcome everyone, you know, we're close to New York City, we're only an hour and 30 minutes outside of New York. It is really kind of a second home for many people that live in New York or work in New York City during the week, and then live in Scranton/Poconos region of the state for the rest of that time, and I think... I think a lot of beliefs are that people bring back that liberal mentality, that is a big city, into the area—I don't think so, I think in reality is that they're not there half the time, but their children are or the people that are living with them are, and they don't really engage with the community, and there's still a lot of—even though it's changing more recently is I think generations are—unfortunately passing away, but the ethnicity pieces, the nationality pieces—churches are on every corner. Now granted, churches are closing on every other corner, but they were on every

corner. Growing up, we would go to church—we would go to Wednesday night services during Lent, we would be doing all—there'd be all of the special fish fries on Fridays. It was that ingrained nationality that ingrained commitment to religion that was in that area that I think had some really strong kind of parameters of how we welcome the other. What does that look like? Who really is the other we're welcoming? We're welcoming white Christian straight people who look like an ordinary family. We're not welcoming other people outside of that, although we have it in our mission statement, are we really welcoming people? It—and I don't think that was happening, and I—I think some of it is changing with a lot of the national kind of changing pieces and some of the global changing pieces, but... I think, you know, there are still some really strong tendencies to hold onto that in that area. Will it continue to change? I think so, and I think it will continue to evolve. The university itself has continued to evolve since I left, but there's still the student group—eventually, right before I left, we applied for non-profit status for the student group, because they wouldn't allow us to have an LGBT student group on campus... they had funding so we started a non-profit with faculty and some administrators in the community, which was really fun for the university, too. But it still exists. And, that group has been able to force some change at the university, think about how they're welcoming LGBTQ individuals. Are they perfect? Far from that. I think right before this interview, I had a conversation with a form—a student who's at the university now. We've been in touch lots, and they're dealing with the same issues I dealt with when I was there. Same administration and administrators are in place who I knew. They would say that they're the most affirming people in the world, but behind the scenes, I knew what they were saying, because I was friends with their staff assistants who told me what they said. [laughs] So, we knew who the closeted case people who really didn't support this work, and they're still there, and they've risen up to bigger titles, and I think it's really unfortunate, but I think during that whole time, I think that as much as the community was conservative, I think it was that conservative mindset that helped me grow. So, I think looking back—

LM: Say how—what you mean there.

BP: Yeah, I think for me, especially in terms of the Christian religious and spirituality realm, I backed away from my faith for awhile, but I think there was something missing in my life after awhile. My mother was this woman who wanted me to make sure I had a bulletin if I went on Sunday—if I didn't have a bulletin, she knew I didn't go to church. So, I figured out a system that I would go into the cathedral, pick up the bulletin in the back—because it happened that they put them out at 11:55 [am]—grabbed it, went to lunch with my friends, went shopping for a bit, and went home, and said, this is what it was. And because I was in the seminary, I knew which gospel was being read, so [laughs] I could easily preach my own sermon. So, I think... but at that point, there was something missing for me, so I started church hopping a bit. And I was taking grad school classes early at the university in community counseling. And one of the projects was really take yourself to somewhere that you haven't been. And because I had been so Christian-

centric, I wanted to explore Catholic-centric, especially. I wanted to start exploring, and I used the project as this exploration piece, and I started church hopping to a bunch of churches in the area, and seeing what fit and what didn't fit for me. There were some churches that I left as soon as I walked in, because although they said they were welcoming on their websites or whatever else, or people said they were welcoming, no one even said hello when you walked in the door. There was—so the one church I ended up entering in was an Episcopal church, and I walked in the doors, and it was this weekend where... there was a new rector, a new person being installed as the chief priest for the church, and I walk in, and this guy says, Hello, welcome! How are you?" and "I'm Peter, and feel free to go take a seat wherever, we're glad to have you here, blah blah blah etc." I go in and sit in the pew, and two seconds later, this guy's tapping me on the back who was sitting two pews behind me, and says, "I'm Greg, I'm Peter's partner! Great to have you here." And in my mind, I made the connection that Peter was the priest, Greg just said he's Peter's partner, and the church has to know about this. Like, this is awkward. Are you the same Peter? Like, Peter-Greg? It was, for me, like—to be in a church where that was scene, I was totally dumbfounded, because I had not found a place where I saw someone who was doing this religious or spiritual work being very out and open, and seeing someone else's partner being out and open and gay in this setting. And, so it was totally—I think I left there very quiet at the end of the service, because I was still processing. Went back, continued to go back. Met some really great community members. Met one—I'm still in touch with most of the people in the congregation, but one of the members there was a former nun who is an out and open lesbian, and very committed to her faith, but couldn't do the Catholic church anymore. She's—she—I think there are so stories within that environment where people were challenged with the conservative pieces where they couldn't be their whole selves, and that that I think challenged me to find something that allowed me to be my whole self. Same thing at the university where the real Catholic dogma wasn't allowing me to embrace all parts of myself. It's we love the sinner, but not the sin. I couldn't put up with that anymore. I think knowing the doctrine of Catholic bishops and what they had—the statement of Catholic bishops at the time had said was really love the sinner, don't love the sin. I think I couldn't reconcile myself to be in those spaces where I wasn't fully embraced. And after awhile, I started doing consulting work for churches and thinking about hospitality, and what is hospitality? So, I said about those mission statements, thinking about, so if you're saying you're welcoming people of color into a space, but you don't have anyone in your space, there's a problem. Or you're saying that your congregating is going, but every time a young person walks into a congregation, do you even say hello? And if you're not, what is that saying to that young person? Are they welcome? Not so much. So, I think after a while, I started doing some of that work and found a really cool niche where I could do some of the LGBT work that I started to do, but also do some of the religion and spirituality work that I continued to do. Shortly after the university I was working at—College Misericordia which is now University Misericordia, and their diversity institution, and so their institute did trainings, education, programs for businesses, hospitals, colleges, universities, etc... social service agencies, mental health agencies, general diversity work and ended—I worked with them. I also

led their multi-cultural camp over the summer. And doing that work was—set me on a different path. It was still—so I'll still say that the work that I do today is a form of a ministry. In that my work did not—although I ended—started in the seminary, it was a—a start that led me to do the work that I'm doing now. I'm still serving student populations, faculty/administration populations... I think what students bring to me on a daily basis is similar work to what I would've been doing as a priest at certain points, trying to make connections, support them in any way I can, allow them to find connections, whatever those connections might be. I still see this work as a piece of ministry, and I think that journeys have a weird way of working. And I think working at the diversity institute and then seeing that I wanted to do more of this work. I ended up switching—going into the graduate program at Penn State, studying higher ed but also sexuality and gender studies, and that was where my Master's work was in.

[video cuts]

LM: Okay, so before we go to your graduate work, when did you come out to your parents?

BP: So, yes, that's a fun kind of conversation, I think. During—like I said, I was not very out at home during undergrad, but then I was really out on campus. I think for me, it was—it was when I started doing the work for the consulting for churches. I actually came out to my mother from a pulpit. [laughs] And, which is really an interesting thing. My mother was really interested in knowing the diversity work that I was doing, and wanted to come hear me speak at one of these congregations that I was doing this work at, and now my mother to venture out into non-Catholic church was huge, so it wasn't a Catholic church we were in. So she came, and right before she came, I called her and I said, "Mom, I know you've known things," and I think she knew very well who I was. And, I said, "I know you know things, but I know—you're going to hear things that may have not been confirmed for you in the past from my—kind of conversations with the community today. I need you to accept this at this point, and if you can't be there, I understand, but I really need you to accept it or I think, you know, I'm more than open to having this conversation." I think my heart was beating full fast and it was—and I didn't know if she was going to come. She ended up coming that day. She brought my older sister and my brother-in-law who are also very super Catholic. And, my nephew and—my two nephews at that point were in the church, and I think it was being up at that pulpit was probably the hardest thing I think I've ever—one of the hardest conversations or kind of lecture/sermon kind of things that I've ever had to give, because they were in the front pew. And, looking at that, I had no idea what the reaction would be at the end of the conversation. For her to still come after I gave her that phone call was huge for me, but then afterward, she came up to me, it was like a coffee hour and chat with the congregation, and she came up, and she said, "Great job!" We didn't really talk about anything gay, but it was at least. It was okay that she was still talking to me. My father, on the other hand, has been a person that—so my father's a cop, he's been a cop for 30-some years, originally started off his education to be an English teacher, didn't ever get a position, has a master's in

English, has the best police reports ever. [laughs] But, has loved doing his police work for 30 years. Very masculine, traditionally masculine, stereotypically masculine man. And, I said—I always say that he licensed to carry a gun and licensed to shoot, so I'm like, that always scared me. And knowing that it is his brother who is the out and gay man living with HIV, he has never been fully accepting of his brother, so knowing that has always challenged me to tell him outright. So, eventually, it was my current partner, Greg, there was a point where Greg and I had been dating probably two years, and my father knew that Greg was always over, and it was the point where my mother already knew, but my father had never heard the words from my mouth. It took that point to really—after being with Greg for so long, he got it. And Greg I think has been the only partner that I've ever had that he talks about sports with, talks about everything with, and I have no interest. [laughs] So, I love going to games if I can be present. Watching them on tv is not really exciting for me, but he can talk to Greg about that. He shares like, his soul where he doesn't share anything. As a cop, I think—and I think you see this with cops who have been in the profession for so long, they lose pieces of their identity. They really become blank, and at the end of their careers, they really—they've seen so much of the really bad parts of humanity, they really lose parts of themselves. And I think, he shares parts of himself with Greg that I've never seen him share with anyone. So I think that has been more of a he's okay with this than anything else that he could have ever said to me, and he's not an emotional man. He doesn't have emotions. He would never say—I think this is the same thing with my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law, he never said, "Welcome to the family!" Never any of those things. But, if you know that he talks to you and he engages with you, that's an okay and you're accepted. And I think of my siblings, I'm one of the ones my father relies on for most of the financial pieces and many of those things moving forward. So I think that's been a really good affirmative piece, because I don't think I'll ever heard my father say, "Yes, I'm fully on board with this, this is who you are." But I think it's taken him awhile to get to the point that he's totally okay with Greg and I, he loves both Greg and I. Makes sure that Greg, when we're at the beach as a family or whatever else, that Greg is you know, doing everything that everyone else is doing. So i think those pieces were really hard. My siblings—my sister was in the congregation that day. She struggled with it. I think my older sister at one point told me that I could never be a godparent to my nieces and nephews, because they would become gay as well. She has her doctorate in child psychology and that was fun. I think, for me, I was questioning every theoretical thing, everything in my mind—psychology-based, counseling-based, social work-based of how can you be saying this as a child psychologist working with children who are suffering with this, and really trying—suffering with this decision to tell people and to really live their lives, and I think it was after awhile that I—you know, Greg and I had been together now seven, eight years, and I think looking at that, it's changed her perception. My uncle, I think came out at a time, where I think the way some gay expressed was very different. I think also they've always linked, because of his status—HIV status, they linked that every gay man would have HIV or be living with AIDS. And I think [shakes head] that's not true, and I think some of those stereotypes have been beaten down a bit by Greg and I living our lives and who we are, and I think Greg and I are

different from my uncle. I think expectations, just personality-wise, we're different people. So, I think that's allowed them to think about LGBT issues in a different way. But it's taken time. I think after a while now, she calls me if she has clients where, you know, especially trans clients, and she can't help or direct them or even some of her colleagues in social work and mental health stuff, calling me for resources and trying to figure out who's the best person to connect them with. What's that stuff? But getting to that point has taken several years. My older brother at first, who has changed fully after a while, had originally said it was just because—I was gay because my father didn't hunt and fish enough with me. My older brother always went hunting and killed Bambi. I couldn't kill Bambi. My brother can. [laughs] I would fish, but I think he just said, "Well, it's because he never took you out into the woods like that and everything," and for me, I'm like, "I—it just wasn't me. I'm not going to freeze my butt off in the middle of winter. You're nuts." [laughs] So, eventually, I think he's been able to reconcile the same thing, and seen and working through it, and I think Greg and I, living our lives as open books, just—not just my work, but my personal life as well, I think. I want people to be able to see who we are, and I think that's allowed people to engage with us in different ways. My younger sister has always been okay, very similar to the LGBT stereotype, "Well, you're gay. Let's go shopping. How does my dress look?" She's still unrealistic in some of those things, but at least that was a good reaction. I can deal with that. But, over time, I think all of their reactions have changed. I think even with the Equal—Pennsylvania Marriage Equality pieces recently, they know Greg and I want kids. We want to adopt. We want to do those things. They know that we are going to get married at some point. But I think they've all been much more supportive after a while. Greg's parents as a whole really struggled at first, too. I think looking at his story, I think when Greg and I first met, he wasn't out to his family. When he told them, his mother—who's really close to her verdict (?), and his father on the other side, was—became his best friend and advocate. It took his mom several years, and then, we met when Greg finished up his graduate work, and I think it was probably one of the most nerve wracking points in my life again, because we knew that we both were petrified of each other. His mother and me, even know I do this work professionally, I was petrified of her. At the end, I think, we now are probably—we text each other, we're best friends, but it's taken so long for people to see. And this I think is paralleling the rest of the journey, too, and the journey of LGBT folks as a whole. People need to see the authentic lives we live, and be able to connect with us and I think that's been the biggest piece of my work as a person, as a human being, is just letting people see us for who we are. And that has changed the hearts and minds of others. Coming out to my family and all those pieces. Those have been really hard times, and I think it still centers around the conservative mindset of religion at times, and just the religious mindsets that have paralleled in Pennsylvania, and Greg's from Minnesota. There's a lot of religious pieces in there, as well. So, over time, those things changed, and I think going to graduate school, working really directly on sexuality and gender issues, doing research in those areas, working—my faculty mentor and research advisor was doing some of the top level LGBT research at the time, and I think working with her and being out, really out and open in these spaces was helpful to my own identity development. It pushed me beyond any comfort

level I thought I'd ever be at. And kept me going, and I think that was work where, you know, also the development of working with college students came from and really, they're at this time—and I think high school and college students, that journey into the college or university setting, when they are just coming out or coming out or now they are out, how do they make those connections and continue being open and honest wherever they need to be at that point in their lives? So, I think the graduate work, going to Penn State, outside of—you know, coming from College Misericordia at that time. You know, I went into—I started working at Penn State's LGBT Resource Center at that time, and while I was doing my graduate studies and research, it was an awesome environment, but it was also Central Pennsylvania still. I tell this story of, you know, when I was searching for an apartment when I first moved to State College. I went in, and I asked about—so State College as a whole has protective ordinances for LGBT folks when they're renting or buying property. Outside of State College, they don't. So I was living outside of State College, and you can be evicted at any time if they find out you're LGBT. And, there was several cases of it happening in State College, and, so, you know, going to these places, I was warned by my faculty advisor, "Just be careful, ask them questions to make sure you don't get into something later." I ended up in a really good apartment complex, but there were people that I think. It was shock. Even though Pennsylvania is Pennsylvania and everything in this state, I thought, would be similar. Going to State College from Scranton was even a much more conservative mindset. There was the confederate flag on people's trucks, there was gun racks everywhere, and I think, for me, that petrified me. My neighbor downstairs at my apartment complex had the confederate flag, and a gun rack, and this dog that looked like it could eat someone, and... turned out after awhile, after I had to jump his car for him, he turned out to be a nice man. But all of my internal triggers were, "Oh my god, what am I doing?" and I need to be careful of who I am and what I'm doing, and what—what this place is. And I think, you know, being at Penn State, it really challenged me again to think about this work—this work from a conservative area and the value of this work in a conservative—sometimes area that this work the most. I think, you know, doing the work at Penn State and then, going on after I finished my graduate work at Penn State and working at Penn State professionally in their center as the assistant director—looking at the violence, the abuse, the bias that students, faculty, and staff experience in State College walking down the street of College Ave or Beaver Ave. I think those streets, main thoroughfares of the college community, but... Greg and I would never go, and God forbid, hold hands in that area. I wouldn't walk closely to him, especially after dark. If those are areas that are still—I knew students who were beat up, just because it may have been two women walking closely together, but they were just supporting each other, because they were coming home from a party or... they were beat, because their style was too good. And I think those pieces petrified me at certain points. There was a strong [clears throat]—there was a strong LGBT presence, but I think, as a whole, it was—it's still a hard place. I think as much as we're changed policy and procedure, state, national government... the small mindsets are still there. The small pockets of rural geography are still there. We're here in Carlisle, same thing. I think Greg and I, eventually we moved out to Port Matilda. We moved into a more rural area outside

of State College, but we lived where there was no neighbors. Our closest neighbor was a few acres away, but that was so—it was wonderful for us. The only thing is after dark, you would here people practicing their guns. [laughs] Gunshots. But, there was still a sense of safety for us in that we could go there, there wasn't anyone around, there wasn't going to be anyone to bother us. There was perks of that, but I think also one of the things—one of the most pertinent experiences was I had to go and pick up certified mail at the post office in Port Matilda. I walked in, dressed as I usually would, probably in like a button-down and a pair of khakis, and my hair styles have changed lots, and I like playing with people's mentalities at some points, but learning that when you're in a conservative geographical area, at times it's not always good. Walking into the post office, there was all these people gathering. It was like the community gathering spot, and internally, these triggers are still going off, you know, inside, like, "Oh, there's all these guys. They're bigger. They look rough. I don't know if I should actually even be going in." I walk in, walk to the counter, the person at the counter says, "Boy, you're not from around here, are you?" And I'm like, "Oh, great. This is wonderful. Nope, just give me my package, and I want to get out of here." And as I'm leaving, they're closing off the exit, there's people standing in my way, and I'm—I think I'm pa—I push through and got in my car and never went back. My directive to the post office was: I don't care what you have to deliver, where you have to deliver it, I'm never going back. And I think that was—I think that was another true sign that this work was so needed in those areas, and I—you know, sometimes I think when you're doing this work, you can get lost in that, but I think lost in that, it's hopeless. You're never going to change people. But I think there's also—there's such a lack of education and awareness at times in those communities that has to happen at some point. Unfortunately, it may be you by living your life that you're doing that work, but I think... doing this work in New York City and doing this work in conservative, sometimes Central Pennsylvania is so different, but I think the value and the work that I've been able to do in these—this area has been tremendously valuable and profoundly powerful and such a privilege that I can't say enough about. And I can't even—I can't justify in words how powerful this work has been. And just, in my own development, my own life, continually I think Penn State for me was a primer for coming to Dickinson. I knew what I was—where I was going and what I was going into. And I think looking at State College, I didn't think Carlisle was going to be significantly different. I think moving to this area, I thought, you know, I knew that I could make—I knew I do an office. I knew I could make an office happen.

LM: So you came straight from graduate school to this work?

BP: Well, I stayed on. So, I finished graduate school at Penn State, and then I worked professionally for about five-six years at Penn State, so I was the assistant director there. So, worked, finished research, and then I also—so as I was assistant director, I was still doing research on the side with my research advisor, so it was kind of nice to continue doing that work, and I think also while I was at Penn State, I did a lot of work with NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association], the athletes, and so, I led one of their research studies with my former

research advisor on student athlete climate and what it was like to be an LGBT student athlete. What does that look like and what are the experiences—where are the silences in their lives? So much in that arena. Granted, it's been changing pretty quickly right now and policy and everything has been changing, but just thinking about some of that study and how it's informed some of trans policy in athletics has been really, really exciting to watch. I think—during that time, I also did a benchmarking study up and down the East Coast of universities offerings of LGBT work for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. And that work, it was amazing to look at somehow... looking at where you think conservative, sometimes Central Pennsylvania could be, whereas going down to like, Georgia or going down even below—farther down in the south—you know, looking at South Carolina, Carolina, looking at those areas and thinking, "Oh my gosh, Pennsylvania is actually progressive, compared to these areas, and you look at staff or faculty that I was meeting with during that research thing, and listening to their stories were so powerful and informative my future work. I think their stories of saying that this is what I can do with the power that I'm given, and this is what I've been able to do. And not judging them or saying this is bad, but they were doing what they could do in their environment, and I think that has allowed me—has given me so much respect for the ability to work within the structures and systems that a person is in, but it also is given me a full realization of how different the U.S. is. Geographically, mindset, and I think that's informed my work. What—so, when I left Penn State and had the opportunity to come to Dickinson, I think, I wasn't sure where we were gonna go. I had no idea, I started hearing lots of different stories, and I knew there'd been a history—I think your name, Lonna, was one of the first that came up. You need to speak to Lonna. Like, you need to talk to Lonna. And we did. We had Thai food. [laughs] And I think the stories and—I knew it wasn't going to be perfect. And I knew we had issues—we still have issues. I think Dickinson has so much farther to grow, but I feel like I'm leaving this place different than when I started with this place, and I'm happy that the changes we were able to make in the time that I was here, and I'm also happy that we've been able to honor some of the history and call out some of that history.

LM: Okay, what—what are the kinds of changes that you value there?

BP: I think—so for me, one of the biggest changes at Dickinson—policy-wise, visibility of policy, visibility—just visible support of LGBT issues, and I think hearing it from you, originally, hearing it from so many different faculty and staff, I think it's still incredible to me that there are faculty on this campus that still can't be out, and still aren't out. Or people know that they are part of this community, but won't be vocal about it, and I think—and I know everyone needs to be where they need to be, but I think what's really important is that many of those faculty who haven't been out in the past have started to talk more about these issues. At least to me or at least to students or at least refer them to me, if a student has come to them. That's probably one of my proudest pieces is forming networks, forming conversations on this campus that there—there were lots of conversations happening on this campus when I arrived,

but allowing people to feel like they have value in this work, that they feel like they—I think everyone's voice on this campus and in this work needs to be heard, I think everyone's voice is valuable. We need—and we can't leave people in the dust. I'd like to leave some people in the dust. I think we'd all like to leave certain people in the dust. But I think bringing in even some of the toughest voices over the last two years here, even when I announced when I was leaving, some of the people that have given me the hardest time in making work happen, reaching out and saying, "thank you for changing my mindset" and just "thank you for understanding where I was," and it was just simple is that.

LM: Can you get more specific?

BP: I think—I think looking at—so yes, so when—

LM: Give me some anecdotes.

BP: So, visibility. There were people on this campus when I arrived, when I wanted logos for the office—the one thing, I think, one part of this job or one part of these types of positions is making PR happen and the marketing. The marketing piece so that people can't erase it. I don't—I think there is so much rainbow on this campus at this point that people can't erase it. We did that on purpose. I did that on purpose, because I wanted to make sure that our websites, our printed materials were out there. That students were able to see this—as soon as they arrived on campus. That they could see a rainbow flag on their first tour of Dickinson. The rainbow tapestry that was created the year before I got here that was kind of throw in a shambles when I arrived, and it was all these pieces—patchwork rainbow pieces—that were sown together in a rainbow-type flag with different statements by students was laying in a box when I arrived. It's now hanging in the library. We worked with the library staff to make sure it's strategically on the tour route of all students that progress through the halls at Dickinson if they're interested in this place. And so everyone, parents, students, sees that big rainbow tapestry. And there's pretty powerful statements on that. They all walk by it, they all see it. And I think just that alone, then getting logos for this office, getting a website for this office and telling them what I wanted exactly and why I wanted it. It wasn't that I was inventing this stuff. I'm benchmarking off of other people, using research of what has worked in the past, and I think that wasn't a mentality that people liked. [laughs] And saying at times that we had missed the train. We were on the little pumping boat [making pumping motion with his hands], the little pumping train behind it, hoping that we could catch up, and I think we needed to get into where other schools like us where, but also there was so many people hurting and wanting to be heard on this campus yet that we needed to raise visibility. And when I was trying to do that, I think so many people had tried to build walls. "Oh, you can't do that." "Well, you're not—where your position is at the institution doesn't allow you to do that," or "No, well what do you mean that you want to do it this way? What do you mean that you need this type of logo or what do you mean that you need a budget or you need

this or that to do that?" I think—I think for me, one of the things that worked well here was going to sit in people's offices until they let me do it and saying I wasn't going to leave until they let me do it. There was people that did not answer my emails when I first arrived or my phone calls that I stopped in to visit, and I said, "Oh, let me—that change that you need to make for me, let's do it right now, while I'm here, so that you don't have to worry about that email or that phone call," but that was effective. But also in the point that after that, I'd send them a small thank you note and say, "Thanks for getting that done," because I wasn't gonna let them feel like I threw them under the bus or anything else. I wanted them to know that I really appreciated them doing it, even though they gave me a hard time doing it. And in the end, I think that visibility has allowed us to change policy on campus and procedures of how students, LGBTQ, as well as faculty and staff navigate the institution. The queer beers event that was happening before I arrived was only three or four people when I first—the first queer beers I went to had four people at it. The last one we just had for this semester had twenty-seven people, and it was faculty and staff who I had never seen before, and I think those are people that visibility has helped build community. But I think there were so many obstacles that people were inventing ways to put up obstacles. When we started one of the other things when I arrived that was a challenge was trans pieces on campus. Students who were trans, gender non-conforming, genderqueer had no voice. There was conversations that they said that they were gonna—

[video cuts]

BP: So I think what was—looking at this moment, I think what was Dickinson so afraid of and I kept asking myself over and over, like talking to colleagues and friends, because at some points I thought I was going nuts, but I think it was just this extreme, irrational fear that if we started talking about these issues and publicizing that we were working to make this a more friendly campus for LGBTQ folks, that Dickinson was gonna close. That it was gonna hurt us, that it was really gonna be a challenge for us, and I think it's quite different. It's quite the contrary, actually. I think by opening those doors extends a welcome to a whole bunch more community members that allows Dickinson to change and move forward, but it was really working one-on-one with people and saying, this is why we need to do this. This is the student's story of why we need to do this, going one on one to people with a lot of this formation work, the foundation of this work. One of the biggest pieces on campus that we're able to change is gender-neutral housing. Our policy was just recognized as one of the best in the country, so I just finished writing a book chapter on Dickinson's policy, our process—I presented on Monday in [Washington] D.C. on our policy. I think that policy now is being recognized by colleges and universities as this wonderful milestone and way to break barriers at institutions to create it at their own. So now Dickinson is highlighting this policy, because it's great. It's good. Same thing with our Lavender Reception. This year, we were in *U.S.A. Today*. They showed our picture in *U.S.A. Today*, and we're only a two-year-old office. We were in there with offices that have been around for 20+ years. So that's awesome. For us to be recognized in two years that we're doing this work is monumental. I think

just that visibility piece is one thing that I know we needed when I arrived, and I think we've accomplished it. And I think no matter what happens—our website resources have been recognized as one of the best in the country, because it allows students, faculty, staff—even from those from not our institution to access them and find a place and resources that they need. They don't ever need to walk through the doors of this place. They don't need to if they're not comfortable or at that place. They know—there's a statement on the website that I will meet a student—anyone, faculty, staff, community member off campus if they need to talk. I've met a guy, I don't know how many times at Subway or Panera or anywhere else to have conversations about struggles that people are having. I've been with staff members that have children that are coming out and don't know what to do and are really scared and don't—know that they should accept their child, but can't, but need to figure out how, and worked with them over the last two years. And, I think, it's been wonderful to sit with them and chat and know where they're going. This office has also raised visibility in the Carlisle community in that people in Carlisle—mental health offices, social service agencies—I've been doing trainings and having conversations, especially around issues of violence and abuse in relationships—intimate partner violence, power-based personal violence for LGBT individuals. Being able to have those conversations where some of those agencies haven't had training on these issues, and they've said they've never had an LGBT client before. I'm sure they have. I'm sure that person just wasn't open about who their partner was or what that was, because you didn't set up an environment for that. And so now, those in agencies—I've worked with them. They know that Dickinson has this now, and that it's a resource for both the institution but also I want it to be a resource for the community, because I think we need to bring Carlisle with this. We're in this community. Why can't we work with the community to build it up? Same thing with Cares—Carlisle Cares, the—one of their members is a trans identified member in their community, and that person had been experiencing such discrimination and bias. One of their volunteers at Cares reached out to me and said, "Can I come to the trans workshop that you're offering, because I don't understand this. In the Bible, it says this is wrong." And so we met, we've had conversations, we've come to the workshops. They're growing. They're changing. But I think they're starting to recognize that they need to provide inclusive housing for this member, and you know, I think serving as a resource, increasing visibility for faculty, staff, administration on this campus and students has been wonderful. Also increasing—so this past—two weeks ago at alumni weekend, we had a session with alumni again, and this year's was the most populated. We had over 20 some alums back, having a conversation, learning where Dickinson has gone over the last few years and honoring their history, hearing their stories was awesome. And I think this has been—that's been the most powerful pieces of this work is the stories that I've been privileged to hear and also recognize that those stories are still a part of this work. Those stories—the work that some student did 20 years ago on this campus, the work that you did on this campus is what made this happen today. And I think... no matter how small, how big, whatever you did on this campus, maybe it was just someone who was added to an ally list years ago that are now on our list. They still have an impact in this community, and they still have a voice to keep this community growing, and I

think, you know, the gender neutral housing policy, the visibility pieces, looking at just the way that we are offering resources to the community, and I think this is—the office for me is a very unique office on this campus. Our office, although many of the other offices are set up just to serve students, the workshops, the trainings, the educational things that we offer have allowed staff members and staff assistants on the campus who would've never been able to engage in these issues to engage in these issues, because I really firmly believe that this is everyone's work. It's not just my work in this office. Everyone needs to be a part of this work on campus to build a better community, and I think the offerings that this space has set up—leaving this, it's sad. For me to leave this space, it's hard. But I think it will live on. I think I'm really—I'm—I'm passionate that it will live on, I think that—and I'm excited to see where it will go, you know, I think sometimes in this change work or this justice-related work, sometimes, you know, being in a position and being the pusher for awhile is really good to get it set up and to get it going. Sometimes having someone else come in and grow that work that's been set up is awesome to watch happen, and I think this office is set up to boom wherever it's gonna go. I think it has the support, it has the community, it's ready to go. And for me, that's exciting. I think for me, you know, this community has been—there's been challenges, but it's been amazing to watch people change and their hearts change. And that's been the biggest thing I've wanted people to see me not as just the gay person on campus doing the gay work, but rather, I've been doing the work—the work that I do I consider human work. It's for everyone, and I think [cellphone ringtone plays] that's been a lot of—it's underneath the chair.

[video cuts]

LM: Okay.

BP: So, I think this work has been really the human work for me at Dickinson. I think the community—I've really wanted this work to be—I've wanted people to know me for not just the gay person, but also for the person who loves talking about religion and spirituality, loves talking about race, ethnicity, and this all comes together, and how that, you know, my experiences are going to be different than yours, or how can we make LGBTQ issues present in orientation, so you know, same-sex, same-gender parents feel welcome just as much as their students do when they arrive on campus. One of the coolest things that has been said—so, Dickinson—Dickinson was an institution that I think in the beginning was afraid of this LGBT stuff or having this office be really visible. I now think it's benchmarking off of it and having a ball with it, because I think they're recruiting students based off of it now. When I was offered Cornell's position, Colgate [University] had contacted me. Colgate as one of our peer institutions was looking for someone to do this work. Colgate has been losing applications to Dickinson, because of our office. They wanted to take me away from Dickinson. I wouldn't have gone to Colgate, so that's now on the record. [laughs] But, they wanted to take me there, because they wanted this to happen there, and they were being competitive, and I think, for me... I needed to do something different. I wanted

to see—and Cornell was giving me that opportunity that—their center is 20 years old. It needs a face lift. It's starting at a different point. They have a huge alumni community that's been established, but they're thirsty for change and their community has been in some turmoil a bit. So, they need someone to rebridge and rebrand and redo. So, it's a different point. It's not starting an office this time, it's figuring out how to move it forward. So, it's a new challenge for me, but I think Dickinson's experiences are going to go with me, and I think—I'm hopeful in all of the community emails and wonderful things that people have sent, I'm—I know that they'll still be in touch. And I'm glad that they're still gonna be in touch, and I want this work—I want this to grow. I want to come back to Dickinson, and I want to see all of this work continuing to grow. I think Dickinson is a really cool institution. Are we perfect? By far not, but I think... I'm excited, because this office is different than what Dickinson, I think, has seen before, and I don't think Dickinson really knew, and I think I can be honest. I don't think Dickinson knew what they wanted when they hired me. And I don't think they understood who they were hiring. So, I think for me, I came in, and I remember in my interview session was telling, you know, Amy Farrell and Susan Rose and all of these people in my interview sessions of what I was going to do. And this is—this is what you—this is where—this is my belief of this work, and this is what I was passionate about doing, and if this wasn't right for you, than don't hire me. And I think, there were people who were definitely on board, but then there was other people who thought that it all sounded good, but had no idea that it was actually going to happen. And I think, you know, there are things that are still things that we need to make happen here on campus, but I think, overall over the last two years, there's been tremendous change, there's been tremendous energy, looking at Lavender Reception both last year and this year—this year—last year was big. This year, we were packed. There wasn't a seat in the house, and I think we're out of room. [laughs] That's—now granted, I hand wrote—now this will be on tape, too—but I handwrote over 400 invites. Personal invites to faculty, staff, and people on this campus, because I also wanted to nudge them and make them feel like we're really invited to this, because after the first year, I heard people who said, "I heard it was wonderful, but I felt like I couldn't be there, because I'm not part of the LGBT community." Each of those notes called out and said, "I want you there. I need you there, because you do have a voice in this work, whether you're visible just in that space once a year, a student then knows that you were visible there, and that will allow a different type of connection with you and that student at a different point of time. They may never come out to you, they may never tell you their life story, but they know you were there, and that's a huge piece of trust that you can never develop any other way. And I think, that's been—it's been wonderful. I think—I will miss it, and I'm going to miss Dickinson, I'm going to miss—I'm gonna miss knowing (?) a smaller school again. I think going from 2,400 to 25,000. Now granted, it's not 48,000. That was Penn State. It's right in between. I'm excited, and it's gonna be—there's lots of challenges ahead, and I know it. I've been informed of all of those challenges that are upfront at Cornell, but I'm really confident that Dickinson's going to continue to grow. And I think for me, going back to all of my experiences growing up, the conservative pieces have challenged me. I think the challenges have helped me persevere. In the moment, it's not fun,

but I think one thing that one of my mentors—she's a—she's the director of women students at Penn State, she has—I don't know if she'll ever retire, but she's just there and she's this person who's an advocate—a person that I consider an advocate, someone who just keeps fighting and does it in a real, big way with compassion. But, says trust the process. Things happen for a reason, and I think everything in my life, looking back, seminary, thinking about the ministry pieces, to where I am now and continue to keep pushing and making change—there were days that I wanted to bang my head against a wall, because people were not doing what I needed them to do. And I could tell them what I needed them to do exactly, but they wouldn't do it. But at the end of the day, I don't think we would've experienced as much change as if we didn't have those experiences, and when Cornell came and was asking, I was open to the possibility. And I think there's a reason why this is happening at this point, and I... I can't predict the future, but, you know, I think... there's reasons things happen, and there's reasons why I'll be at Cornell, and they'll be reasons that I'm still gonna be in touch with Dickinson, and—but I think that trust the process mentality has been just so true. I think it's been something that's been trust where life will take you, and I think it's been something that's been exciting. It's been a journey that I would've never predicted that I was going to be an LGBTQ professional or gay-for-pay [claps hands on legs], but I am. And, at the end of the day, Central Pennsylvania, this work— Pennsylvania has been such a big piece of my development, because it's been able to—you have to work within systems, and you have to be able to find—find the people that are gonna help you move forward with this work. And then hold on tight, because it's a rough road. These areas, as you know, I think, are never easy, but I think it's been a really wonderful journey, so.

LM: So I hear.

BP: [nodding]

LM: So, let's stop for a minute.

[video cuts]

LM: Okay, what have we missed?

BP: I think for me, what my next steps will be in the future, and I don't know, like, I think you have to trust that process. But I think, for me, I don't know if I'll do this work forever. I think I will probably go back—I'll probably go back to hospice work, definitely, at some point, because I don't think I could do everything I want to do in a day or the number of hours that are allotted. I think for me, I may go back and do a ministry piece, too, because I think, although we're moving forward in areas—and yes, you know, congregations and things are moving forward—the mindset on things still are...

LM: Has any of this been stressful on your relationship with your partner?

BP: I think I have to say, Greg is probably—the only thing that’s frustrating is Greg is too easy-going for me at times. [laughs] For me, I think, Greg is probably—well, he’s my strongest support, he’s my backbone. I think he has held me up in the points that it’s just been, “I can’t take this, I need—this is—I cannot believe these people are saying this.” I think for Greg and I, I am the person who wants to get things done, and I need to have a plan, and I need to see that plan through the end, and that’s—that’s where we are. Greg is a person who will roll with the punches and “whatever you need, I’m there, we’re good,” and I think that has been—it’s been a learning experience for me, because he has allowed me—I—I talk to students about self-care a lot, and self-care in advocacy work, because I think we can burn out in this work, because you get tired of telling people over and over what has to be done and you get sick of the same story over and over and over, but you realize at the end of the day that you need to keep telling that story, because it’s not going to happen without you telling that story. But Greg, I think, has been that rock that has provided support, strength, and I think just—just—just the ability to have someone to lean on in this process. Greg as a whole is not—he’ll never say that he is, you know, an LGBT advocate. He doesn’t do LGBT work. But, in his work that he does, he has worked with students who have just learned they’re HIV positive, he’s worked with students in crisis with their families whose parents may have just passed away, and they’re trying to support themselves academically to stay in college, and I think he has worked with students who have been in parts of sexual assault—all of these social work kind of justice mentality pieces. We do similar work. He’ll never admit that we do exactly the same work, but I think, the amazing things are I think we’ve been able to play off of each other and support each other, but also his own openness and ability to work with students at Dickinson. Greg’s here a lot—he comes in, he’ll be present at events with me, and I think that shows the students that we’re out, we’re visible, and I think I would have never imagined, because when Greg and I first started dating, I don’t think he was that—you know, person who’s going to be out and visible and recognize that. Now, he knows what the value is of it. I think Greg is the first person that, if a student is in need or distress or something, “we can bring them over, let them stay with us, whatever, we’ll make it happen, whatever they need,” like—and that’s like having that support throughout all of this process. He understands where students are. He understands where other faculty, staff, administrators are in this work, and it’s been so immensely powerful to have that support. And I think, Greg is supportive of whatever I do. He knows my plans in the future probably won’t be, maybe won’t be directly higher ed. He’s totally supportive of the ministry thing, although Greg I consider—I know it’s going to be on tape, too, he’ll kill me—but I call him the anti-Christ or Satan, because he’s the total opposite of spirituality and religion stuff. He’s very critical. So, he will be the most critical, calling out questions, and in some circles, those aren’t always respected [laughs], but I think for him and I, we’re very different, but we’ve found like this really unique niche of the difference helps us be stronger, because it’s the pieces that I know I lack—the easy-going, you know, letting things go—where he has that sort of strength, whereas I’m definitely more

structured in other areas that help him, and I think that's been really beneficial in all of this work, and I think, you know, moving forward, we're exciting about the Ithaca [New York] pieces, and I think, it's a different community. There's been questions we didn't have to ask that we asked when we moved to Camp Hill and Carlisle. One other story when I came to Dickinson—Dickinson set me up with a realtor and Paul Richards, who is the swim coach here at Dickinson—Paul was connecting us. The realtor had called him, because he was one of the search committee members and had said, because I had called him, and then, he wasn't responding to me. Paul called him back, and the realtor had said, "Is this new LGBT position a new athletics position? What is this?" Paul, very adamant Paul, "Well, it's the lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer questioning office director and they're advocates in support of this work on campus, blah blah blah." Paul said, "Well, they wasn't any response on the other end of the phone." And shortly after, the guy said, "Well, why do you need that? That's—that's absurd." And Paul's like, "Well, you're not going to be his realtor" and hung up the phone. [laughs] And, so I think, coming in, there was some bumps. I think—and I knew that would happen, but I think, going into Ithaca [New York] now, it's been different up there for awhile, so it's a total different process. I think it's going to be a total different mindset for us. Our neighbors of the property we're looking at—it's a lesbian couple that they're—they both worked in the university for awhile, they're probably in their mid-60s, early 70s, great people, can't wait, like, so I think there's just a different mentality, so—and we're moving back to having property, like larger land, so we've missed that. We like where we live right now, but you can see neighbors, because the houses are so close together, but now we're going to move to five acres hopefully if all goes well. So, it'll be a little oasis again in the midst of some of the noise of this work that kind of comes up, so self-care and burnout prevention is important, so I think that's probably, yeah, we'll see where the paths lead.

LM: Anything else?

BP: I—yeah, I'm really hopeful—I think for me, I think just a bit about this project, I think I want to see this continue to grow. Malinda in the library has absolutely been so passionate about this work. Malinda Triller has been an advocate of this work on this campus so much. I think she in the library—before the LGBT History Project and when Dickinson got on board, Malinda and this office has been so vital to growing LGBTQ publications, works, updated materials, DVDs, videos, everything I've requested, Malinda has made sure the library has acquired, and I think that—I think your background in this work and her together. I'm so excited to see this—where it's going in the future, and I really do hope that five, six, seven years out, that when I come back to Dickinson, there is some type of display—besides the one, like a bigger one that joins Dickinson history with Central Pennsylvania LGBT history and I think it'll be exciting. I want to see where this goes. I want us to continue honoring our past, and that's—because it's hard and those experiences, those hardships are valid. And think that's one of the things for me Dickinson doesn't like sometimes when I say that we need to talk about the bad times we've had here.

We're not perfect yet, and when I've said that, I think some people get tight up in their shoulders, because they're afraid that, you know, they're gonna—that I'm gonna talk about the bad things about Dickinson in the past, but if we don't honor that past, we're not going to know where we're going in the future. We're going to keep reinventing the wheel. And I think the past, although hard, gives us a perspective of how far we've grown, and that's why I think I'm so excited about this project and to see it continue to flourish, because it's so important to this work. It's important to this office and where it goes next. I think the stories—comparing the stories of alumni, Central Pennsylvania individuals who have experienced Central Pennsylvania, hearing their stories and comparing it to stories of the early 2000s and even to now and into the future, it's going to be a fascinating project, and it'll take years to build us. But it's gonna be fascinating, and I think, it just honors the great work and the voices that have been part of this work—the voices we don't want to fade away and to die without us hearing them. Like, I—I think those are the voices that have been so vital to forming my professional and personal identity, I wouldn't be who I am total without the voices of the past—the people in the past.

LM: Okay, now there's another question I have. Do you have people on campus that you think we should interview?

BP: Yes.

LM: Or in Carlisle.

BP: I think—yeah, so I think there are several people in Carlisle.

LM: I'll take those down when we're finished.

BP: Yeah, I think there are people in Carlisle that would be good to interview. I think at Dickinson... I think a lot of the emeriti faculty—there have been a few that have stopped by that I think would be good to interview and see what their thoughts are. I don't know if they'd be willing yet, but they've at least stopped by here. I think for me, you know, has Malinda done this yet?

LM: What?

BP: The interview process?

LM: Not yet.

BP: She needs to. At one point.

LM: Well, eventually.

BP: Eventually, yes. Not yet. But I think there are people that, you know, I think being able to talk about this history, before people's voices are gone, and I think that's so important. I think it's just, for me, even looking back to my time at Penn State, there's alumni who experienced Penn State in a very, very different way than when I was working there. Those people, right now, are like Greg's and I—both of our grandparents are deceased, so, but they are like our gay grandparents. So we go back often. Harry and Ed are there. Harry's time is limited. He has lung cancer for some time, but their souls are so intertwined. Harry and Ed both did hospice work there—both elementary school teachers for awhile, were chased out during the Anita Bryant time, because they were going to be outed, because they were gay, and all of those kind of pieces that Anita Bryant, when she was leading her campaign, were really chasing out gay teachers. So they retired early and did end up working at an HIV/AIDS hospice unit, so I—and I look at their story, and I think their story is so powerful and when I was teaching at Penn State, I used to bring in all of those stories, and that's—those are the voices that we want heard before they're gone, because those stories are the ones that can't be taught out of textbook. Those are the stories that—they're lived experiences, so I'm passionate about this work, and honestly, so Malinda, before I leave, I will be sending out some more information to some of the alumni that I've connected back. So, and that's gonna be something that I want to continue and make sure Malinda knows that—whether I'm here or not—this work needs to continue, especially with the LGBT History Project, because those voices need to be heard in some way, so—and Emily, this coming fall. I'm really excited about Emily coming back—so, Emily Newberry, the alumna who's coming back from 1968. She I think will tell a fascinating story of Dickinson, and just Central Pennsylvania at her time, when she was here. So I think—and those are the things that I want to keep recognizing and I hope that this office continues to recognize as well. That we can continue to bring back alumni to be a part of this work, because those are the voices who walked the limestone walls of Dickinson, and those experiences are valid, and it allows current students to see that Dickinson's got growth to do, but look at the growth they had to do, so—and they can be a part of making the change, so—and that's, I think that's where I'm excited about seeing all of this work go, so... and thank you for this. I thank you for the opportunity to interview for this. I think this is [shaking head] yeah, this is a culmination of the past two years at Dickinson, so thank you so much.

LM: Good, good. Like an exit interview.

BP: [laughs] No, no. This is nicer. [laughs] I think for me, one of the other areas of Dickinson that kinda has to be called out—we've got a lot of issues with gender issues on campus that still need a lot of work and that we're still sweeping places. That's not acceptable. I think it's not acceptable for faculty, administration, students to have to—to have to struggle with that. So, there's a lot of work there. I think—and that's one of the things that I know all of the new

standards that are coming out, so with Title IX now being inclusive of LGBT stuff, I think that's huge. For me, it's—I know it makes institutions cringe right now, but for me, it's exciting, because it's not legalized that this work has to happen. But, it had to be law. That's unfortunate, but for me to say that, in our judicial conduct system, in our student conduct system, everyone now has to be trained on LGBT issues. [emphasizes] Oh! That's huge! And, for me, I think—I've been telling Dickinson this, that we should be ahead of the curve. Let's do this now. Do we do that? Not always, we don't always like to be ahead of curve, but I think we've got work to do, but now that it's—now that it's part of law that Dickinson has to do—that every institution has to do, there's a new validity of this work on a college campus, university campus, but just in Title IX requirements, that institutions need to do, no questions asked. Unfortunately, we had to wait until law—until there's actually a stance on this to move forward, but at the end of the day, it's validation, and there's something that people have to be held accountable for, so I think leaving Dickinson, that's one of the things I'm going to be really pushing in my exit interview and challenging them to say, “You still need to do this,” and it's not me saying this, this is law saying this now. And I know you can try to beat around the bush, and I know—you know, as a small institution, sometimes we can, but it's not acceptable. And it's not acceptable to sweep those experiences away. F&M's [Franklin & Marshall] under the lens, you know, other schools in the area are under the lens. We haven't made the list yet, but I think there are possibilities that we can. For me, I think Dickinson—I think Dickinson—

LM: What lens are you talking about?

BP: I think Dickinson, I think for me, Dickinson has to be—I think Dickinson has to be open to change, and they want to be good. I don't think... I don't think we always have... I think some people are comfortable in their positions, and their positions haven't been challenged in some time, and I think they haven't done their own work. As an academic, I think you know that you have to stay current in your field, and I think there's people who are on campus who haven't stayed current in their field, and they don't realize how far behind they are, but they think Dickinson is ahead of the curve, but haven't gone outside the limestone walls in awhile. They need to go outside the limestone walls to see how far behind we are in some of this policy work, which is good, and I'm glad that we've had lots of changes for that work to move forward, and I think we will, but I think... it's gonna take time, and I think Dickinson—any institution of higher education, as you know—I'm sure you have been up against—it does not change fast. Education does not change fast, and I think we get stuck in our ways, and that's unfortunate for us, because I think education can be so innovative and pushing things forward, and I know—well, studying the history pieces for you, same thing, I think, you've recognized that people have done things in the past, the same way, over and over and over, and kept reinventing the wheel when they could've just moved forward at a certain point. So, I think leaving this place, I'm going to be really hopeful that they continue to change and move forward in those policies and procedures, and I've left, and I'm leaving a pretty strict plan of where you need to go, and if that plan if

followed, it'll be excellent, but I think, they need to follow it. And I'm hopeful that that's what gonna happen, and I think—the best part about seeing the work that's been done over the last two years here, seeing the community that has—that is now vocal, the members of the community who are not willing to let this die, and it's not just one person anymore. It's not just one faculty member who've had to hold so much of everyone's stuff on the community. Like, I think it's so true. I think if you look at the history, many times it's one person on a campus holding everything, and it's not... we're not there. Your work helped us build this community of networks, and I think that's what's going to push Dickinson forward, and I think that is so complimentary to you, and I think it is—you started this, you put yourself out there, and—I think everyone around you recognizes—you're the foundation, you were, Lonna, you're the first person on this campus to really push and that pushing granted me the privilege of being in this office, and I think, now, people aren't letting it go. And that's that. For me, for you, it's not just one person anymore, and I think—and it's not just the LGBT members talking about LGBT things. It's other people saying that we need to go forward, and at the end of the day, if that's where we are, that's the best place to be, because people are questioning. That's what we're supposed in education, right?

LM: That's right.

BP: So, I think we will. And I—and I'm confident that people won't let this go, and that's—that's good. That's where we are.

LM: Anything else?

BP: That's it. Thank you.