

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative**

**Interview with Ronald “Ron” Davidson
February 28, 2016**

Interviewer: Sydney Brennert

Interviewee: Ronald “Ron” Davidson

Date: February 28, 2016

Location: Mill Mountain Coffeehouse, Campbell Avenue, Roanoke, VA

Total: 52:04

Transcribed by: Becca Johnson and Christian Sullivan

0:00 = Introductions

1:17 = homosexuality in the military (Norfolk, Virginia) (1970s)

2:14 = on getting married to his long-time partner in Virginia

2:35 = work experiences in and around Roanoke, including at Macado’s

4:44 = involvement in the artistic community

6:31 = involvement in the first Pride in the Park festivals (1989 – early 1990s)

7:10 = involvement in founding a gay motorcycle club in Roanoke

8:02 = gay bars and restaurants in Roanoke

10:05 = discrimination against gays in the past versus today

12:06 = homosexuality in the Navy (Norfolk, Virginia), including gay prostitution (1970s)

15:52 = experiences in college at UNC-Chapel Hill

17:01 = Roanoke as a “gay hub” that attracts people

18:32 = coming out to his then-girlfriend at The Tradewinds (1970s), and coming out to his parents

22:43 = about his family members

24:10 = work experiences, planning the interior decoration at Macado’s

26:53 = discrimination against gays

28:40 = drug abuse within the gay community

31:11 = more reflections on coming out to family members

33:46 = on interior decoration & how he got the job designing the interior of Macado’s

38:56 = retirement and a love of travel

41:53 = the story of how he met his husband (late 1970s/early 1980s)

43:49 = experiences at Timberfell, a gay men’s resort in Tennessee

45:51 = on the idea of adopting kids

47:20 = reflecting on changes at Pride in the Park (1989-present)

48:40 = Roanoke politicians and the gay constituency

00:01

SB: Hi, my name is Sydney Brennert and I am here with Corey Murphy, and we are at Mill Mountain in downtown Roanoke. The date is February 28 and it is 2:18 pm. So, can you tell us...what is your name?

00:18

RD: My name is Ronald Davidson.

00:20

SB: Where were you born and what is your date of birth?

00:24

RD: November 21, 1948 and I was born in Roanoke.

00:28

SB: Where was your family originally from?

00:31

RD: Both of my grandparents were pretty much from this area...

00:37

SB: Okay

00:38

RD: ...Franklin County down through Fincastle [Botetourt County], which are outlying counties.

00:43

SB: So did you have any siblings growing up? Can you tell me about your home life?

00:48

RD: I had one brother. He and I... we weren't really close growing up. There were never any problems about me being gay, I mean...that wasn't the reason. He just went one way and I went another way.

01:07

SB: Right. So you say that you and your brother weren't that close, but he really didn't have a problem. So when did you find out or realize your sexual preference?

01:17

RD: Probably when I was in the military... which was in the '70s.

01:27

SB: So...what was that experience like? Were you outcasted at all for being gay?

01:33

RD: Well...most of the time we would go out and get drunk, there would be a bunch of us. And we'd end up going back and taking a shower all together and then one thing led to another. But then the next day, we would see each other and look at each other like nothing ever happened.

01:50

SB: Right, so before that, did you attend high school?

01:53

RD: Oh yes.

01:54

SB: So then...you weren't sure that you were gay?

01:59

RD: In high school, I dated women, I played football, I wrestled...the whole nine yards.

02:07

SB: Did you ever marry or have children?

02:10

RD: No.

02:11

SB: Okay. Are you in a relationship now?

02:14

RD: Yes. I've been in a relationship for 35 years and we have been married for two [years]. When it was legal in Virginia to get married, I told him that we would get married. And we did.

02:28

SB: Do you live together?

02:30

RD: Oh yes.

02:32

SB: What do you guys like to do on your spare time?

02:35

RD: I retired, and my husband said that I couldn't retire unless he did. So I said, "Well okay." We had gotten to the point that everything was paid for. We had some substantial, good income and so we both retired. I sold one house. We moved into a smaller home that was paid for and we travelled. I am a part owner in an antique mall and I travel around, buying and selling antiques. It's kind of a hobby.

03:15

SB: So you do that in the Roanoke area?

03:17

RD: Well I travel as far as Atlanta doing that, going to shows and going to big auctions.

03:28

SB: Okay. So, you never really left this area...because you said you grew up here.

03:33

RD: Yeah, pretty much I've stayed here.

03:36

SB: When you got out of the military, what was your occupation?

03:42

RD: I worked for Ingersoll Rand, that was a big industrial, manufacturing place. Then, I left there and I went to work for Macado's. I worked there and I kind of worked my way up to where I was kind of my own boss. I was corden belong[?] with the owner. I travelled anywhere from New York to Atlanta, Miami, just buying stuff for his chain of restaurants.

04:19

SB: Have you ever experienced any discrimination at Macado's at all?

04:23

RD: No. No. Actually my partner and I, when he would have a big Christmas party—I mean he owns twenty stores—it was a large Christmas party, my partner and I would be usually the first people on the dance floor.

04:39

SB: It sounds like you had a pretty extensive social life then. Can you tell us about that?

04:44

RD: Well I've always been into the arts. I have a degree in interior design from the University of North Carolina. It started out, I guess when I came back from the military, there really wasn't a big, good place for gays to gather. So, we would have dinner parties and we go from one couple's house to another couple's house. There would be anywhere from five to fifteen couples...that kind of thing. For a while I did some ballroom dancing that involved females, especially at Hotel Roanoke...let me see as far as social... I've always been pretty much in the artist type scene here in town. I've won the Heironimus Sidewalk Show...I'm a lifetime member of the Fine Arts Council.

05:59

(Tapping on the table)

06:00

SB: Did you meet any interesting people along the way...on your social excursions?

06:07

RD: You mean like...?

06:09

SB: ...Like new friends?

06:10

RD: Celebrities or...?

06:11

SB: Celebrities? Anyone. Anyone that really kind of took you back, like wow. Anyone influential?

06:18

RD: Nobody that really impressed me. I'm not really impressed with people.

06:22

SB: [*laughing*]

06:23

RD: I'm kind of impressed with what they do, not who they are.

06:27

SB: Right. So, are you active in the Roanoke community?

06:31

RD: Not as much as I did. At first when they had Pride in the Park...when they first started that, actually it was in a park right across the street from my house.¹ And I did a good bit of fundraising for their... they have silent auctions, and that type of thing. And I knew a lot of business owners in the Roanoke area that would donate stuff. They would donate it because they were... I won't say sympathetic, but they were for the cause.

07:03

SB: Right, yeah. So we were informed that you actually had started a motorcycle club...

07:10

RD: Well I didn't start it, but I would say maybe I was a little instrumental in getting it going. It wasn't really a motorcycle club, it was a Levi leather-type thing. There were only a few members that had motorcycles, but our biggest thing is we raised money for the community. And we would go, there were other clubs around, we would go to D.C. or to Norfolk, and they had chapters of the same type of club there. We would host runs where we would go bar

¹ The first Pride in the Park festival was held in Wasena Park in 1989. According to an informal history written by Charlotte Eakin, Pride in the Park was held in Wasena Park from 1989-1995; Highland Park from 1996-2003; and Elmwood Park from 2004 to the present. See Charlotte Eakin, "PRIDE History," c. 2006, <http://www.roanokepride.org/history.html> (Accessed March 24, 2016).

hopping and that kind of thing, but most of the time it was to raise awareness and money for different charities.

07:51

SB: So, you said before how there wasn't really a lot places for all of you guys to go out, so you would go to different couple's houses...

07:57

RD: Yeah.

07:58

SB: Would you say that that has changed now, is there more environments for you guys?

08:02

RD: Oh yes, I feel like that we have really paved the way for the newer generations. Like the gay and lesbian clubs in high school now, that was unheard of when I was growing up, unheard of. And now they can be openly going to proms together, that was all unheard of. So I think we kind of paved the way for all that. And now...it used to be there were certain restaurants and stuff that would tolerate this, but now I think they all have to because they're all in competition to get patrons. And I will say probably, the gay community spends a lot more money than people realize.

08:50

SB: So, now what are some types of places you go to?

08:55

RD: Now, I go to Macado's, and one reason is because I know everybody there. And it has become kind of a central hangout for the gays. The Park, I haven't been in several years. I don't like the new music. Most everybody there, I could be their grandfather.

09:19

SB: *[laughing]*

09:20

RD: You know, I just don't feel really comfortable.

09:22

SB: Right.

09:23

RD: In the younger days, we used to go to a place called the Garden Lounge in North Carolina, and we would get a couple of loads of people and drive down there just for the night because there was really nothing here. There was the Trade Winds, I'm sure you've heard about that extensively, which I bartended at for a while. And then I hit all the regulars, O'Charley's, all of the rest of the restaurants that anybody else would go to, I go to.

10:05

SB: So, what do you feel are some of the more important changes in the area since you grew up and realized “I am gay?” Have you noticed any important changes in the area, in the stuff that you’ve been a part of, that you feel has changed, the stigma?

10:23

RD: Well, like I was saying, I think that the older crowd really paved the way for the younger people now. That, you could probably go anywhere in town here now holding hands, as a same-sex couple, and there would be very little said. When I was growing up here, you couldn’t do that. You would be called names, or shunned of honor, or have something thrown at you.

10:56

SB: So, growing up, did you ever experience discrimination?

11:02

RD: My size and I’ve always been very outgoing. I’ve always been able to fend for myself and I have never had problems with it at all. I mean as far as people calling me names because if they did I’d probably kick the shit out them.

11:20

SB and RD: *[laughing]*

11:22

SB: Touché. So did you ever really face any struggles or hardships growing up?

11:29

RD: No, not really. I grew up, my mom was a CPA [Certified Public Accountant], my dad was a business owner. He always had anxieties for me to take over the business, but I did not feel like being a mechanic. And so my brother kind of stepped in...and then, my brother was an alcoholic and he ended up...he didn’t take over. My parents just ended up retiring and closing the business down.

12:06

SB: So, in the military, let’s go backtrack to that.

12:13

RD: Okay.

12:14

You said that you guys would go out and what not, and then shower together, and then the next day it would be totally normal, like nothing happened.

12:21

RD: Right.

12:22

SB: Was that like an everyday type...not every day, but reoccurring?

12:25

RD: Eh, most weekends.

12:26

SB: Okay. And so...

12:29

RD: And actually I did have one of the rarest experiences. There was a bar in Norfolk, and I was stationed at the base there. And one of my friends, that I had got[ten] to know, he said, "Do I want to make some extra money?" And he said, "Well there's a wrinkle room over here." And I go "what in the world is a wrinkle room?" And it was older men that would pay younger men for sex.

13:01

SB: interesting.

13:03

RD: I ended up going home with an older...Navy, I don't know if he was a Captain, but he was an officer, and I don't remember a whole lot about it, but I remember there were right many people there, and I remember he gave me \$100 to get a cab home.

13:25

SB: So, would you say that...

13:27

RD: *[laughing]*

13:30

SB: Do you still think that these things like still occur, in the military?

13:37

RD: They probably occur everywhere, whether it's in the military or not in the military. "Escort services" I guess now, they would be called. It was hush-hush then. That \$100 that I got from that guy, I called a buddy of mine on base, and told him to come and get me, I never did get a cab, and I kept that \$100.

14:05

SB: What'd you spend it on?

14:06

RD: Oh I don't know. I just thought that was just the wildest thing in the world.

14:15

SB: So, tell us more about your military experience. What were your daily duties, daily tasks?

14:22

RD: I ended up going to submarine school. I spent six years in. I was on a nuclear submarine out of Holy Loch, Scotland. I was in during Vietnam, but we never saw any action, we were just on the ready, on the outside in case something happened. I was in tear[?] communication. I was in charge of all the communication going on and off the boat. It was pretty boring.

14:54

SB: Now that you're obviously out of the military, and you're living in Roanoke, and you're retired, at this point in your life, what is something that is important to you?

15:10

RD: My partner is 13 years younger than I am. When I go I would like to make sure that he is very well taken care of. I have a nephew that is in prison right now, and he has robbed the family so many times, that I have nothing for him at all. So, my partner is the main one. He has a brother that we really think a lot of, that we will probably leave something to. Other than that, I'm the end of the line.

15:52

SB: In college, you said you went to UNC. Can you tell us some of your social experiences there, what did you like to do on the weekends?

16:04

RD: I'd usually come home.

16:06

SB: Okay. I feel like that's a far hike.

16:09

RD: Huh?

16:10

SB: Is that a far drive, from here to there?

16:11

RD: No. No, it's like two and a half hours.

16:15

SB: And so, you would just go home to your family home?

16:17

RD: Yeah. Or there were a couple of theater groups there that sometimes I would help with. Painting sets and backdrops that I would help out there. I've only had really two jobs in my life and I've only had two lovers.

16:44

SB: When you did come home on the weekends during college, what were some of the things that you would do in the area?

16:49

RD: We would just get together with friends and maybe go bar hopping, or go to somebody's house. There was always a lot of dinner parties.

17:01

SB: What do you think are some challenges facing gay people in Roanoke today?

17:11

RD: That's a tough one. It seems like Roanoke has become the hub of Virginia and North Carolina. There's always been, since the 1940s, it's always been like a gay hub. People come from other places to live here because it was a little more tolerable, but I don't know.

17:40

SB: So...

17:41

RD: I think they're already accepted and there could always be a little more of that, but maybe educating some of the people. Even the ones that are gay to make good choices, and ones that aren't gay to realize that we are humans. But as far as making things better, I don't know.

18:19

SB: You say that you wish that there was a little bit more acceptance, there is already, but it's always good to have more. When you first came out, was your family accepting? Can you tell us a little bit about that experience?

18:32

RD: The first time I came out, that I heard of a bar in Roanoke, I was in the military. I took leave. I had a girlfriend. We went to a bar called the New Wood, which is no longer there. I told her I was going to go outside and smoke a cigarette. Well I didn't, I went across the street to the gay bar because I had never been there. I walked in and I asked the guy, he was a Lebanese guy, the Georges, which I got to know a whole lot better later.² I asked him, I said, "Am I in the right place?" He said, "Well the bar is downstairs." So I went downstairs and here was all these people, it was like another little world. There was a nice restaurant upstairs, but then there was a bar in the basement. Then I left and I went back with her. Later, we went out again and I told her, I was going to come out to her. Her mother was one of the drama coaches at Hollins College, so I'm sure she had been around a lot more gay people than I had, even though she wasn't gay. Well I took her to this Tradewinds, and as I was going down the steps I told her—I don't want to say her name—"When we go in here there's something I got to tell you." We opened the door and went in, and she knew everybody there. And this was going to be a surprise for me, and she knew everybody there. From then on, we were just kind of friends

² The Tradewinds bar was run by a pair of gay Lebanese-American brothers, Herbie and Lewis George.

20:17

SB: Do you think she already knew?

20:19

RD: I think she did.

20:21

SB: So she took it well when you came out and said it.

20:24

RD: Oh yeah, well like I said, she knew everybody there. And I didn't know anybody, and I was going to come out to her, but I think she knew. As far as my mom and dad, my dad was a drill instructor in the Marines. He was one of the last survivors at Iwo Jima. My mom was fine with it. My dad would never talk about it. He wanted me to be a man. He didn't realize that if you were gay you were a man, I guess. But, mom was fine. Mom would cut things out of the paper and put them where he would see them, and have to read them. And he would because he read all the time, but he never would discuss anything with me. Nothing at all.

21:29

SB: So was your relationship with your dad kind of distant?

21:32

RD: No, it was pretty good, but I think he was a little ashamed. I think he was a little ashamed, him being a big military man, and [to him] that kind of thing just wasn't right.

21:51

SB: Do you still talk to any of the guys that you hung out with in the military?

21:57

RD: Oh no. No, I have no idea where they are.

22:01

SB: Would you be interested ever trying to reach out to them or finding them?

22:05

RD: No. I think that's just a chapter that's behind me. I don't have any regrets, but I don't see any reason. There's more people in my past that I would like to reach out to than them.

22:19

SB: Who are those people that you would like to reach out to?

22:22

RD: Oh, some people that maybe I was in college with, or even some of the people that I grew up with that moved out of town, or even some cousins...fourth or fifth cousins, that I've only met once or twice.

22:38

SB: So your family now, that you have...

22:43

RD: I don't. My dad's been deceased for ten years, and my mom...[no,] fifteen years [for my dad] and my mom for ten years, and then my brother...he's been deceased for probably ten years. I have no brothers and sisters, or grandparents, or mom and dad. I have first and second cousins that are eighty years old.

23:11

SB: And do you hang out with them at all?

23:14

RD: Most of them. I have some cousins that live in Florida, that we'll go down and visit them, or they'll come up and visit us. And my cousin, they live in Florida. His daughter, she has a black boyfriend. She has two children by marriage, beautiful kids. And then she has a black boyfriend, and then she has a white girlfriend. And her boyfriend is like a babysitter, that's all he does, and she goes out and parties. So we get along real good and we're on Facebook a lot talking, and that kind of thing.

23:58

SB: So they don't have a problem with you being gay at all?

24:02

RD: No. Oh no. No.

24:06

SB: So...I'm trying to think here...

24:09

RD: [*laughing*]

24:10

SB: We've covered a lot and it's only been 24 minutes. We talked about how you worked at Macado's. Can you tell us the experience that you had there and a little bit of what exactly you did? You said you actually decorated the inside of it.

24:26

RD: It was a good working experience. The owner and I were good friends. Of course him being a multimillionaire, he has a lot of people that want to be his friend. Even today, if him and his wife are fighting, he'll get a six-pack and come over to the house, and we sit on the deck, and he'll spill his guts and just talk. We're still just friends. But he and I would travel to Atlanta and he would stay there one...we would go to a big, huge auction...and he would stay there one day with me, then he'd go off to play golf in Pinehurst or something, and just leave me. Then, I'd buy whatever I wanted to and then I'd fly back.

25:16

SB: So at these auctions, what are some of the things that you do?

25:20

RD: Oh, I would buy stuff that was just neat, weird, strange...

25:24

SB: For Macado's.

25:25

RD: Yeah. Just to decorate. I always liked when he'd open a new store, we used to be able to go in... We've got a warehouse that's probably half as big as a football field, that's packed, when I left there eight years ago. We liked to go in and say, "Oh we'll take this, and this, and this, and this." We could just pick through it. A lot of times... I bought a pair of boots, that are Justins, they are 10 feet tall. They were advertisement, but they're 10 feet tall. I bought the two boots out of California and had them shipped here, and when they came in, he said, "What in the world are we going to do with those?" I said, "I don't know, I just think they're neat." I had a really good job.

26:16

SB: Do you miss it at all?

26:18

RD: Yeah.

26:20

SB: What do like to do during the day? If you're retired, what are the some of the daily things that you like to do to have fun?

26:29

RD: I still like to take off and hit some antique shops and just look around. I'm always tinkering with something. I'm good with electronics. But, there's not much else... watch TV.

26:52

[Stopped the recording to regroup and reset the line of questioning. RD interrupted again and we quickly put the recording back on.]

26:53

RD: ...know that didn't have it as well as I did growing up. They would be called fags, and throw stuff at them, and their cars vandalized, but I never had any of that. And I always knew that I was fortunate.

27:09

SB: Do you have any close friends that experienced hard times?

27:17

RD: Not close friends, but people I knew.

27:21

SB: Right, so that must be difficult to hear because you didn't have that rough of a time. I assume it was hard to hear.

27:30

RD: Yeah. But a lot of it I think they brought on themselves. Flaunting stuff, or saying something to somebody who's straight that they know they don't want to hear.

27:47

SB: For the most part, were you kind of conservative with it, and wouldn't really put it out there?

27:53

RD: Right, I've tried to live my life just as a normal person, except I have a different sexual preference. Where we live right now, our neighbors absolutely love us. We have keys to all of their houses, they leave and they want us to check on their dogs. There's a woman that lives beside me, that's eighty years old, and she'll bake cakes and pies, and bring them over to the house. It's just a good relationship.

28:27

SB: I'm glad to hear that. What would you say is the biggest...

28:40

RD: I just thought of something. You were saying that one of the biggest problems...I do think that the gay scene has a bigger drug problem. Anybody I've ever known to get any drugs from were gay. Or any of them that hurt themselves because they were high, were gay. I don't know if [it was] because they were oppressed, or what it might've been. But it seems like years ago, I don't know about today because I'm just not hip with everything right now, but I know years ago...if you wanted to buy liquor after hours, you needed somebody gay that had it at home that were selling it, or pot. We never were into doing cocaine and heroin. You might do a little speed or a little weed and that was about it.

29:48

SB: So on nights out, you and your partner would just drink and have a good time. Do you have friends that kind of went a little crazy with drugs or anything like that?

30:04

RD: Not close friends. Uh, I've known some people, but I won't say they're close friends, that you know have done harder drugs and stuff. I know a lot of them, around the drag queens, I know I mean that they seemed like those people were always doing cocaine. I mean I don't know if they needed to get their nerve up or what it was but they were always doing cocaine, but they were staying up all hours of the night.

30:42

SB: Were you ever interested in doing that kind of stuff?

30:43

RD: No, I can't say I haven't done it

30:48

SB: Mhm.

30:49

RD: But it's a habit. I've done it... I would look at it like now this makes people lose everything they have, their job, and makes them rob from their parents you know? Now how good can this be. You know, I just I don't think there could be anything that good.

31:11

SB: When you told your parents that you were coming out, did you, were you ever worried that you would lose, lose, everything?

31:19

RD: That I would lose everything? Well my parents never gave me everything to start with. Now my.., I was always a little resentful of my brother because, you know, he had three or four children, was married a couple of times. He lived in one of their houses. He worked for my dad. You know, my dad was constantly getting him out of trouble. And I'm the one... I went off to school, and I went into the military. I never asked them for anything, so they didn't really have anything they could take away from me.

31:55

SB: Were you worried about losing *them* at all?

31:58

RD: Oh well yeah always, always. They, they lived to be, you know, in their eighties.

32:04

SB: Mhm, but losing them I guess if they weren't okay with you being gay. Do you think, did you ever like, worry about that?

32:14

RD: No, I don't think I ever. I don't think I ever thought that. I don't think I ever thought that at all.

32:21

SB: Do you have any friends that you lost along the way because you were gay?

32:24

RD: No

32:26

SB: So everyone was pretty much accepting?

32:28

RD: If they were friends they wouldn't.

32:33

SB: So what would you say was the most influential event growing up that made you who you are today?

32:46

RD: Hmm

[*Long pause*]

33:00

RD: I don't know.

33:02

SB: Or a couple events? Anything.

33:04

RD: You mean an event, or a person, or?

33:07

SB: An event, a person, anything influential that really sticks out to you as something that made you who you are.

[*Silence*]

33:24

RD: Uh, I couldn't say. I don't know.

[*Long pause*]

33:46

RD: I've always, like, kind of liked the finer things, and it seems like if you like the finer things you're going to be around gay people. I mean, I don't know why that is but...

34:06

SB: Good taste.

34:07

RD: Yeah, I guess. Good taste. I fight with my husband all the time about... I collect a lot of things. And like you can put a nice... I have marble-top tables, and I'll put a lamp on it and four or five... I see how much stuff I can get on it, and he don't want it. He wants to put the lamp on it and that's it, but if there's a spot usually I can find something to put on it.

34:33

SB: Have you ever designed like the interior of someone else's house and stuff like that?

34:37

RD: What?

34:38

SB: Did you ever, um, design someone's interior of their house or stuff like that?

34:43

RD: I've done some kitchens and some bathrooms. You know, just that kind of thing. But not really.

34:53

SB: And so what led you to Macado's if you majored in interior design?

34:59

RD: Well, I had left Ingersoll Rand and I had a friend—she had an antique store—and so I was working there and she was like gone all the time so I pretty much ran the store. Well then I got a chance to run an antique mall that used to be here in Roanoke. And I did that. Well then the city took the building, and the people that owned it, the building [that] had the antique mall, he [also] owned Macado's. And so I just went from there into Macado's.

35:41

SB: And so he hired you knowing that you were going to be designing and picking things out for the inside of Macado's?

34:46

RD: No, not at first, not at first.

35:49

SB: So at first what, what did you do? What was your job for Macado's? Just a server?

35:55

RD: Oh no. I've never worked in the restaurant. I went to work on the construction crew, and we were, you know, like building booths and just that kind of stuff, doing like the layouts, and I would pick the fabric for the cushions, and then he just kept giving me more and more and more to do, and I just ended up doing just that.

36:23

SB: So while designing the inside of Macado's, like how did you get the vision to get all these crazy things and just stick them everywhere?

36:30

RD: I have no idea. I have no idea.

36:35

SB: It just like came to you?

36:36

RD: I guess it is just a [way of] looking at things different than... I can kind of see ahead, look [at] like what the end result is going to be before it is there. A lot of times I would be doing something and he would [be] like "why you doing that?" and I said "it'll work out. It'll work out." And then when I finished it, he's like "wow, isn't that great!"

37:00

SB: So how long did it take you to do everything from start to finish?

37:04

RD: What the restaurant?

37:05

SB: Mhm.

37:07

RD: Uh, three or four months

37:09

SB: Not too bad.

37:11

RD: No, usually it was three or four months.

37:14

SB: And so along the way of picking things up and antiques and stuff like that for Macado's, did you meet anyone interesting along the way? Like would you buy antiques and crazy things from interesting people?

37:27

RD: Well, I guess I bought some [of the] original light fixtures from outside of the Hotel Roanoke. I bought some light fixtures from out of the old the Roanoke Theatre that's been closed for a long time. Meryl Streep did come in[to] the antique shop and did a lot of shopping for her friends. It was on a Sunday I think and we were closed, and she called Saturday and said could she come in, and I said "well if its just you," and I went down and opened the shop and she came in and she bought four or five thousand dollars worth of stuff.

38:07

SB: Wow.

38:08

RD: Just, just little knickknacks and stuff to give her friends.

38:12

SB: Did you meet anyone else famous in that...

38:14

RD: Uh

38:14

SB: ...line of job?

38:17

RD: Yeah. There was a guy, a little short actor. I can't think of his name. Well, he was doing a movie down at Smith Mountain Lake. And I did... We loaned some stuff for *Dirty Dancing*, up at [Smith] Mountain Lake with Patrick Swayze, we loaned them some stuff one time but that was about it. They're just people.

38:56

SB: And so what made you really want to retire if you loved it so much?

39:03

RD: I like to travel. We take a couple of cruises a year and we'll take a trip out to Charlestown to the horse races, or we'll go out to Vegas. We do something every about three months probably.

39:16

SB: What has been your favorite vacation spot?

39:19

RD: Oh Lord... Belize.

39:26

SB: What kind of stuff did you do there?

39:28

RD: Huh?

39:29

SB: What kind of stuff did you do there?

39:30

RD: In Belize?

39:31

SB: Mhm.

39:32

RD: You can live like a king for nothing there. I mean, absolutely. We've looked into buying a place there. I mean, you can buy a 300,000 dollar home for like 40,000 dollars, and plus you can get a maid that'll live there for like, you know, twenty dollars a month.

39:58

SB: Wow, so what other things?

39:59

RD: It's just nice to relax, and I like to go out fishing.

40:01

SB: Mhm.

40:02

RD: You know, that kind of thing.

40:04

SB: So, what other destinations have you visited?

40:08

RD: What?

40:09

SB: What other destinations have you gone to?

40:11

RD: Well we've been... I haven't been to Europe. But just mainly Mexico, South America... I've been to Venezuela. Where else have we been? Well, let's see... we've been to Seattle, went to Vancouver. We like Aruba, too. Aruba's really nice.

40:48

SB: So you mentioned before that you had gone to Vegas.

40:52

RD: Oh yeah.

40:54

SB: [*Laughing*] Can you tell us about that experience?

40:54

RD: My mom and dad like to gamble and they would go about every four months, three or four months. And my mom's nickname was Totsy, and I've got a caricature of her in my den and it says "Slotsy-Totsy." She liked to play the five-dollar slot machines, and I saw her win thirty-seven thousand dollars one time. Now my dad, he liked to play blackjack. Hundred dollars a hand, and he would never tell you whether he won or lost. But we used to do a father-son gambling trip. We would go up to Atlantic City. And he always told me whatever I took, he

would match it and give it to me. And so, so he would. Most of the time I'd lose, but most of the time he'd win. [*Laughing*]

41:49

SB: So were there any trips that you and your partner and your parents would take?

41:53

RD: Me and my parents used to go to Vegas, but Danny's been with me everywhere we go.

42:01

SB: And so how did you meet him?

42:06

RD: One enchanted evening across a crowded room, at The Park.³

42:13

SB: [*Laughing*]

42:15

RD: He said I was stalking him. And I told him, he said, and I don't know, but he said that I came up and I said "you're going home with me," and he said "no, I'm not either," he said I was drunk. And he said later, when he saw me and I wasn't, he said "well I think I kind of like him." And he was actually renting from a good friend of mine, and I went over to this friend's [apartment]. We were going to... my parents had a summer home in Craig County, we were going over there and he came out and we talked, and I asked him if he wanted to go over there and he said "yeah," and we were together ever since.

43:00

SB: Wow, so after that whole thing when you first had met, where did you guys usually go out for like dates and stuff like that?

43:10

RD: Tradewinds, The Park, Last Straw. Then there was another one... My friend who had the house that he lived in, he owned a little gay bar on Kirk Avenue then called the Nite & Day for a short period of time. He was a country and western singer.

43:37

SB: That's pretty cool [*laughs*]

43:38

RD: Well, he even had a Hank Williams Jr. look alike thing [and] he would do a gig in Vegas. He had a tour bus.

³ This appears to be a reference to the song "One Enchanted Evening" from the Broadway musical *South Pacific* (1949). The lyrics of the song go, in part, "One enchanted evening, you may meet a stranger, you may meet a stranger across a crowded room."

43:47

SB: And would you go out there with him?

43:49

RD: No, no. I never went. And then we'd take off usually. You know the movie "Sordid Lives?"

43:58

SB: I don't.

43:59

RD: Huh?

43:59

SB: I don't.

44:00

RD: Write that down and rent it. Its one of the most funniest movies you will ever... Its called "Sordid Lives," its got like Delta Brooke [Delta Burke] in it, and Burke, and its got a lot of famous people in it but it's a "trailer trash" movie with a lot of gay people in it and people trying to quit smoking, but anyway they do a thing on that up at Timberfell, that's the place we go up in Tennessee. It's a gay men's resort. And its just people act out the parts in the movie. It is so funny.

44:42

SB: So what kind of things go on at an all men's resort?

44:45

RD: Well it's all naked and, uh, well they have saunas, there's backpacking and horseback riding. People bring their pets. It's just a lot of... I've met airline pilots, and doctors, and lawyers from all over the country there. It's just a getaway. You know you'd think it'd be like a lot of sex and you know cause everybody is walking around naked but it isn't. You meet some of the nicest people. You meet a lot of married people that have boyfriends on the side and they'll come up from Florida and you know spend a week up there. Just to get away.

45:31

SB: Did you go there a lot?

45:32

RD: We usually go once a year. In the summer.

45:37

SB: So do you feel that your essential identity is based on your sexual orientation? So do you think that you would be different if you weren't gay?

45:51

RD: No. No. I'd probably [be] married and have four or five kids and probably be in debt up to my butt, but that'd be the only thing. *[Laughing]*

46:04

SB: So you never wanted to adopt kids?

46:07

RD: We thought about it but I'm too old. I mean you know I'm too old to do it. If I were younger I would definitely think about it. I would definitely think about it. But kids are for young people.

46:26

SB: Agreed. *[Laughing]*

46:27

RD: I've got two dachshunds.

46:30

SB: And so do you usually like take them around town, walk around and what not?

46:35

RD: No, not really. I mean they'll go on trips with us

46:39

SB: Yeah

46:40

RD: But if we drive. But, well one of them is three years old and the other one is five months. And one of them is a standard dachshund and the other one's a miniature dachshund. They're good dogs.

46:57

SB: So those are your babies. *[Laughing]*

46:58

RD: Huh?

46:59

SB: I said those are your kids.

47:00

RD: Oh yeah, and they don't want for anything.

47:05

SB: *[Laughing]* Back to Roanoke. Do you think that there are any important events that happen in Roanoke that kind of changed the stigma around the gay community here?

47:20

RD: Except for Pride in the Park? See I think personally Pride in the Park has gotten to be just a carnival. You know, when it first started it, I think it had a good substance about it but I don't think now it has like the real.. Its gotten so commercialized and you know with all the vendors and I mean we didn't have that then.

47:57

SB: So when did you realize that it was changing and more commercialized?

48:00

RD: When it moved from Highland Park to Elmwood Park.⁴

48:05

SB: And so were some of your best friends.. .

48:07

RD: It was a little more private then..

48:09

SB: Right, and you obviously liked that more.

48:11

RD: Yeah.

48:12

SB: So what exactly goes on during that?

48:16

RD: What? Pride in the Park?

48:17

SB: Yes.

48:18

RD: Oh they have guest speakers in and there's just, you know, a lot of kids. I think there's a lot of gay people that have children and you know they bring all their kids. There's face painting and it's just... That's not for me.

48:40

SB: Understandable. So politically, what are your thoughts on how Roanoke has changed over the years? Do you think that there's been legislat[ion] passed...

48:54

⁴ According to an informal history written by Charlotte Eakin, Pride in the Park was held in Wasena Park from 1989-1995; Highland Park from 1996-2003; and Elmwood Park from 2004 to the present. See Charlotte Eakin, "PRIDE History," c. 2006, <http://www.roanokepride.org/history.html> (Accessed March 24, 2016).

RD: I think because of the big gay population here, I don't think Republican, Democrat, or man, or woman that's running for anything, I don't think they would want to step on their toes. So they will be supporting them to get their vote. If somebody came out and they were really anti-gay or whatever, and they came out on a platform like that, they may as well shoot themselves.

49:31

SB: [*Laughing*]

49:34

RD: I mean, and there's a lot of officials in town that have kids and have brothers and sisters that are gay. They're very prominent people in town.

49:46

SB: So overall though, your experience in the Roanoke area is pretty, pretty good?

49:51

RD: Yeah.

49:51

SB: For being a gay man?

49:52

RD: Yeah. And I will say that women have had it easier than men because you know its every straight redneck's dream to have sex with a lesbian and change them over [*laughing*]

50:14

SB: [*Laughing*] True.

50:15

RD: Well its true.

50:15

SB: [*laughing*] yeah.

50:16

RD: Oh they love to see two women having sex but they wouldn't dare watch two men. You know, they just think that's the hottest thing in the world.

50:23

SB: Why do think that there's that stigma?

50:26

RD: I don't know. I think the men that think that they're not challenged by a woman.

50:38

SB: All right.

50:39

RD: ...where they would be by a man

50:42

SB: Well I think that's about it, so we would just like to thank you for your time

50:48

RD: [*Laughing*]

50:49

SB: Do you have any closing remarks or anything you'd like to say?

50:57

RD: No, not really.

50:58

SB: [*Laughing*] Okay. Thank you Ron.

51:00

RD: Not that I haven't had already.

51:02

SB: [*Laughing*]

51:04

RD: Did y'all talk to Danny? Jones?

51:08

SB: Did we talk to Danny?

51:09

RD: Danny Jones?⁵

51:11

CM (Corey Murphy): I believe that the man who referred you to us, or the man who referred...

51:16

RD: He used to be the librarian here.

51:20

CM: We talked to someone, I forget...

⁵ Gregory Rosenthal conducted an oral history interview with Daniel Jones on February 20, 2016 for the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project: Oral History Initiative. That interview is also catalogued within the LGBTQ History Collection at the Virginia Room.

51:22

RD: Danny Jones?

51:22

CM: It might have been him.

51:25

RD: I think he said he did it in the office at Roanoke College.

51:29

CM: Yeah, I honestly think it was him.

51:31

RD: Was it him?

51:32

CM: I think so.

51:33

RD: A beard?

51:35

CM: I didn't see anyone. We talked to someone else, but I don't...

51:41

CM: via email, yeah

51:43

RD: Because like I met him when I first got out of the service. And we've been friends for fifty years, forty years.

51:53

SB: Wow that's a long time

51:56

RD: *[Laughing]*

51:57

[turning off the recording device]

End Transcript