

Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative
Interview with Price
March 18, 2021

Interviewer: Steph Zemba

Interviewee: Price

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Transcription Prepared by Erica Gudino, Hannah Brotton, Charlie, Steph Zemba, and Alexis Smith

Duration: 94:18

0:00 = Childhood in Northern Alabama, including early awareness of gender and sexuality (1960s)

5:24 = Moving to a larger city in Alabama (c. 1968)

6:10 = Bullying in grammar school; lack of friends in middle and high school (late 1960s-1970s)

9:52 = Early observations of gay and lesbian couples; butch/femme gender roles in the 1960s-1970s; family's attitudes towards homosexuality

14:00 = Attending college in Birmingham and going to a gay bar for the first time (late 1970s); coming out as lesbian (1978); relationship with first partner

16:35 = Drug abuse and sobriety (early 1980s); wrestling with gender identity; suicidal ideation

20:17 = Meeting another trans man for the first time (1982)

22:08 = Creating a Gay Alcoholics Anonymous group in Birmingham (1982)

22:48 = Learning about the AIDS epidemic; working with AIDS patients as a nurse (1980s)

29:15 = Lesbians and the AIDS crisis; stigma attached to bisexual women

32:22 = Going back to college as an out queer person

35:58 = Moving to South Florida with partner for five years; leaving Florida and moving to North Carolina (Early 1990s)

37:05 = Facing anti-gay harassment in Greensboro, North Carolina (mid-1990s)

40:10 = Leaving North Carolina and moving to Virginia (c. 2000)

42:43 = Mention of Backstreet Café shooting in Roanoke (2000)

43:10 = Involvement in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of the Blue Ridge; experiences with churches in North Carolina and Virginia

49:14 = Beginnings of self-isolation (mid-2000 to late 2010s)

51:22 = Beginning gender transition (2019 - present)

52:54 = Navigating being transgender in the workplace; getting top surgery; name change

58:38 = Involvement with SARA Roanoke (Sexual Assault Response and Awareness); volunteering

1:02:38 = Making trans male friends, and gay male friends
1:06:49 = Experiences with transphobia in various settings, including banking and healthcare
1:11:46 = Microaggressions and being deadnamed
1:15:34 = Aging and transitioning
1:22:35 = Trying to connect with the local transgender community
1:26:55 = Opinion on the internet and visibility for younger transgender individuals
1:31:18 = Closing thoughts

Interview (1:34:18 total).

0:00

SZ: My name is Steph Zemba and I am here with Price on March 18th, 2021, as part of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ History Project, Oral History Initiative. We're doing this interview over Zencaster, so, hi Price, and welcome.

0:14

P: Hi Steph. Thank you.

0:17

SZ: Yeah. Can we just start off with your childhood, just give us like a little bit of an overview of that?

0:23

P: Of my childhood?

0:25

SZ: Yeah, where you grew up and what it was like for you.

0:28

P: Yeah, so I grew up in a really small town in North Alabama of probably about five hundred people, maybe six hundred people; one stop light; two churches. My parents... my mother was from there, my dad was from New York. And so we were a little bit of an odd family there because my dad was a Yankee and he drank beer and the local church wasn't too happy with that. He was also atheist. So on one side, it was the church, we went to church every time the doors were open. We went to the Southern Baptist church with my grandparents. And then on the other side, it was my dad who was an atheist. So it was kind of nice because I had a little bit of a buffer from the 'hell and brimstone' that was taught at the church and I just never believed it. I can remember being a small child and just being in church and thinking, 'How can this be right?' So, I was glad that I had that, because I think a lot of my friends grew up with a lot of shame

because of that [the church's teachings] and I didn't internalize that at that time. I just went but I didn't really believe what they were saying.

2:05

SZ: Yeah, so was religion a big part of your life in the home? Or not so much?

2:11

P: Not so much in my home but my grandparents were [religious]. They went to church every time the doors were open, and I lived with them some when I was little, so they would take me to church with them. My dad ended up leaving when I was four and I lived with my grandparents some for a couple of years and that was when I started to notice that I was different. I probably was five or six years old and I was attracted to girls and I wanted to marry a girl. [As kids] playing, I always had a girlfriend, and I thought that was different and I never really said anything about it. But I guess because I felt so different because of my family, with a Yankee dad and [him being] an atheist father, and they already thought we was odd because my parents were divorced and nobody had ever been divorced there. So I just felt that that was just another part of being different from the kids that I grew up with there. And when I was little, honestly, I thought I was a boy. I wore boy clothes and I had a boy haircut. I played with boy stuff. If they gave me dolls, I would shave their hair off and make them into boy dolls. And, you know, I wanted G.I. Joes and all that but I never got any of those kinds of things. The most I could ever get out of my mother was a little pack of green plastic army men at the grocery store and I would get packs of those and play army. It was weird, because nobody in that town even acted like it was weird, you know? I guess they just thought that I was an ultra tomboy or something, and I never felt weird about how I was. I didn't feel like anybody thought much about it, which was nice. I grew up on the Tennessee River and during the day in the summer I would get up and me and my dog and I would just go and hit the woods and hit the boathouse and we'd be gone all day, playing in the woods or whatever. I was always Daniel Boone or some male figure like Dr. Spock. We would play Star Trek and I was always Dr. Spock. So it was really kind of a nice childhood, living there in that town.

5:20

SZ: Yeah, so what years would that be approximately?

5:24

P: So, I was about nine when we moved from there and we moved to a bigger city in Alabama. And I was behind academically because I had gone from that small county school system to a city school system, so I had to struggle a little bit with that. And the very first day that I went to the new school, the teacher put me in front of the class and was telling the students that they had a new student, and a boy in the back of the class yelled out, "Are you a boy or are you a girl?"

6:09

SZ: Oh wow.

6:10

P: Yeah, I mean, it just stopped me. I mean, it stopped me in my tracks. Nobody had ever said anything like that to me, ever. And of course everybody in the class laughed, and so that was like a real turning point in my childhood. I went from being fairly happy, a good student, and I was happy with how I was and nobody said anything about it, to that. And it was a real shock for me.

6:50

SZ: Yeah.

6:50

P: I was bullied. The kids bullied me. And so I didn't have any friends, so I started to try to do things to fit in, like I grew my hair out and I started to try to dress more like the girls in my class. But I never fit in with them or with the guys. I wanted to play boys' sports and I wanted to do all that. Of course, this was in 1969, in the late '60s, so I was always put with the girls, and I never ever fit in with either group. So, all through the rest of that grammar school, and all through junior high and high school, I really had no friends. I was by myself a lot. And, you know, it was just a really lonely, really lonely time for me. My mother had always had gay friends when I was little and had gay friends when I moved, and I knew that I was different but I didn't really identify with them either.

8:18

SZ: Oh.

8:19

P: I guess—and I've come to understand this more now—I didn't want a girl to like me because I was a girl. I wanted a girl to like me because I was a boy, and that was not possible. So, I didn't really identify with the gay people I knew either. So high school was pretty rough. I graduated early because I just couldn't stand to go. I went as little as possible and I petitioned the school board to let me graduate early. And they said, "Well, you'll miss the prom and you'll miss the senior picnic and all of that." And I said, "Do I look like I care about that? I don't care about that at all, I just want out of here." It was so bad. I hung out with a guy that lived across the street, and he was a misfit, too. We started smoking a lot of pot, so that was kind of what got me through high school. We would walk to school together and we'd smoke a joint on the way to school [*laughter*], which made it a little more tolerable. But I graduated early and got a job and then I went to college.

9:52

SZ: Yeah, so during your childhood, what were your parents and grandparents like? Were they really open to people who didn't really identify with the gender binary? You know, like men versus women.

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10:03

P: Yeah, well actually, I don't think that they had ever heard of anything like that. I mean, like when I was little and living in that small town... We lived on the river, so our house was like a party house, and there were always people there on the pier drinking and spending the night and that kind of thing. There were always women couples, lesbian couples, and there were always gay men couples. But the women couples were always one woman was real kind of butch, and the other one wasn't. And it was kind of like, you would say, "Well, who's the girl and who's the boy?" But there was no non-binary stuff. We had never heard of that. And the guys were mostly always effeminate. Most of them were hairdressers. And I'm being real stereotypical, but that was how it was. And then, the gay people my mother knew later, in the bigger town that we moved to, the guys, some of them, were very masculine and some were very feminine. So, you were still into that... even if they were gay or lesbian, it was still relatively binary. You see, they were either really butch or really effeminate. You didn't see anybody that was kind of in between.

11:44

I got really close to one of my mom's friends during that period of time when I was in high school. His name was Fred Price. My mother sort of disowned me when I was about thirteen and told me that I was on my own. She didn't care what I did. She didn't care when I came home. She didn't care who I was with, or whatever. So I smoked a lot of pot and stayed out of her way. And [I met] this one friend of hers and we just kind of hit it off. He would come and get me before I could even drive and take me to his house and I'd spend the weekend with him. Or if she kicked me out of the house or locked me out of the house, I'd call him and he'd come get me. He was kind of like my savior in high school. He was just always there and he really never dated anybody. He had some gender issues himself with his family. His dad was a preacher. Of course, my grandparents thought it was totally wrong. That you would just go to hell if you were—my grandmother called lesbians "lisbens." She said, "If you're one of those 'lisbens' you're going to hell." So, we had some conversations about it and I said, "I'm sorry that you believe that way, but I don't believe that way. I don't think that I'm going to hell and I really don't want to have this conversation again." So we never did. She and my grandfather eventually, and actually pretty quickly, came to accept how I was. And they accepted if I was with someone and they came home with me for Christmas or something. If they got me a present, they got her the same present. And they called my partners my 'buddy.' You know, they'd call and say, "How's your buddy doing?" But they were okay with it and they never gave me any trouble about it after that.

14:00

I got ahead of myself there, but when I went to college, I started going to gay bars. It was in the mid-70s and the gay bars were really big with the disco music and they were just really fun places to be. I had a roommate who was an art major, and she and her boyfriend went to the gay bars. They asked me if I wanted to go and I had never heard of anything like that before. I mean, I knew those gay people my mother knew, but they never went to a bar, and I didn't know how they got to be gay or how they met people or anything. So I said, "Yeah, I'd love to go!" So, I started going to the gay bars and I started meeting girls who liked me. All through high school I had crushed on straight girls and they never paid me any attention at all, and I just followed them around like a little puppy dog, wanting them to talk to me and notice me, which they never did because they were straight. So, I started going to gay bars and started running into girls and the girls liked me. And I thought, "Maybe I am a lesbian." It made more sense to me than anything else I had seen, so I came out when I was 19 as a lesbian. That was in 1978. My first partner was quite a bit older than I was and did not get along with my mother at all. They hated one another. So that was a real, real bad period of time, with my mother hassling me and calling me and starting fights and stuff. And then my partner would get on the phone and they would get into a fight. It was not good. It was not good for anybody. My partner had been a heroin addict in the '60s.

16:34

SZ: Hmm.

16:35

P: Because there was so much turmoil with me, and with my mother and all that, we started doing a lot of drugs, a lot of pills, and of course that escalated, too. I was shooting some drugs at the time. I was in college, but I wasn't doing very good because I was doing so many drugs and I overdosed a couple times and ended up in a psych ward. And quickly begged to be transferred to a drug rehab program because I didn't want to be in the psych ward. I thought a drug rehab would be better. So I went there and my partner and I split up. I went through rehab, got clean, quit drugs, quit drinking, and went back to school... I didn't have anywhere to live so I lived in halfway houses for a while and went back to school. And it was then that I would, again, over and over, I would fall in love with a straight woman. You know, either classmates who were straight or women that I met through the program, through AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or NA. There was no Narcotics Anonymous back then; addicts went to AA. So, I went through a period of a couple of years where I was in so much pain over wanting to change my gender. I had heard about some famous people, and back then they called them transsexuals. And I had heard about those people ...

18:38

And I started to figure out... I wasn't drinking, I wasn't doing any drugs, and I was thinking more clearly. I was coming to the realization that I was not a lesbian, that I was actually trans, and we

didn't even have a word for that then. I guess you would say transexual, but those were the people that had had surgeries. But I knew that I was not lesbian, I knew that I wanted to change my gender. I journaled for two years and I was in a lot of pain over it, like every night saying "Why did I have to be born in this body? Why is it so hard?" And I had, at one point, decided that I would just kill myself. And I usually talked to my grandparents on Sunday and I think it was on a Thursday that I decided that I was just going to go and kill myself because I couldn't deal with it. I was getting ready to leave my apartment and my grandmother called. She never called on Thursday, ever. Never.

20:02

SZ: Wow.

20:03

P: Yeah, so it really saved my life. You know, I thought, "Gosh, how could I do that? Why did she call me right now?" So I decided to just put it away for a little bit, and about the same time I did meet a transsexual.

20:24

SZ: Hmm.

20:25

P: He was a friend of a *[audio cuts out]*. Went to college with him when he presented as female. And he had had top and bottom surgery in Philadelphia. And...

20:40

SZ: Oh.

20:41

P: Back in... and this would have been... I met him in 1982 so he probably had his surgeries in the late '70s, early '80s in Philadelphia. So, she said, "Why don't we go, and you can meet him." So we drove up. He was living in Rhode Island. We drove up and stayed the weekend with him. What had happened to him was so horrible. They didn't take good care of him when he had his surgery and he had terrible scars. I mean, he wouldn't even take his shirt off. He wouldn't show his chest, it was so scarred.

21:27

SZ: Wow.

21:28

P: Yeah. He was not happy. His family had disowned him and said, “We never want to see you again.” So he was struggling a lot with all of that. So, when I came back from meeting him, I thought, “I can't. There's just no way I can do this.” So I just resigned myself to just going on with my life, you know? I finished school.

22:01

SZ: So where did you go to college at?

22:03

P: I went to the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

22:07

SZ: Okay.

22:08

P: And that was another interesting thing. When I got out of drug rehab... The drug addicts had to go to AA, and the people in AA didn't like us because we were young and we were drug addicts, and most of them were older people and they were really hardcore alcoholics. They didn't want to hear about this drug stuff. They had never heard of Quaaludes [Methaqualone] and Cocaine. They just didn't want to hear about it.

So we started a Gay AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]. We had never heard of NA, but we started a Gay AA.

22:47

SZ: Oh.

22:48

P: Sometimes there were only one or two people that would come. There was one guy that came every single time. Every single time. Sometimes it would just be him sitting there and sometimes I would go and it would just be me and him. Then sometimes there would be a few people. It was mostly guys, and I loved them. They called me ‘baby butch’ and I hung out with them mostly, because it was safe. I mean they were gay guys who weren't interested [in sex]. What would happen occasionally if I tried to hang out with a straight guy, you know, it would end up in a bad situation because they would think, “Well, I'm gonna be the guy that's gonna change your mind about wanting to date women” or whatever. It always ended up [going] badly. So I hung out with all of these gay guys in Gay AA. It was probably 1982. We were at a meeting and these two guys came from Houston. You could go to a town and look up and see where a meeting was, so they looked it up and found Gay AA, so they came to the AA meeting. And they sat there and they cried... [*choking up*]

24:21

SZ: Wow.

24:22

P: And they said, "Our friends are dying" [*pause*]. "All our friends are dying with this virus and all our friends in Houston are dying with it. And our friends in California are dying with it and we don't know why and we don't know what it is." And it was AIDS. But we had never heard of AIDS before. We had never heard of HIV.

24:48

SZ: Oh.

24:48

P: We had never heard of it. I mean, they literally begged the guys in this group, "Please either abstain from having sex for a while, or use protection." And of course the guys that I knew back then... the big thing to do was cruise the park and just have sex with anybody that you found.

25:16

SZ: Oh.

25:17

P: They didn't believe these guys from Houston, and all of these guys are dead or they've been dead for many many years. They all died with...

25:28

SZ: Wow...

25:29

P: ...with AIDS. And you know, we just didn't have any way to figure what they were saying, you know? We just... [*audio cuts out*] we didn't not believe them, but we didn't really believe them. And I just can remember the guys saying, "Aww, that's just bullshit. We don't know anything about that here." And as I said, all of those guys that were friends of mine died of AIDS.

26:03

SZ: Wow.

26:04

P: I was working in the ICU at UAB at the time, it was a burn unit, so we had private rooms, and usually ICUs don't have private rooms. We got all the AIDS patients, and I took care of all those people.

26:27

SZ: So were you concerned at all then, for yourself? With AIDS being such an emergent. . .?

26:35

P: Yeah! If you can believe this, I drew lab work and drew blood and started IVs and drew blood gases and all kinds of things on those patients with no gloves.

26:50

SZ: Wow.

26:51

P: Because we didn't know, and back then, if you were a nurse, we were taught never to wear gloves because it made the patients feel weird, like we didn't want to touch them. So, I mean if we were clean and somebody would use a bedpan or something, we would use gloves. But we didn't use gloves to start IVs or draw blood or any of that. So, we took care of all those guys in the unit with no gloves and minimal precautions. We really weren't that concerned about it, you know? We would just say, "I don't know what this is, really, so I'm not going to worry about it." And none of us that took care of those guys, as far as I know, ever got anything. But it was a weird time. My cousin died with AIDS also, and he would actually be at a doctor's office in a wheelchair, when he was really bad. His mother would take him to the doctor and he would need to use the bathroom and they would say, "We don't have a bathroom." That's how bad it was. I mean even the medical community didn't even want him to use their bathroom.

28:19

SZ: Oh so like the fear of getting it?

28:21

P: Yes, everybody was so—we weren't scared—but everybody else was really scared. His mother took care of him until he died and she didn't get anything either. But there was a lot of hysteria about it, and like I said, all those people died that I knew. A whole generation of just wonderful guys—smart, creative, just great guys—just wiped out.

28:57

SZ: Yeah.

28:57

P: Yeah. So...

28:59

SZ: So, you...

29:01

P: Yeah, go ahead.

29:02

SZ: So with AIDS, a lot of people had tied it to the gay community, the LGBTQ community, were you ever worried about that? Like about people tying you to that? And maybe treating you the same way that you had mentioned with your cousin, you know, with fear?

29:15

P: Yeah! There was a fear, and not so much with the lesbians in the community. I mean at that time lesbians kind of had this attitude of “Well, it isn’t happening to us,” you know, that kind of thing, unless you slept with guys also, or unless you slept with bisexuals. So, at that time the lesbian community felt pretty [safe]. . . we felt like we were okay. We didn’t think we were going to get it, as long as you didn’t sleep with a guy, or sleep with a guy who slept with guys, or sleep with a woman who slept with guys. So, there was a lot of, “I don’t know... who did she sleep with,” that kind of thing. Because, back then, I mean women weren’t using protection, we never heard of dental dams or any of that. But we were really careful about women who might sleep with guys. So, you didn’t sleep with a woman who might have slept with guys, because you didn’t know. Actually, now that I say that, there was some paranoia that was going around about it. Like, stick with the people you know. Don’t sleep with somebody you don’t know. Which had not been the case in the ‘70s. In the ‘70s everybody slept with everybody. Nobody used protection, the worst you could get was gonorrhea and you could clear that up pretty easily; there was no herpes, syphilis was very rare—there was nothing that people could get, really. In the ‘70s, I mean, everybody was sleeping with everybody. So, this kind of changed everything even for us too, because there was paranoia about it. I left Birmingham and went to South Florida for five years, my partner and I moved down there after I went back and got another Bachelors. I didn’t get a Masters. And there was homophobia in that program, in the second program I went to.

32:10

SZ: Oh?

32:11

P: The director of the school said that he was going to rid my whole profession of queers.

32:18

SZ: Oh.

32:20

P: So...

32:21

SZ: So, what was your profession?

32:22

P: I did anesthesia for 32 years. I was a nurse anesthetist. So, [the director] came to our school and he said he was gonna rid the profession [of queers]; there were quite a few gay men who were anesthetists and there were quite a few lesbians who went to anesthesia school, and he made the comment he was gonna rid the profession of all the queers. So, my last year in that program was really not fun. He kind of had it out for me the whole time. I had a 4.0 GPA, graduated with honors, and he didn't give me any recognition for that.

33:11

SZ: Wow.

33:12

P: There was another gay guy in my class, and he and I kind of stuck together, kind of weathered the whole thing. And what was funny, [the director] handpicked the next class, and there were two lesbians in the next class and he didn't know it [*laughter*]. Like, he thought he could tell who was lesbian and gay, and he didn't have a clue, but he was going to rid the profession of us. So, thank God my friends were in the class and we ended up sticking together, and we made it through the program.

33:50

SZ: So, where there any queer spaces at either one of those programs you went to?

33:56

P: Yeah, no!

33:59

SZ: Like places where you could find a community?

34:00

P: No, there weren't [any] at all. When I went to nursing school there were none. This is interesting though, the dean of the nursing school, when I had gotten in drug treatment, he was a

gay guy. And he and I had kind of hit it off when I was there as a student, and I was on an ethics committee and all that before I got all drugged out. I was trying to be good. But for some reason, he took a liking to me. When I got out of drug treatment, I had to re-apply to get back in school, and a lot of the professors didn't want me there, because of the drugs. And this dean said, "Look, I like you a lot. And I'm going to let you back in this program. You better, by God, not make one mistake, or your ass is out of here." And I said, "Okay, okay." So I got back in, because of him. But yeah, I didn't know any gay people in that program. I knew him, and that was it. There were no gay spaces, there were no gay bookstores, there was nowhere. The only place where anybody met anybody gay was at a bar.

35:36

SZ: Right.

35:37

P: When I got out, of course I didn't go to any bars anymore and didn't go anywhere. I met somebody who was actually a sister of one of my mother's friends when I was little, one of the lesbian women. We thought that was a sign we were supposed to be together.

35:57

SZ: Huh.

35:58

P: So we got together, we moved to South Florida, and that was pretty uneventful. We lived down there for five years. We should've never gotten together, that was not a sign [*laughter*]. And my dysphoria, my discomfort with my body, was getting worse.

36:22

SZ: Huh.

36:23

P: [It got to the point] where I didn't want anybody looking at me. I didn't want her looking at me. And I was just getting more and more uncomfortable with my body. So we broke up and nothing really happened down there. We didn't really have many friends, nobody really knew that we lived together. We just kind of moved in. And you know, everybody is transient in South Florida, so nobody cares what you are or what you're doing. They don't even pay attention. So I left there and went to North Carolina.

37:04

SZ: Hm.

37:05

P: I was there for eight years. I met somebody there, we met and moved in [together]. We were together until we moved here, actually. In North Carolina, the people there that I worked with knew that we were living together and all, but it was never talked about. We weren't very active because neither one of us drank, so we didn't go to bars and we didn't really know how to meet other gay people. We knew a few people that we hung out with. Something happened there that had never happened before. We went to eat one day and I had a rainbow flag on the front of the truck and we came out, got in the truck and we were driving home. It was in the summer, and we had the windows rolled down. All these people at the stop lights were yelling, "Dykes! Faggots! Dykes!" and, like, screaming and waving their fists at us and stuff, and we were going, "What happened? That didn't happen when we drove over here!" [*laughter*]. Like, what happened between when we got to the restaurant and [started] going home? All of a sudden, at every red light, people were screaming at us. It was really scary. I mean, really scary.

38:35

SZ: Yeah. So what year was this?

38:36

P: This would have been in, probably, 1994.

38:43

SZ: Oh.

38:44

P: It was in Greensboro. So, we get home and somebody had written all over the flag and all over the front of the truck, "I'm a faggot, I'm a dyke," with lipstick.

39:01

SZ: Wow.

39:02

P: So, we had driven all the way across town with this graffiti on the truck and we didn't even know it was there [*laughter*]. But the response was terrible. I mean, people were really screaming at us. And like I said, that had never happened before. I had never had anybody say anything untoward towards me at work or anywhere. Even if they knew, it was never talked about. That was a really scary experience for me, that that would happen, that people would be so bold that they would scream and wave their fists at us and yell at us like that. So that was pretty different, and that would've been probably in '94. We kind of stayed to ourselves there. Then we decided to move to Virginia 21 years ago.

40:10

SZ: Oh.

40:12

P: An employer that I had worked for in North Carolina moved a little bit north of here and was working in a hospital north of here. She asked me to come up and look around, and we did. Of course, it's beautiful up there. Then, what was nice about it, before I even came to meet everybody, she told everybody that I was a lesbian. Everybody was fine with it, and we came up and interviewed and went to dinner and everybody was perfectly okay with that, which had been different because it had always been under wraps, or kind of quiet. Nobody ever said anything about it. But everybody at work was okay. We moved up there and we lived in a pretty, I would say it was kind of a famous, house. Everybody up there knew the house, and everybody wanted to live there. So, I bought that house, not knowing that, but that kind of made us a spectacle, because everybody wanted to know who lived in that house. So, at work things are fine, but everywhere we went, people would say, "Ohhh, you're those women that live in that house."

41:36

SZ: Huh.

41:37

P: I had a crew cut, had a bunch of tattoos, and it was hot as hell, and we were always wearing sleeveless shirts and stuff. It didn't go over very well up there in the community. You know, people made comments.

41:54

SZ: Like in what way?

41:56

P: We were just different. I mean, a woman with a crew cut and tattoos kind of stuck out up there, and especially two women living together. We'd go vote and people would say, "Oh so y'all are those women that live in that house." And [there were] a lot of homophobic comments at work—not directed at me, but about other people. It turned out not to be a very warm place to live or work. I wasn't very happy with the job. My partner and I were not getting along very well.

42:42

SZ: Oh.

42:43

P: Well, our relationship was pretty much nonexistent; we just lived together. We weren't really getting along, and it was when the shooting happened, Backstreet, here. We were living up there, and it was in September of 2000 when the shooting happened here [in Roanoke]. I'm sure you know about that, Backstreet.

43:09

SZ: Yeah.

43:10

P: So, we watched all that on the news, and we were very impressed with the response from the community, and with the gay community here. And of course I'm old [and] for years and years it was just the gay and lesbian community. There was no LGBTQ and all that. If I say the gay and lesbian community, I'm not trying to exclude anybody, but that's what it was for us. We were so impressed with how the gay and lesbian community handled the shooting and how Roanoke seemed to rally around the community. So we decided to move here. We moved here in February of 2001, not too long after the shootings. And of course, MCC, the Metropolitan Community Church, was in the news a lot.

44:17

SZ: Oh?

44:18

P: We had always been excluded from church, so we said, "We want to go there." So, we started going to the church, got pretty involved in the church there. Because we lived out in the country and had a big porch and all, we were kind of like the hanging out spot for some couples. People would come up here. I'd cook big meals, and I would cut people's hair on the porch. Eventually I ended up being called 'Daddy' by some people. "Let's check with Daddy about that." I guess I was emerging more as a [person with] male energy. So yeah, that relationship didn't last very long. She was very introverted and didn't work, so when she left I told her to keep going to MCC because we knew some people there, and she didn't know anybody because she didn't work and I worked. And I suggested, "Why don't you just continue to go to MCC and I will just not go there. So that it will be more comfortable." And I just kind of hung out with the people I worked with.

45:42

SZ: Oh.

45:43

P: People knew about this and knew about us, and knew that we broke up. People at my job were very supportive during that time.

45:56

SZ: Right.

45:57

P: Yeah! So, she left.

46:00

SZ: So how did you...

46:01

PB: Yeah.

46:03

SZ: So, about religion, you had mentioned earlier that in your childhood you kind of felt excluded or that you didn't really fit into religion.

46:10

P: Yeah, I didn't. I didn't, and I left the church when I was really young. Then when my grandmother died, I was 39, and I was with the partner that we moved here with. She had never gone to church ever; her family never went to church. My grandmother asked me, when she was dying, she said, "I really wish you would find a church." It was something that was really important to her, so I said, "Okay." So, before we moved here, when we were living in North Carolina, there was a new church that opened up and it was right near our house so we said, "Okay, this is a sign. We're gonna go to this church and just see." So we went there, we talked to the minister, we told him that we were a lesbian couple and he said, "I don't care." So, we were going there for, I don't know, six or eight months, and my partner was baptized there. She had never been baptized.

47:10

SZ: Oh.

47:12

P: We felt that we were kind of getting into the church thing a little bit. I would say that I was agnostic. Not atheist, but more agnostic, and she was really glad with the whole thing, and was baptized there. Probably a few months after that, the woman who was supposed to take care of the crib babies while they were in church was sick, and the preacher's wife came and asked me if I would take care of the crib babies that morning. I said, "Sure, why not, I'm a nurse, so it'd be perfect." So, I took care of the babies and on Wednesday, some people knocked on our door and

it was some of the deacons from that church and they said that the church was upset that I took care of the crib babies, and that they never wanted me near their children.

48:09

SZ: Oh, did they say why?

48:11

P: They didn't like our lifestyle, and they didn't want us around any of the kids in the church. They had the kid zone—it was like a kid zone where all the nurseries were, and the kid rooms, and all that. And the deacon said, "You can continue to come to the church, but you cannot be even in the kid zone area. Nobody wants you near their children."

48:38

SZ: Wow.

48:39

P: Yes, and, well, you know what I said? I don't know if I can say that here, but [I said] "F—you." So, we quit going, and she kinda missed that, and so when we moved here, and we learned about MCC, and we'd seen the pastor on the news, about the shootings, and we'd seen the church, we thought, "Well, okay, we'll try this. At least this is a church, where we won't be asked to leave, because they don't want us around their kids."

49:14

So anyway, she ended up hanging out at that church for a little bit; she became agoraphobic, and almost drank herself to death. After 9/11, she got really drunk, and it was kinda sad. I don't know if she's okay, now, but anyway... When all that happened, when we broke up and all, I just kinda went underground, and stayed out here in the country by myself. I saw some people transitioning when we moved here, some younger people. And I just thought, I was 40 by then, and I thought, "God, if I were 20, I would do it."

But I was already working here, already had a career, and I really thought that they would fire me if I said that I wanted to transition. I didn't know anybody personally who transitioned, but I had seen some people around town, where people would say, "Oh look, they're transitioning." But, I didn't know how they did it, or what they did; I just knew that I saw them several months later, and they looked more like a guy, and I thought, "God, I wish... I just wanna do that." But I was 40, and I thought I was too old. And I was afraid that my job would fire me, so...

For twenty years, I sat here, and I worked and I took care of my animals. I really saw nobody. I wanted to transition more and more... And then, in 2019, when I was 60, I could retire from work.

51:21

SZ: Huh

51:22

P: And so I knew that nobody could hurt me anymore, you know? Like, they couldn't fire me, they couldn't take away my income because I was eligible for pension. And so I told a good friend of mine that I'd known for 40 years that I wanted to transition, and she said, "I think that's the smartest thing you've ever said in your life. Which was all I needed. I just needed one person to say "yeah."

52:02

So I went to my boss and I said "I'm gonna retire," and she asked me why. She said, "You're too young, and you're really good at your job, and we really don't want you to retire. What's going on?" And I said I've wanted to transition for 40 years, and I've been too afraid, and now I can retire, and I'm going to retire, so that I can transition. And she said, "Oh no, you're not. You're not going to retire. You're going to stay here, and you're going to do this here, and we're going to get you through this. I'll do everything in my power to make this easy for you." And she said, "I'm just sorry you waited 60 years to do this."

52:51

SZ: Wow. So, was everyone as supportive as her at your work?

52:54

P: Yes. It was the most amazing thing I've ever witnessed. To go from being a recluse for twenty years who really had nothing to do with people, didn't really care for people very much. I worked at nights, so I didn't have to be around people very much...

I went to my director and told her, and she said, "It's fine. How do you wanna deal with this? Do you wanna send a blast email out?" Cause I worked with several hundred people. "Do you want me to blast an email out telling everybody that your new name is Price, and that you are transitioning, or what?" And I said, "No, actually, I would rather talk to everybody in person."

53:46

And so I did. For a year, I worked there. We figured it out. I had to change clothes at work, so I didn't want to change clothes with all the women I worked with for all that long, even though they didn't care. They're like, "We don't care if you change clothes with us; we don't give a shit. We don't care." I couldn't go in the men's dressing room and change clothes with all the guys I'd worked with for twenty years. I felt like that would be too weird. So, they worked it out that I could change clothes in my boss's office, and I had a little locker in there that I kept my stuff in, and, for a year, I spoke to everybody in person.

As I worked with people, I worked with surgeons, I worked with anesthesiologists or nurses... I worked in endo, and I worked in radiology, and the cardiac cath lab... All the places that I worked, when I would work there, I would just say “I need to talk to you for a minute.” I would tell them that I changed my name to Price, and that I was transitioning female to male.

I was astounded. People told me stories they would have never told me about their own kids, about their uncle, about their cousin...

55:16

It was amazing. It was just—it was really an amazing experience. Before I changed my name legally, they were already putting Price on my card at night when I came into work. They were so excited. And the reason they were so excited, and the reason why they were so accepting, [is because] I had gone from this profoundly sad person to like the happiest person ever. People would see me down the hall, and come down and say, “I could see the difference in you from way down the hall. You are just like a different person.” And people would say, “How can I not be happy for you, when you are so happy?” They went overboard... even some of the really religious people that I was worried about telling were amazing. Nobody judged me. Some people didn’t talk about it very much. Some people would ask me [questions], they felt comfortable asking me questions, and I said, “Look. Ask me anything you wanna ask me. I’m an easy trans person. You’ve known me for twenty years. If you wanna ask me a question, ask me. I’m the person to ask.” And they’d say, “Gosh, we’ve never known a transgender person before.” I would have people come up and say, “Do you mind if I ask you something?” It was really... it was amazing.

57:00

I quickly had top surgery, and a lot of my dysphoria with my body just was totally gone. I walked straighter, stood up taller, and had a lot more confidence, even though there was a period of time—and still, I get misgendered—but there was a period of time where people didn’t know if I was a girl or a boy, or a woman or a man, or whatever, but even in that weird period of time, people treated me so well and were so respectful, and mostly, they just did not wanna make a mistake and say something that would hurt my feelings. They’d say “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say that like that!” and I’d say, “You worked with me for twenty years; it’s hard to change over like a light switch. I get that.”

So yeah, it was really an amazing time, and just as a side note, I chose “Price” as my name because of my friend Fred Price who saved my life so many times in high school. He committed suicide when I was twenty.

So, I carry him with me, and I sound like it’s emotional, [but] I’m really proud to carry his [name], to have his name...

58:38

So anyway, now I'm getting more involved. I don't have all the dysphoria that I used to have. I'm not so anxious socially. I could never go anywhere socially before, but now I don't have that anxiety, like I did.

So I'm on the board of SARA [Roanoke] here in town—the sexual assault hotline. They also do counseling. I'm also a crisis counselor for them—or crisis advocate, not a counselor. I'm an advocate, I answer the phone, and then when we get to where we can go to the hospital with assault victims, or whatever, we'll be going back to the hospital, the police station, with victims. They wanted someone on the board who was transgender, because we know that trans people are assaulted on a regular basis, but they don't call the crisis line, so we're trying to figure out why that is. This also gives the trans people or people in the LGBTQ community a safer space to report assault.

1:00:02

SZ: Yeah.

1:00:03

P: I'm also trying to do some stuff for the Diversity Center now. I met some folks down there, so I'm hoping to get—

1:00:12

SZ: The Diversity Center?

1:00:13

P: Yeah, downtown. I'm hoping to get involved—

1:00:17

SZ: Oh, okay.

1:00:18

P: Yeah, it's not open—well, it's open some now, but I'm hoping to get more involved with that. I did end up retiring because of COVID.

1:00:30:

SZ: Yeah.

1:00:31

P: After a year, I was gonna go to trade school in the spring, but that didn't happen yet, cause COVID's still bad, but I retired because of COVID because everybody I cared for was presumed positive and with my age, I just said "I'm done." But no, coming out... and just saying "I'm transgender" was the most freeing thing that I've ever done. I wish I had done it forty years ago. I wish I had not been such a coward. But I've never been happier. And I'm trying to find ways to

give back to the community now that I kinda... had deserted, ya know, for most of my life, and had not participated in... But I was amazed at the response I got when I came out. Most people said “Yeah, we knew it all along,” or “yeah, we saw it all along,” or whatever, but it’s not something that somebody comes to you and says, like “hey, I think you ought to be a guy. I think you’d be a better guy.” My friend of forty years now, she’ll say things like, “You really are a guy.” Or “I felt like you dismissed me the other day” or something. I’m like “I didn’t do that...” It’s been very interesting and it’s such a... I think it’s such an asset to have been socialized for so long as a woman.

1:02:13

SZ: Oh?

1:02:14

P: And knowing what women’s issues are intimately, and now, getting to be on the other side, sort of.

1:02:29

SZ: So, what about the community now? You had mentioned trying to be more involved. Have you found any LGBTQ spaces?

1:02:38

P: Yeah. Yeah, I’ve met some trans men, who have taken me under their wing. They transitioned many years ago, most of them, but they said “You know, you kinda can be an honorary member because of your age. You’re 62. You’ve been around for a long time, and you’ve lived in isolation for so long... and we don’t think it’s right that you don’t have a community of guy friends to hang out with.” So, they’ve kinda taken me under their wing. They’re going on a camping trip in June. I hope that I can go on the camping trip with them, because I missed all the socialization as a guy. Ya know, I didn’t have guy friends to hang out with. I didn’t have guy friends to do things with. It’s kinda hard when you’re 62...

1:03:32

SZ: Right.

1:03:33

P: ... to make guy friends. But these guys have been amazing; they said, “we just want you to be part of our group. You deserve that.” And I’ve also met a couple of gay guys that I’ve had outside lunches with, and stuff like that. I never would have done [that] before. They’re trying to give me tips on how to do my hair more like a guy, and that kind of thing. I’m learning! I’m just learning all this stuff, you know? I mean I’ve got the clothes down, ‘cause I always wore men’s clothes. But I had lunch with a gay friend the other day, and he said “Dude, you gotta do something about your hair. It’s just borderline girly.” And so I came home and buzzed it, and did

it like he said, and I feel better, and for the last few days, when I've gone places, I was called "sir," which is always a big deal for a trans person.

1:04:39

SZ: Yeah

1:04:40

P: It feels bad to be misgendered, even if you don't look so much like a guy, but still, when someone calls you "sir," it's very validating. So, yeah, I've done that, and I went to the Diversity Center, and met some folks down there. That I'm going to...

1:04:57

SZ: Yeah.

1:04:58

P: ...try to do some things with. No, I feel like my life is full. I used to say all the time, "I don't feel connected to my life. I don't feel connected to my body. I don't feel invested in my life." I mean, I did my life. I worked. I paid the bills. I took care of things. But I had no joy. Like I couldn't even understand why people would get so excited about going on a vacation, you know, how people say, "Oh, we're going on a vacation in a week," and I'd think, "So?" Or, putting up Christmas décor—any just, normal things that people would do, that they'd get excited about. I didn't have any of that joy, like, I just was kind of drab and dead, just... existing.

1:05:59

SZ: Huh.

1:06:00

P: I wasn't connected to my life, you know? There was nothing about my life that validated who I was. I was always hidden.

1:06:06

SZ: Oh.

1:06:07

P: And invisible. "Don't look at me," and "don't hear me," and I didn't take up any space in the world. I was just here. And it's really interesting at 62 to be all of a sudden realizing that I do have a space in the world.

1:06:28

SZ: Yeah.

1:06:30

P: And that there is a lot of joy. Yeah.

1:06:31

SZ: Yeah.

1:06:33

P: Yeah.

1:06:34

SZ: So how about actual spaces? Like, have you begun visiting gay bars or—

1:06:38

P: No.

1:06:39

SZ: —anything like that?

1:06:40

P: Yeah, no, I haven't, but I do hope to get involved more, like I said, with the Diversity Center, and meet some more people...

1:06:48

SZ: Right.

1:06:49

P: — in the community. And, you know, learn about things that need to be done as far as... of course, right now, thank God we have Biden in office, but all of the backlash is...

1:07:05

SZ: Yeah.

1:07:05

P: ... really, really scary. I mean, even for me, like, am I gonna be able to get healthcare? Am I gonna be able to get hormones? You know, those kinds of things. I have a young trans man friend who's seventeen, you know? Like, what's gonna happen to him?

1:07:32

SZ: Yeah.

1:07:33

P: I have another friend who's twenty-four; what's gonna happen to him, you know? Like, all the legislation that's been brought up just by Biden's election, it really sends people scurrying, and afraid. My primary care physician I had for twelve years when I came out said "I don't wanna see you anymore."

1:08:01

SZ: Wow. Why?

1:08:04

P: So I've had to scramble around for healthcare myself, and being a mid-level healthcare provider that was well-respected as a sixty-year-old woman, all of a sudden, I'm a sixty-year-old trans man, and it's been hard. It's been—

1:08:24

SZ: Yeah.

1:08:24

P: —very difficult. So there are a lot of issues facing not just the trans community, but the LGBTQ everybody community. My non-binary friends... I'm more and more aware of their issues; what kind of issues they have socially, medically. So, there are a lot of things that are now coming to the forefront that I feel like I can find my niche and try to figure out what it is I can do to help my community. I always speak up.

1:09:04

SZ: Yeah.

1:09:06

P: I've had things happen to me that I couldn't let go, you know. That I would have to call and say "Look, I'm saying this because I'm transgender, and what you've done here is transphobic." And I can let that go, sort of on my own, but I'm not gonna...

1:09:25

SZ: Oh.

1:09:25

P: ,, let it go because I can't let it go for my trans friends who are coming after me.

1:09:34

SZ: Yeah... What kinds of experiences have you had?

1:09:40

P: So like, I rolled my money out of Carilion when I retired, out of the retirement fund into a private financial place, and I'm not really financial-oriented, but I moved all of the money out of Carilion into another private thing, and I gave them this pretty nice check, and they had only ever known me as Price. They had my driver's license, my social security card. My taxes were filed in my new name. Everything they had ever seen had my new name on it, and they called me and said they couldn't deposit the check.

1:10:21

SZ: Oh.

1:10:21

P: And I said “Why can’t you deposit the check?” And they said, “Well, we need documentation, and we need the court-order showing that your name had been changed.”

1:10:32

SZ: Huh.

1:10:33

P: And I said “I don’t think so. I don’t think so.” I said, “You have every piece of I.D. that you have—bank accounts, everything, social—all that has my name on it. There’s no reason for you to have to see a court order saying that my name was changed, and I think that you’re being transphobic. I think you’re asking me to go beyond what you would ask somebody else who changed their name because of marriage, or whatever.” And I said, “I’m not gonna give you that document, because I’ve already been vetted by the DMV, I’ve been vetted by Social Security. I’ve been vetted by all these other places, and I don’t need to give you that information.” And I said, “I’ll just come and pick up my check.”

1:11:27

SZ: Yeah.

1:11:28

P: And she said, “Okay.” And, about ten minutes [later], the guy that was in charge of my money called me, and he said, “Price, we don’t need that piece of paper.” And I said “I didn’t think you did.”

1:11:45

SZ: Huh.

1:11:46

P: And, so, those kinds of things. I made an appointment with the doctor, and my name had changed, and they wanted my proof of my name change. I said, “I don’t need to give you that.” My insurance card has my new name. My driver’s license has my new name. You don’t need to see that, and so you know what they did, being, I guess, one of those microaggressions that people do? They sent me a prescription to my deadname.

1:12:17

SZ: Oh.

1:12:20

P: And so I called them, and I said, “How do you suppose I should get this prescription filled?”

1:12:28

SZ: Oh, right.

1:12:29

P: “You sent it to my deadname. I have nothing that has my deadname on it. Nothing. Everything I have has my new name on it. So how would you think I could get this prescription filled, with that on there?” And I said, “You’re very—what you’re doing is not okay. You’ve asked for court documentation of a name change; you don’t need that. My insurance card says, you know, the same thing, blah blah blah blah blah.” I said, “You don’t need it.” And she said, “Yes, sir, you’re right. We don’t need it. And where can I send the prescription to that you can pick it up.” She fixed it real quick. But so, it’s those—

1:13:11

SZ: Wow.

1:13:11

PB: —kinds of things. It’s just things that people think they can get away with, until you call them on it.

1:13:17

SZ: Right.

1:13:18

P: And I’m not a confrontational person, but in every instance like that, I feel like I have to step up and say, “No, this isn’t right. It’s not right for me, and it’s not right for my twenty-four-year old friend that you might meet later. It’s not okay.”

1:13:35

SZ: Yeah.

1:13:36

P: “What you’re doing is not okay. I don’t know if you’re doing it because you’re curious, or because you don’t like the fact that I’m trans, or why you’re doing it, but you’re not gonna get away with it.” So... I feel like I have to be on guard a lot of the time.

1:13:53

SZ: Huh.

1:13:54

P: Any time you’re dealing with another agency or another office, or you know. Because it’s invariably... something’s gonna come up. Until maybe one day, you know, five years down the road, when my deadname doesn’t show up on something. Like, I went to get an x-ray, and it was an ancillary. My chart at Carilion says “Price,” and it has my male gender marker on there, but I

went to get an x-ray, and it showed up my deadname, with the female marker, and the girl handled it well.

1:14:30

SZ: Oh.

1:14:31

P: She goes, “Mr. Brown, could I ask you a question?” And I said, “Sure.” She goes, “Did you change your name recently?” [*laughter*] And I said, “Yeah.” And she said, “I apologize, but it hasn’t been changed on all the ancillary offices.” But she was really nice about it.

1:14:53

SZ: Oh.

1:14:54

P: She didn’t make a big deal about it. She figured out what was going on, and she wasn’t gonna make a spectacle of me. So I can handle that.

1:15:06

SZ: Right.

1:15:06

P: But people are learning. I usually never get angry. I might get a little forceful, sometimes. Like, “No, you don’t need that.” But, yeah, I feel like you have to constantly kind of be on guard for that kind of thing, so...

1:15:26

SZ: Yeah.

1:15:27

PB: It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s worth it. Yeah.

1:15:34

SZ: Right, so kind of related to that, you were talking about healthcare and that sort of thing. How has it been for you aging as someone who is newly trans? And, how do you see that, because you used to be in the medical field? How do you see that process of aging as LGBTQ?

1:15:48

P: Yeah, it was really sad when I first started transitioning. I would look in the mirror and all I could see was an old man and I just felt like, ‘Why did you wait until you saw this old man looking back at you?’

1:16:04

SZ: Oh.

1:16:05

P: There have been some health issues. For one thing, I have been bounced around a lot for the past year. I've gone from doctor to doctor because they either have been disrespectful or did things that were not okay or said some terrible things to me. Finally, I found some decent doctors. As far as my transition, we just kind of confirmed this with this new doctor I went to last week who was absolutely wonderful and apologized for all the other horrible things that people have done and were said to me. But he just said, "You're asking a 62 year old body a lot, to go through another puberty," which is pretty much what happens when you transition. I started taking testosterone about a year and a half ago, and it's like going through puberty when you're 12 years old again. You know, I had a bunch of acne to deal with, that was just crazy. I'm 61 years old and I'm dealing with acne and I'm asking my young friends, "How do you get rid of this shit?"

1:17:22

SZ: *[laughter]*

1:17:23

P: *[You hear]* your voice changing, your voice is changing and cracking, doing all that. So that's really different, but it's also what I wanted all my life. I wanted to be... I wanted to look more like I look right now. However, as an older person—we were talking about it just this week—my transition is slower than my young friends. They have seen a lot of changes more quickly than I have. They have more of a beard, they have more body hair, you know, their legs. If I have on shorts, or something, I still look like I'm a girl shaving my legs. I don't have a lot of hair on my legs. So, my transition is slower and he *[my doctor]* informed me this week that it may take a really long time for me to reach the point where my body looks exactly like I picture it would look in my mind. Because it is gonna be slower; my body just doesn't change as quickly as a young guy. I've been dealing with that, and that's really okay. That was kind of to be expected, I think, that I wasn't just going to overnight become the Hulk or something... I'm never gonna be a buff guy. I think in my mind when I first started, I thought, 'Oh, I'm gonna get all buff.' Well, that's not gonna happen. I'm 62 years old, but I look around at other cisgender 62 year old men and I think, 'Well I don't look any worse than most of them.' That's kind of mean to say, but it is some consolation. I'm okay. I'm not ashamed of my body anymore and I'm not ashamed to go in public, I'm not ashamed to walk into a place and be automatically lumped with the women. I didn't know what to say to the women. No one has ever been to my house that I work with, ever. Because I have camping chairs in my living room, that's my furniture, and I'm perfectly fine with it. I don't care that there are camping chairs in my living room, but most 62 year old women I know don't have camping chairs in their living room for their furniture, and camping stools and stuff. But it works for me and that's fine. So I don't have to hide anymore. Now, if someone came

to my house they just go, “Oh okay, you got camping chairs, cool.” A couple years ago somebody came to my house and they think, “Why does a 62 year old woman have camping chairs in her house?”

1:20:54

SZ: [*laughter*]

1:20:56

P: So, it's just made all the difference in the world to me. And I'm so happy for my younger trans men friends who are able to go ahead and do this when they're younger and their bodies will change and look like they want to look. And if they want to have more surgeries, they can do that. They can be socialized as guys. I mean, I see these 20 year old guys I know and they're out running around with 20 year old guys, doing guy things and having fun. I never got any of that. So, there's a lot of grief that goes with the 'would have,' 'should have,' 'could have'—what my life could have been like. I always wanted a wife and kids and a regular life. I didn't want to have kids; I wanted a wife that would have kids. Growing older with my colleagues, you know, their kids are going to college and graduating to college and they're getting married and they're having grandkids. There's some grief in that. I wish I had had that. But I can't dwell on that. I have to do what I can to be happy and to help other people. Hopefully, someone will hear my story and it will resonate with them and maybe they won't wait so long.

1:22:35

SZ: Yeah. So, do you have any other friends who are older and trans, or members of the broader LGBTQ [community]?

1:22:40

P: So, when I first came out, I tried to break into a trans group here. It's mostly—well this is my feelings and I was probably being over sensitive—I felt like it was mostly dominated by some trans women. Of course, it was a virtual space cause it was [during] COVID and I haven't met these people face to face. I didn't feel very welcome, to be honest, and... I was trying to become an activist but really didn't know what to do. Okay, you know you walk onto something... I'm a walk on, I'm 60 something years old. I haven't been trans [for very long]. I haven't dealt with these issues my whole life. I always presented as a woman and I was always respected as a mid-level provider and I didn't have any problems really in my life. So, I didn't want to be a walk-on advocate and be like, “Okay, here I am now. I know everything and let's fix it.” That's not the way to do it. I never had that attitude about it, but I felt like when I would offer information in these spaces that I would constantly be challenged by these people. Like, prove it. “Prove what you're saying. Tell us who did you talk to... We want to know, and we want to ask them.” I'm thinking, I'm 60 years old, I'm a professional. I'm not gonna lie about stuff. I'm just trying to pass on information that I thought might be helpful to people. I kind of got my feelings hurt a

little bit and I don't know if they... I didn't ever mean to go into that space with an attitude, [acting] like I knew everything because I don't. It's hard to tell when you're just typing and you're not seeing somebody face to face and you're not talking to them, you know, what their intentions are, if they're trying to be a know-it-all and tell you what to do. That wasn't how it was offered. I didn't feel very welcomed so I just kind of backed out of that.

1:25:28

SZ: Do you think it was because of your age or just the group?

1:25:32

P: I don't know. I've heard from other people that the trans community here is kind of cliquy. A little bit cliquy. And never having been a joiner—I never joined stuff because I was such a loner—it wasn't that important to me to join that community. So, when I got shot down a couple of times with the things that I would offer as information in that way, I just kind of said “F--- that.” I'll just figure it out on my own. But, now that I'm more comfortable with myself... and with COVID, I got vaccinated this week, I got my first vaccine... hopefully I'll be able to move into some spaces that are not virtual, where I can actually meet some people, so that they can see that my intention is not to take over anything. I do feel like I have a place and an obligation to speak up for my community.

1:25: 51

SZ: Yeah.

1:26:53

P: Yeah.

1:26:55

SZ: Yeah, so just thinking about your life overall and how it is different now, what do you think about the new developments? The increased visibility of the LGBTQ community, the new acronym, and the Internet as a space for them to connect. What are your thoughts on that?

1:27:15

P: Yeah, it's amazing. Like I said, I think I've learned most [now].... when I even came out there was no Internet. There was nothing. When I came out lesbian in the '70s... I don't even know when I got Internet. I think it was close to 2000, 20 years ago, and it was awful. It was Prodigy and it was dial-up, it was awful. I think it's amazing that people can find themselves on the internet now. You can find people who look like you and who have your story. You don't have to spend 20 years fumbling around out there trying to figure it out on your own and figuring out, “What's wrong with me? Why am I like this?” Like I said, there was no word ‘transgender.’ There was nothing. I just thought I was a boy until people pointed out the fact that I wasn't. And

then I went, “Oh okay, well I guess I have to act like I’m supposed to, then,” which was horrible. But yeah, the whole visibility thing. I just feel like the suicide rate in the trans community is higher than anything. If we can just save one more person and not lose another person because of ignorance or whatever. Like I said, I never knew any non-binary people and now I know [several]. I’m close to several non-binary people and I learn something from them every day about what they have to deal with. And what they deal with is sometimes a lot worse than what I deal with, so I need to support those people and speak up for those people too. Those friends of mine, they’re awesome people, and I think it’s great that people have the ability to be who they are, to express themselves however they want. More and more people are talking about the difference between... you know, nobody knew the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation and gender expression. Nobody heard about that before, and now people are talking about it. It doesn't have to be one way or the other. I think for me, one of the biggest things is, whatever parts you have, it doesn't really matter.

1:30:25

SZ: Ah...

1:30:26

P: You know, it just doesn't really matter. Your gender is in your head.

1:30:30

SZ: Yeah.

1:30:33

P: So, that has opened up a lot of things for me. I had somebody ask me on my non-binary friend’s site... we were talking about something and a woman asked me, “What parts do you have?” And I’m thinking, ‘Hmm, how am I gonna answer that?’ It took me a while to come up with an answer for it, without just being mean to her. But people are really hung up on that, like the whole bathroom issue. The whole women’s trans sports issue. They’re hung up on what body parts you have and that has nothing to do with anything [*laughter*].

1:31:17

SZ: Right.

1:31:18

P: Yeah, so... I’m really happy about it... I’m happy that I jumped in when I did.

1:31:28

SZ: Right.

1:31:30

P: A lot of really brave people came before me, and I'm always grateful for them, that they had the courage to do this when I was too scared, I was too afraid.

1:31:43

SZ: Yeah.

1:31:44

P: So, yeah, I owe a lot to the people who came before me. I have a lot of gratitude for those people. So, I hope that I can be that for somebody else, you know? And also be somebody that someone older, who's thinking about transitioning, that has wanted to transition and thinks they're too old... You're not too old! It's doable. It may not be as quick as it would have been, but it's doable, and the change in my life has been... I'm a whole person now, and I was never a whole person.

1:32:25

SZ: Oh.

1:32:26

P: Yeah. So, yeah. It's been an awesome journey! *[laughter]*

1:32:33

SZ: It sounds like it.

1:32:34

P: Yeah, it has been.

1:32:36

SZ: Well, yeah... well, that's all the questions I had, unless there's something else that you wanted to share, that we didn't get a chance to...

1:32:39

P: No, I feel like I talked your ear off. I'm sorry if I talked your ear off, I didn't mean to.

1:32:47

SZ: No, no.

1:32:48

B: I've enjoyed doing it, and thank you very much for spending this time with me today. I know you have another class. I hope I didn't run you over.

1:33:00

SZ: No, you're good.

1:33:01

P: Okay

1:33:02

SZ: Yeah, thanks so much for talking with us too, I'm sure that people are going to really enjoy listening to your story and learning about [your experiences] ... because I think it's pretty rare to transition as an older person, so...

1:33:14

P: Yeah, I know there's a couple of people in town who transitioned a little later.

1:33:24

SZ: Huh.

1:33:25

P: And I meet people online in groups a lot who are in their forties and they're thinking that they're too old.

1:33:31

SZ: Oh.

1:33:32

P: And I'm always the first to say, no you're not. No, you're not. You're not too old. If it's going to make you happy, it's going to make your life better, your life fuller... I mean, the way I relate to people is so different now.

1:33:48

SZ: Yeah

1:33:49

P: There's no way to describe it. So, if someone hears this and is inspired to go ahead and do it, that's what I'm about. Yeah.

1:34:07

SZ: Yeah.

1:34:12

P: Anyway, thank you, Steph!

1:34:13

SZ: Alright, well thank you so much.

1:34:14

P: I hope you have a good afternoon, thanks a lot.

1:34:17

SZ: You as well.

1:34:18

P: Okay, bye.

END.