

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

**Interview with Rosemary Wyman**

**February 27, 2016**

Interviewee: Rosemary Wyman  
Interviewer: Rachel Barton  
Date: February 27, 2016  
Location: Floyd, Virginia  
Duration: 50:13

Transcription prepared by Rachel Barton

0:00 = childhood in Suffern, New York (1950s – 1960s) & reflections on her parents

5:30 = attending one year of college in Boston (1970/1971)

6:20 = moving to North Carolina and meeting her first husband (early 1970s); then second husband (1980); about her family and children

8:08 = motherhood & about her children

13:08 = raising her gay son (who was born in 1987)

15:11 = the story of her son coming out as gay (late 1990s / early 2000s)

17:45 = facing harassment and bullying at Floyd County High School (early 2000s)

20:14 = experiencing partner abuse in a same-sex relationship at VCU (2000s)

22:58 = founding Floyd PFLAG in c. 2009-2010

27:39 = involvement in LGBTQ activism

29:48 = feelings of self-worth among LGBTQ youth

34:21 = reflections on the future of LGBT rights in Floyd, and on activism within PFLAG

40:18 = intersectionality within LGBTQ activism?

42:27 = reflections on changes in youth culture from the 1960s to today

46:20 = role of Floyd PFLAG with transgender youth

0:01

Interviewer: My name is Rachel Barton. I'm here with Rosemary Wyman. It's the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2016 and we are in Floyd Virginia doing an LGBT oral history project for Dr. Rosenthal's class.<sup>1</sup> So Rosemary, would you mind starting by telling me a little bit about where you grew up?

0:23

Rosemary: Yeah, I wasn't born in the South. I was born in Suffern, New York, which is about 30 miles from New York City. My dad worked in the city primarily, and it was like this. It was rural like this when I was growing up. I was born in 1952 and graduated high school in 1970, so the '60s were kind of my period of coming of age. I was the youngest in my family. Four older brothers, very traditional Christian family. My mother was a Catholic, raised us as Catholics. My father was an Episcopalian and, you know, was all work no play. *[laughter]*

1:12

Interviewer: *[laughter]* Pretty strict?

1:15

Rosemary: Pretty strict! Although we did have a lot more freedom than children now have in terms of exploring and learning to know themselves.

1:26

Interviewer: Yeah? So as far as growing up in New York, what would you say was different or similar about where you grew up to Roanoke?

1:38

Rosemary: Okay. Well, New York to Roanoke was not similar at all.

1:46

Interviewer: Yeah? Very different?

1:48

Rosemary: My mother actually had a friend who grew up in Roanoke and we loved her. Her name was Francis Avery and she was a southern belle for sure. But we were afraid of the South, because, you know, I remember all of the bitter struggles around desegregation. And all of the ugliness was the news that came to us. And so, I can remember saying to myself and to my friends, I will never ever live in the South, so...

2:20

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<sup>1</sup> The class is INQ 300: Sex & Storytelling. It took place during the spring semester 2016 at Roanoke College.

Interviewer: Yeah, it had that connotation.

2:22

Rosemary: [*laughter*] So discrimination was something that my mother as a social worker and a political activist worked really hard against. You know, she...I'm going to sort of flip flop here.

2:37

Interviewer: Oh, that's fine.

2:39

Rosemary: She certainly had tolerance for people who were homosexual or lesbian. I don't think she had any awareness of folks who were bi [bisexual] or transgender. You know, that was kind of beyond her realm. She died in 1997. But, interestingly, she picked up on the fact that my son, who was eleven when she died, was probably gay.

3:10

Interviewer: Really?

3:11

Rosemary: And she sent me a message through one of her care providers after she died. This lady Mary came to me and said "You know, your mother didn't want to say anything because she didn't want to act like this was a given." Because Max hadn't identified himself at that point. "But, she said to tell you that if it turns out Max is gay, she is fine with that."

3:38

Interviewer: That's great!

3:39

Rosemary: So, anyway, that tells you a little bit about my mother. My dad was not very tolerant of differences. [*laughter*]

3:47

Interviewer: Yeah? He wasn't a political activist?

3:50

Rosemary: No! I once dated an African-American, and he wasn't happy about that.

3:58

Interviewer: But your mom did political activism?

4:00

Rosemary: Yes.

4:01

Interviewer: It surrounded segregation particularly?

4:04

Rosemary: Yeah, she taught graduate students at Fordham University, and she and her teams would do these sting operations on landlords in our area [*laughter*]

4:15

Interviewer: Wow! So it was pretty involved activism?

4:19

Rosemary: Yeah.

4:20

Interviewer: Wow, so as far as growing up and coming of age in the '60s in New York, what was that environment like? Was there a lot of social activism going on? You were aware of the South and the differences that were happening....

4:33

Rosemary: Yeah, and, of course, New York during the '60s was a pretty wild place, kind of like it was on the West Coast, too. There was...well, at that time there was a lot of crime in New York City, but as a teenager it was kind of my playground, and so I got to see a lot of great rock and roll [*laughter*]

4:59

Interviewer: [*laughter*] a lot of good shows?

5:01

Rosemary: A lot of, you know, interesting war protests were happening there, and I went to school for a year in Boston, and [*protests were happening*] also there. Yeah, I don't think anything as I was a young child or before my teenage years really....except for being brought up in a rural area. It doesn't really translate to here.

5:25

Interviewer: Yeah, it was a totally different kind of environment.

5:27

Rosemary: Yes.

5:30

Interviewer: So, you mentioned going to school in Boston, what was that like?

5:37

Rosemary: I thought I really wanted to go to school there. There are tons of arts there, and I'm very interested in the arts, but because I came from a place like this and I was put in the heart of the city, I really couldn't stand it there [*laughter*]

5:55

Interviewer: [*laughter*] too much going on?

5:58

Rosemary: Yeah, I needed to feel connected to the earth. So I wasn't prepared for that, and I think I kind of spiraled into a depression. I really didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what I wanted to be or do, so....

6:12

Interviewer: Was this when you were in college?

6:14

Rosemary: Yeah, it was like 1970, '71.

6:16

Interviewer: So you went to Boston for a year, what did you do after that?

6:20

Rosemary: Then I came back home, lived in my hometown, not with my parents, and I worked in a bookstore. Then I left there, and went and lived on a farm that was owned by my sister-in-law's parents. My brother was flying in Southeast Asia, and she had taken her kids back to her parents' area, so I went and lived there for a while, and then I moved from there to Chapel Hill.

6:51

Interviewer: Chapel Hill, North Carolina?

6:53

Rosemary: Yes, and worked at the student bookstore there. Moved from there, with another bookstore job, to Charlotte, North Carolina. And that's where we met—that's where I met my husband. My first husband and I had two children together, and then Walter and I got together in 1980, and he had four children, I had two children, and we raised those children together and had two more children, Max and Emma.

7:28

Interviewer: Wow, so a big household? [*laughter*]

7:30

Rosemary: Yeah, a family of eight kids.

7:32

Interviewer: Wow! How's that?

7:35

Rosemary: It's crazy! [*laughter*] You know, everything in our environment is really geared for the smaller family.

7:45

Interviewer: Right, absolutely.

7:47

Rosemary: If you think about how much money people are spending on raising one child, we managed to do it on an income—one working income—of a self-employed person because he did a lot of bartering, and, anyway, it was a very different scene.

8:08

Interviewer: How would you say that having all your children, having this big family, affected you?

8:23

Rosemary: [*laughter*] Well, I kind of came into life knowing two things that I wanted: that I wanted to be a mother and that I wanted to be a nurse, and the nurse thing didn't really happen to me until much later. But, I got my wish. And it's been my primary spiritual path I guess, trying to learn how to, you know, put my own desires aside and put others first. Learning how to do that, that's been the primary effect of it. It's been hard to know who I am and what my rhythms are, so once the nest was empty, I kind of had to really devote myself to figuring those kinds of things out, because I'd been stretching myself really thin for a really long time, and I didn't quite know who I was anymore.

9:27

Interviewer: Right, so motherhood for you, you would describe as kind of a spiritual aspect of your life?

9:35

Rosemary: Yeah, and a lot of joy too.

9:37

Interviewer: A lot of joy?

9:40

Rosemary: And the reason I go to Charlotte every week right now is to be with two of my grandchildren, and I don't really like to go to Charlotte. I like it in the country. But because those kids are there and the time is very limited to be with them... they bring a lot of joy into my life, and I think the relationship offers them something they wouldn't have otherwise.

10:05

Interviewer: Right, so can you talk a bit about all your kids? What they do, what they're like?

10:11

Rosemary: Yeah. Okay, we have a daughter who is 46 years old, or will be this year. She has two children, one who's 24 and one who's 18, and her 24 year old has two children. She lost her husband about 12 years ago, so she's really struggled to raise her children, and it's been a huge challenge for her. She lives in North Carolina, outside of Charlotte. Then we have a son, Joshua, who is 45? 44? [laughter] And twins who are 42, I think, and all three of those guys have Fragile X syndrome. They were diagnosed early in elementary school, so they've been special needs guys, but they're actually pretty high functioning. They feed and dress themselves, they have their own interests. They do need quite a lot of guidance and supervision, and they all live in group homes in Charlotte. So that's one of the reasons my husband still goes down there to work a couple of days a week, to see them and support them and love them. I have a daughter who lives in Charlotte with two grandchildren, she and her husband. She moved back to Charlotte; she went to school in Atlanta. She's an attorney and her husband is on the road a lot, so they're grateful for the support that we're able to give them during the week. I have a son, who is an ex-marine, lives in San Diego. He is a structural engineer, and he would be 37, my daughter is 38, and then there's like nine years between that son and Max, who was born in 1987. That's whose wedding invitation, or save the date, I gave you.<sup>2</sup> So he was born in Charlotte, and kind of from the age of two, was looking really different to us from all the other kids.

13:08

Interviewer: Yeah, so it was kind of immediately recognizable?

13:10

Rosemary: He went through a phase where he needed to wear dresses all the time.

13:16

Interviewer: As a child?

13:18

Rosemary: Yeah. Really, from age two on that's all he wanted to wear. And we used to have struggles.

13:31

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<sup>2</sup> This item is part of Rosemary Wyman's series within the LGBTQ History Collection, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library.

Interviewer: It was a challenge?

13:32

Rosemary: Yeah, because he wanted to wear them to preschool, and it was not the environment that it is today. It's pretty tough for people *today*. So, I can remember having conversations with him. He would want to go to the grocery store with me and he would want to be wearing his dress and his red patent leather shoes, and I would say "Okay, but when the lady comes up to me and says 'what a cute daughter you have,' I'm not going to set her straight. But it's going to be up to you if you want to not say anything or say anything." And I think, you know, at the time, I met—I think it was the year that Max was born—I met somebody in a support group who very shortly started the transition from male to female. And so, for me, that was incredibly important in terms of knowing how to be with Max, knowing to just back off, let him... of course I wanted him to be safe. [*laughter*] We did insist that he wear pants to regular school, you know? And he's not a transgender person, but he does identify as gay.

14:55

Interviewer: When you first noticed these differences in him, did you think maybe it was a gender identity thing? What was your perception of it?

15:07

Rosemary: Yeah, I thought it was a gender identity thing.

15:10

Interviewer: And he was really young?

15:11

Rosemary: Yeah, I grew up as a dancer and actually danced professionally for a while in Charlotte and had gay friends. I don't have any sisters that were born into my family, but my sister by choice whom I met in high school is a lesbian, so I was pretty familiar with how different people, kind of, present to the world, and Max presented as very feminine in the world. So I felt like it was a gender identity thing, and, you know, he didn't really come right out and say so until he was in seventh or eighth grade.

15:55

Interviewer: He was in middle school?

15:57

Rosemary: Yeah.

15:59

Interviewer: How did he bring it up to you guys?

16:03



RW: Well, he had a really good friend here in Floyd—I guess it was ninth grade really—because we were just letting him.... he had long hair, we were just letting him be who he was. But, at school, they were pushing him to identify, and he actually had some child say that he was going to kill him. He came to us with that, so we talked about it, and I basically said: “Hey look, this is what we’ve noticed. We’ve noticed this for a long time. Who do you think you are?” And then once he.... I guess at that point he felt like he was free and safe enough—because we were asking and saying we will support you—to identify himself as gay. And then we were able to address it with the school system. He had quite a bit of harassment, he actually had teacher harassment there at Floyd County High School, and we had to go in and basically... I think the teacher was unaware of his behavior. He thought he was just teasing.

17:31

RB: mhmm, just a joke?

17:33

RW: So he needed to be educated. *[laughter]* But anyway, I forget what the original question was.

17:43

RB: *[laughter]* That’s okay.

17:45

RW: But that’s when he came out, so we have been with him on that journey and encouraging him. Oh, I remember when that death threat happened, I said to him “Hey Max, you don’t have to go to school today if you don’t want to.” And he had been a person who was kind of not engaging in after-school activities or things. We were new to the area. I had let him home school the first year rather than go back to elementary school because elementary school goes through seventh grade here. He’d already been in an arts middle school in Charlotte, and just didn’t want to do the backtracking. So, he said “No, I’m going.” And we stepped up, talked to the sheriff, talked to the principal, the other child was dealt with. And from then on it was kind of like, he said “fuck it!” *[laughter]* And he just went for whatever he wanted in high school, and he was extremely popular, and he was very gifted, and did a lot of things really well, and just kind of came into his own despite those sort of threats that were on the edge of his social group.

19:18

RB: So, would you say the community around here, the community in Floyd, was relatively accepting of your son in high school? Or was it...

19:24

RW: There were elements that certainly were, and then other elements that were just very neutral, and then there were other elements that were vocal.

19:37

RB: Vocally against?

19:38

RW: Yeah.

19:39

RB: How did he deal with that and how did you guys deal with that?

19:44

RW: Usually we would talk about it, occasionally we would confront it, but mostly he just kept his friendships... he's a good friend, and he kept them strong, and let other people worry about their own stuff.

20:10

RB: So, for the most part it could be, kind of, pushed away?

20:14

RW: Yeah. Of course, it's one thing when you've got somebody where you can protect them. When he went off to school in Richmond he went to VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University], and there were some things that happened there that were scary for us. He met and was involved with a young man in another city who, I think, was abusing drugs and alcohol and probably had a lot of self-loathing, and he was abusive. I can remember one night I was getting ready for bed here. We were all just about to crash, and Max called and said: "I just got back from this other place and here's what happened." I said to Walter: "We're going to Richmond, and we're going tonight." Because, if it had been a daughter...I don't know. I just felt like it needed an immediate response from us to say "this is not okay and you're worth more than this." And, for a while we kind of worked on that whole aspect of what he could hope for in a relationship, what he had the right to. That's one of the things that I feel was a huge plus for me to abandon my first marriage and take up with Walter. My oldest daughter is very aware of what she was watching in my first marriage, and all my kids have ever seen from Walter is respect and love for me. I wish I could say that's all I've ever given him [*laughter*]. I would have to be honest and say that I'm a pretty volatile person sometimes.

22:41

RB: So, your son went off to college in Richmond. What was the point where you felt like you were getting involved in the activism and reaching out in the LGBT community?

22:58

RW: Well, after the kids left, after Emma left, I did what was supposed to be a sensitivity training with the teachers at Floyd High School. One of the faculty asked me to come and talk to them. Our daughter is a lesbian, and she came through Floyd High School after Max, and she had a huge crisis also, but it was more just a personal inner crisis rather than being attacked at school. But one of the things that happened as a result was I developed relationships with other children

who were fringe children, who were identifying as either gay or bi, and they would come to me and talk to me, whereas they weren't safe in their own homes.

24:00

RB: With their own parents?

24:02

RW: Yeah, so I did some advocacy work with those folks, and then I went and basically told the faculty what they weren't seeing.

24:11

RB: mmmm, so a big part of it was at the schools?

24:15

RW: Yeah, I've done some writing. That was a one-time adventure, really. I would go back any year, but we've actually encouraged other people to do that same thing so that we don't always see the same face. I started the Floyd PFLAG with my friend Kim O'Donnell.<sup>3</sup>

24:37

RB: When did you start that?

24:39

RW: Well, I'm thinking it was maybe 2009 or '10. I'd have to look that up.

24:52

RB: It was after your kids had graduated from the school system themselves?

24:55

RW: Yes.

24:58

RB: So, when they were in school, what were the kinds of things that you were seeing that prompted you to want to start the PFLAG?

25:04

RW: Honestly, I don't think I would have thought of starting PFLAG. But my friend Karen Day who runs the Plenty organization here also has a lesbian daughter.<sup>4</sup> [She] was working with a group, and I'm forgetting the name of it now, it's kind of similar to PFLAG. And she and I were

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<sup>3</sup> Kim O'Donnell has also recorded an oral history interview for this project that is also housed in the LGBTQ History Collection, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library.

<sup>4</sup> Plenty! Nourishing Community, Feeding Hungry Neighbors is a grassroots organization based in Floyd, Virginia. <http://www.plentylocal.org>

having some conversations, and she's like "You know, maybe we should just start one here." So, I went ahead and did that. It did not pan out the way I had hoped at that time, but I think...do you know who Jim Best is?<sup>5</sup>

25:47

RB: Yeah.

25:48

RW: Okay, so Jim has taken over the leadership there, and I think it's a much more vital organization, and people are much more aware of it and, perhaps, more people who are just kind of figuring out that their kids or somebody else in their family...perhaps some people are coming more from that angle now. Before it was just a very small support group, and I didn't actually need that support. I was kind of wanting to be there for people who were like "Oh my god! This is happening to us and our family!" [*laughter*]

26:26

RB: It was a crisis for them?

26:29

RW: Yeah, I wanted to give them a place to go, but it didn't seem like, at that time, people in Floyd were utilizing PFLAG for that. We've marched in the pride parade here in Floyd a couple of times. It's an itty-bitty parade but it's fun. [*laughter*]

26:50

RB: Yeah, has involvement in PFLAG gotten better over the years, do you think?

26:56

RW: I think it's a larger group and they're doing more things.

27:00

RB: The community is more receptive to it?

27:02

RW: Yeah, I think so.

27:04

RB: Would you say the experience of having a gay child, having gay children, really pushes people to want to be more involved in that type of stuff?

27:15

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Best has also recorded an oral history interview for this project that is also housed in the LGBTQ History Collection, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library.

RW: Oh yes. I'm trying to think how vocal I would be, you know? My heart would still be against discrimination, but, if it weren't this personal, I don't know. I don't know how much time I would find for it.

27:39

RB: The kind of things you experience when it's your child versus when it's someone you don't know. Are your children involved in activism at all?

27:48

RW: Somewhat. I would say they'll show their faces for demonstrations and things like that. I don't know. They kind of think of the world as their own. I can't fully say that for my daughter but I think she's getting to feel that way. It's the other people's problem, it's not their problem. *[laughter]* Our daughter lives out in California and she belongs to a Zen community out there and the Zen community usually puts together a float for the San Francisco Pride Parade, so she's participated in that.

28:52

RB: Pretty huge parade! Bigger than Floyd.

28:55

RW: Yeah, I don't think that they're tremendously active. I was going to say, I realized that before my kids were out, or had identified at all, I was doing demonstrations in Washington with my friend who was trans and my sister.

29:27

RB: So that was still something that you were involved in before.

29:31

RW: Yeah, I was doing things like that in a support role. It's like, "Oh, you're going to go do that, well I'll come with you!"

29:43

RB: Yeah, show your support. Did it become more personal after your children...?

29:48

RW: Yes. When you see what effect society's views about anything like body shape or skin color...what those views agitate in somebody. That whole notion of "am I worthy?" is something that I wish nobody had to go through, but I don't want my children ever wondering if they're worthy.

30:32

RB: Do you think that was something that they really struggled with initially after coming out?

30:41

RW: Yeah.

30:43

RB: And that's, to you, a societal problem?

30:47

RW: Yeah, I think one of the things that's pretty well known about homophobia is that some of the folks who have it the worst are the people that are homosexual. That's a big demon that they have to work through. One of the reasons Walter and I are so tickled about the partner that Max has now is because he came out to his family at about the same age that Max was when he came out. He had support within his family, and so the playing field is kind of leveled in terms of the amount of self-worth that they feel, and I feel like they're on good footing. Some of the guys that Max dated who were newly out, they were in a horrible mess. They just didn't know who they were and they were constantly either trying to please Max or please their parents or run away... it was kind of crazy.

32:08

RB: So, as far as the role of having a supportive family and going through that coming out process, how important is that to you?

32:20

RW: Well, I think if you think about any child who has gifts and challenges that they're born with, we would hope that their family, their extensive family, would support them in having the courage to overcome their challenges and recognize their own strengths. So, I don't see that as any different... all of our kids had big challenges.

32:55

RB: So, being gay is not necessarily distinguishable, as far as your role as a parent, from any other problem that children have?

33:10

RW: Right, as long as I cannot be shut down because I'm believing that it's a sin or something. You know? That's where those kids are really vulnerable, if their parents can't even accept them as they are.

33:32

RB: And working through PFLAG, you had a lot of experiences with that, with parents who were very reluctant, with parents who, kind of, lash out?

33:44

RW: No, those experiences, those things that I saw, are basically things that I saw when my kids were in high school. As I said, those folks really didn't show up at PFLAG when I was there, and I haven't been attending because we're not around the days that the meetings are happening. I know people, I read accounts...

34:21

RB: What would you say is where you want to see PFLAG and the Floyd community going as far as their acceptance of an interaction with the LGBT community?

34:35

RW: Well, I would love for everyone in Floyd to know that PFLAG exists and for every child and parent who are in the school system to know that there is support if they're wondering if they're gay, if their parents are wondering if they're gay. I think that going to other families who've been through the experience rather than going out to the minister who might try to set you on a path for a cure. *[laughter]* We know that that happens, and those cures are being taken down by some very strong activism. They're being disproved, but that's just another abuse. Little digression here, I grew up, as I said, in the '50s and '60s and, on my road there was a family who had about as many children as I did. Both parents were actors, and about 25 years into their marriage, the husband came out and went off and lived with a male partner. Back then, that was totally devastating. Here was somebody who had lived basically a lie and struggled with his own self-worth around it for all those years. He had kids that were born to him. My hope is that people don't have to try to fit into some other kind of costume to live their lives.

36:52

RB: Right, the more people who can be open and honest from a young age...

36:57

RW: Yeah.

37:00

RB: Do you think, as far as the role of a parent is concerned, how essential is that?

37:07

RW: I think it's really essential that parents not only see who their children are, but give them the space to figure it out for themselves. It was really important for us to not press our kids, and say "you're gay! You're gay!" It's like, let them figure it out and find their own voice for how they say that.

37:36

RB: I guess there's kind of a different path for everyone. You've seen your kids take very different paths as far as their lives... so what would you say is the most rewarding part for you about being involved in PFLAG and just being involved in this activism?

37:57

RW: Well, I'd have to say [there are] big rewards in terms of just the personal stories. You know, my son getting married, out in public in front of everybody, in a public place! That's something that for a lot of years we didn't think was going to happen. We have really good friends, women who were together for 35 years, and one of the partners was suffering with dementia. When it became legal in Virginia to get married, they went ahead and got married. It's only been a year or so, and that partner has now died, but it meant so much to my friend who's still living to be able to sanctify that union. Both those ladies I think were brought up Catholic, and to be able to really come fully out and say "we have a right to be who we are, we love each other" in front of everybody and God. I'm sure the Catholic Church didn't sanctify their wedding, but they had two lady ministers who were there who did that right here in Floyd, so yeah.

39:34

RB: That's amazing! So would you say that gay marriage ruling really kind of changed the environment around...?

39:43

RW: Yes, I think it did. And I think it just kind of speeds up that snowball of everything that's been trying to happen since the abolition of slavery really. It's just kind of speeding things up to where we're going to be really seeing all people with all differences as more and more the same. We're all the same, you know? We all have that spark that goes beyond time, all of us have it. We're all worthy.

40:18

RB: Absolutely. So, kind of going off your point about gay marriage relating to accepting all differences, going in that direction, is that a part of your activism as well?

40:41

RW: I'm not sure about that question, can you say that in a different way?

40:45

RB: Yeah, sorry. So you mentioned the importance of the gay marriage ruling and then how that signifies a move in the direction of accepting a lot of differences like the trans community, race differences, is that something that you would connect with your LGBT activism?

41:07

RW: Yeah, and I think, for me, that is also at the root of what I think we're supposed to be here spiritually [for], to not only recognize that we're all more the same than we are different, but that we also don't have dominion over the planet any more than we don't have dominion over each other. I must say it's a discouraging time to live in in that regard, because I think there are a lot of people still blundering around thinking.... old white guys who think they're in charge of the



world and in charge of exploiting it for their own greed. But, I think, the more of us little people who recognize that we're the same and everybody should be treated with the same respect, then the closer we get to making that shift.

42:27

RB: Yeah, for better. So kind of taking this full circle, you grew up in the '60s, that was this huge time of social progress and growth, and a lot was happening. What are some changes that you've seen over time? Do you think it's been kind of a straight line [of progress], have there been a lot of snags? You mentioned at the beginning of the interview that you felt like back then there was some more freedom that children had to explore themselves and their identities, can you elaborate on that?

43:01

RW: Yeah, well I think kids were playing outside, they were playing outside most all the time that they could. Even in urban areas, kids were allowed to play on the street, and now there's such a fear of who's in the neighborhood. It might be a predator, and kids are very closely guarded and kind of overprotected, which we [gestures at her partner] were just talking about this the other day. If you're free to roam in the woods around your house or just in your neighborhood, you learn things experientially that you can't get from a parent telling you about them or a teacher telling you about them. You learn by trial and error how to cross the brook or how to get from here to there without getting lost. A lot of that experiential knowledge is not accessible to kids right now, and I think that that helps them to know who they are and to feel empowered about their own world. So I feel sorry about that.

44:24

RB: Yeah, it's strange how that seems to have just had a complete flip. Would you say that now there's a lot of pressure for kids to...they're pressed into these identities of "you're gay, or you're bi" and there's not...?

44:43

RW: I don't know if anyone is pressing kids into those identities. I would think that...I don't think socially people are...it's not like there are recruiters out there.

45:02

RB: [laughs] right, no recruiters for the gay community....

45:05

RW: I mean, there are people who will exploit young men and young women, you know. Young teens, if they run away people will exploit them. Some people might say, "well, that's a recruitment." If they're selling a boy on the street for sex, but if a person has their own ability to make up their mind how they use their bodies I think they're going to figure out who they're attracted to. And I suspect that a lot more people are just going to be like...they are attracted to the person and the spirit of the person regardless of what their sex is. I think that's going to be

more and more the case. I do think that there are people who are born in the wrong body, and I'm glad for all of the incredibly hard work that's been done around that. The pioneers who were trying to change that... God, what was that movie? *The Danish Girl*... have you seen that?

46:20

RB: I've heard of it, I haven't seen it though.

46:23

RW: Yeah. That's some pretty rough old history right there. Even when my friend back in the early '90s was going through it, it was pretty rough. It's a lot safer today to do those kinds of surgeries and those kinds of transitions.

46:46

RB: Does PFLAG do a lot of work with the trans community in Floyd?

46:55

RW: Yeah, I think that's one of the things that Jim has had the wherewithal to do. He's brought speakers, international trans folks have been here and the people in PFLAG feel free to talk about how they can support somebody they know is transitioning. So, I don't know where that leaves the general population of Floyd. I mean, these are people [PFLAG supporters] who are kind of ready to look at that and do that work. I don't think it necessarily helps the people who are resistant.

47:49

RB: Yeah, and there are certainly those people out there. Do you think as far as the topic of transitioning and being transgender... is that harder for parents to understand, do you think, than being gay or lesbian currently?

48:08

RW: I think it is harder to understand. I think there are more barriers to accepting that. Certainly in the age that I grew up, people would just be shaking their heads to think "hey, if you were born in that body, that's who you are." They would not be able to understand that inside you were somebody else.

48:40

RB: Right, it was unheard of.

48:42

RW: Yeah [*laughs*]

48:43

RB: That's definitely... that's something that I feel like has really picked up in the last ten years or so.

48:49

RW: So now, I think feelings in general are being talked about more. So even if you can't be totally genuine about what your... if you were to say to your parents "I'm a girl, I'm a girl" if you weren't, what you might be able to say [instead] are all kinds of feelings that may be able to start to let the message seep in, because feelings in general are more acceptable, they're more out on the table. People understand that it's kind of a right to have feelings! *[laughter]*

49:34

RB: Right, luckily people get that!

49:36

RW: Honest to God, when I was growing up it was like "quit crying or I'll give you something to cry about!" Or just these outrageous statements about what you're feeling. That you don't have any right to feel that way. I think feelings are more accepted.

49:55

RB: Yeah, and that's definitely important for recognizing people's identities and respecting them.

50:01

RW: Mhmmm.

50:04

RB: Well, I think we're good. Thank you so much for your time. It was lovely.

50:12

RW: Thank you!