

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

**Interview with Tommy Feazell
February 26, 2022**

Interviewer: Ellasen Spangler

Narrator: Tommy Feazell

Location: Feazell's Home in Lynchburg, Virginia

Transcribed by: Amanda Fox, Abbie Lewis, Samantha Meyer, Adam Reedy

Duration: 1:35:33

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00:00

ES: Hi. My name is Ellasen. It is February 26, 2022 at 2:39 PM and I am speaking with Tommy Feazell. We are in Feazell's home in Lynchburg, Virginia and we will be speaking about your time and involvement with the county [city] of Roanoke's Pride initiative throughout your life thus far. Can you please start by telling us your name and where you grew up?

00:20

TF: My name is Tommy Feazell. I was born at Roanoke Memorial Hospital on June the 20th of 1961. I spent my childhood at 49 Ward Street, Salem, Virginia. We became Salem in 1968. We woke up on New Year's Day, and the city of Salem was our boundaries on the edge of our yard and the city of Roanoke was now across the street. So we had to change our schools. All my childhood friends got sent to other schools, et cetera, et cetera. The first year I started school was the first year of integration for the school system. I met my very first Black children in first grade, Rochevious and Peggy Nance. I'd never seen a Black child before. I grew up in a different era. I grew up in an era when Black people rode on the back of the bus. I grew up in an era when the old Miller and Rhoads department store downtown had one bathroom in the basement for all Black men, women and children, while the whites had a lovely set of bathrooms up on the fifth or sixth floor—it was the top floor where the tearoom was—where there was an attendant to wait on you. So, it was quite a different world. So, what else would you like to know?

01:34

ES: Did you have any siblings growing up?

01:35

TF: I had an older sister, Mary Jo. Mary Jo was beautiful, smart as a whip and normal. I was six years younger, buck toothed, mouthy, and very artistic. My parents were scared to death.

01:48

ES: So, would you almost say that you were like the black sheep of your family, as people call it?

01:52

TF: The oddball. I will not say black sheep, but I will say oddball. When I was five years old, at Christmas, I was precocious. I'd already learned to read. I asked my mother for an illustrated history of fashion that I saw on the mezzanine at Hieronimus, a department store in downtown Roanoke where the books were. Mama bought me the book. On Christmas morning at my grandparents where all my butch little boy cousins went around with their trucks and GI Joes and little gunfights and were acting masculine, I was waltzing around with my little fashion book open, pointing to a picture of Marie Antoinette going "panier means basket hoop" [ES laughs]. Needless to say, my mother and father were horrified. That is the morning that my grandmother turned to my mother and said, "Joanne, honey, you've got a queer on your hands." My mother cried the rest of the day in the back guest bedroom.

02:44

ES: So, your parents knew kind of that you were gay ever since you were a child?

2:49

TF: Yes, most definitely. I was what is called effeminate. I had large eyes, long lashes, red lips, and got a lot of looks from older men that I didn't understand until many years later.

03:01

ES: So, Salem is a particularly rural area. How was that like growing up within kind of that environment?

03:08

TF: It was brutal. Salem is very much a town of the haves and the have nots. My family didn't have a dime. We were shunned, we were made fun of, we wore hand me downs. My sister was brilliant and precocious, but very quiet. Her feelings got hurt easily. I was mouthy. So, when the kids would call us "poor white" or "white trash," I would say wonderful phrases to them like, "your mother's a whore." That always started fights. I always came in with bloody lips, but I

never gave in. I mean, if you called me a name, I'd whip your... I'd just tongue lash you. Daddy said I had more balls than brains.

03:47

ES: [*laughter*] So, what'd your parents do when you were a child?

03:50

TF: My father was a machinist for the Norfolk and Western railroad for forty-some years. My mother was a secretary at a church. She had to later on give up the position when she became ill with cancer. She was also the librarian at the church. I was raised in a very, very, very religious background. We were strict Presbyterian. We did not drink, we did not smoke, we did not play cards, and sex was strictly for procreation and being queer was beyond beyond. You would burn in hell instantly. Leviticus was quoted quite often in my household.

04:24

ES: So, how do you think growing up in a religious household kind of shaped who you were, and who you are now?

04:32

TF: People won't believe me when I say this, but it gave me courage. I was raised that I was one of the elect; I was Presbyterian. So, I didn't care if I was a screaming faggot, I was still going to heaven. And I never drank. I never did drugs. I mean, my mother gave me a lot of moral backbone. And later on, like when I was fag-bashed later in college, it gave me the guts to keep my head up and keep rolling right on. Now from my father, he was a redneck. Daddy's attitude was if you're not invited to the party, then it's not a party. This gave me a lot of courage. When I was snubbed, and made fun of at all, I would just stick my chin in there and say, "screw you" and go on. I mean, that was the redneck in me.

05:17

ES: So, with your parents, knowing kind of at a young age that you were queer and kind of gay at the time, and potentially growing up to come out later in life, how did that affect your relationship with your parents? Were they always supportive?

05:33

TF: Like I've told you earlier, when I was 16 my father wanted to have me lobotomized at the VA [Veteran's Affairs hospital in Salem, Virginia]. Daddy was a World War II vet; he could get me in there. He said, quote, "We're gonna fix your wiring." I mean, being queer was not an option. I think he would have been cool if I had been butch and screwed girls and did guys on the side quietly. Later on in life, I found that that was something a lot of men did. As long as you had a wife and kids, but kept your mouth shut, it was just playing with the guys. You know, it wasn't

gay. It was just, you know, doing some guy stuff. It took my parents a long time. I don't think they ever fully accepted, but they tried to love me and they tried to protect me.

They thought I would burn in hell, but you know, they kept that to themselves after a certain time because I was so mouthy. They were always gracious to my gay friends. They were always gracious to the men I dated. Daddy would just always call them [*mimicking in a southern accent*] "my buds." Yeah, I mean, daddy had gay friends and didn't know it. I can think of one couple in particular that were together for forty years. And daddy just thought they were [*mimicking a southern accent*] "buds." And they've had a home together, a life together, they traveled together. And Daddy never ever thought anything of it because they were both butch. If you were butch and had played sports, you could get away with murder.

07:01

ES: So, what age did you officially come out to your parents and kind of out to the public or if that was at two separate times?

07:08

TF: Two separate times, dear. I told my parents I thought I was gay when I was 15. Oh, I knew I was gay. But I mean, I knew when I was eight years old and started having sex with my cousins, but we'll go into that later. I told my parents when I was fifteen, and my mother instantly put me into counseling with my pastor who didn't know what the hell to do. So, he called in a man from California that had grown up in my church and had moved to California and become a minister in the MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] movement. And this guy flew into Roanoke and met with me, talked to me, and told my pastor, "He's queer." He goes, "and he's gonna live a queer life." You know, y'all just better get ready. So.

07:52

ES: Yeah, and you had talked about your cousins a little bit? What was the dynamic with that, and particularly if you would like to go into it?

07:58

TF: [*interrupting*] My cousins were butch, honey, so they didn't get in trouble. I always got in trouble. But my cousins were butch. So, you know, nothing was ever said to them. I was the little queen, or the little queer, or the little cocksucker. So, you know, but I was a virgin... I would say all we did was just fool around. I mean, I didn't get into man-to-man action until I was in college. But I mean, yeah, I fooled around with my cousins. But you know, we didn't think that much of it. But I did have older cousins that wanted to take me away to the family cabin on the weekend, and my mother wouldn't let them, and my father told my mother [*mimicking in a southern accent*] "Joanne, let him take him up there and make a man out of him." So, I think daddy knew damn well what was going on, but he didn't care because we were all related. He

said [*mimicking in a southern accent*] “As long as it’s blood, it’s okay.” So do not ask me any questions about incest, I will not answer. So, anyway.

08:55

ES: [*laughter*] I totally understand.

08:56

TF: Yes.

08:57

TF: So anyway, not between me and daddy please don’t think that. but there’s a lot going on with the cousins. So anyway, I didn’t start to have real stuff until I was older. But yeah, fooled around when I was a kid with my cousins. All kids do, I think. I don’t know.

09:14

ES: Probably.

09:16

TF: I mean, my husband thinks it’s perverted, so we won’t go into details.

09:19

ES: [*laughter*] Definitely. So, you came out to your parents, tried to come out when you’re 15. So, you’re right around the age of middle-high school. How was that age and like period for you?

09:31

TF: [*whistles*] Bad. Bad [*whistles again*]. High school was bad... [*sighs*] I was not officially out but you could look at me and tell I was queer. I wore vintage clothing. This was not a done thing in Salem, and I would buy and wear vintage clothing and overcoats and ties to school every day and wingtip shoes and shit like that. And later on, I found that I was called the Gay Godfather of Salem High School after I graduated, the kids that came after me. Because I was regarded as one of the first out gays even though I didn’t think I was out. I had incidents where football players would, like, push me into my locker and... stroke me and you know, shit like that. And I’d push and run because I was terrified. Yeah, it was kind of, I liked the attention, [but] I didn’t want to get the shit beat out of me. I didn’t trust any of them. So I ran. I had teachers pick on me because they thought I was queer. It was not pretty. I would never ever wish my high school years on any kid because it was rough. If I had not been a strong individual, I would have buckled. There were gay kids that dropped out of school when I was going through high school that couldn’t take pressure. But I said, screw you. I’m getting my education and I kept going to school. Now my

parents did have to get me a car, because I started to get roughed up on the school bus. And so, they got me a car so I could be safe going to and from school.

11:15

ES: What do you think really gave you the strength to keep persevering through high school?

11:24

TF: I'm half redneck. I was bullheaded. I would be damned if I let anybody run my ass into the ground. I mean, I was going to get my degree and I was going to be somebody, and you could go die. I mean, I always had a mouth on me. And I was always determined, and I wouldn't let anybody ram me into the damn ground. That was the redneck in me. I mean, you know, you might be able to tell me off and you might be able to beat the shit out of me, but you weren't gonna kill me and you weren't gonna break my spirit. I mean, I was me. Screw you. I was wearing my British tweed overcoats to school every day and my ties and if you didn't like it, you could go die. Now you could probably beat the shit out of me first. But still at the end of the... I might have a busted lip and a busted nose, but my head was up. Nobody was gonna knock me into the ground. Nuh uh. No.

12:12

ES: Absolutely. Do you have any memories from high school that you're particularly fond of that you can look back on? Kind of pulling away from the dark times, were there any times that you look back on and your heart's full?

12:30

TF: The only thing I can tell you I thoroughly enjoyed was when I was 15, maybe 16—this was the late '70s—The Park, the gay club, the big gay club, opened in downtown Roanoke. I had three fake IDs. Back in those days, an ID had a paper part to it. You had your photograph from the DMV, and then the paper part. If you were smart, you could take the paper part out and make copies of it on the copy machine in the library. And then you dipped it in green food dye, and it would make it green like the legal paper. If you knew how to take an exacto knife, you could cut numbers out and paste them on top of your legal birthday. So, I had a fake ID for 18, a fake ID for 21. I can't remember the other age. So, I grew hair very fast as a young man. I started shaving in middle school. So, in the summers, I would grow a mustache and get a little bit of a tan and I'd hit the clubs with a fake ID. So, when The Park opened, now, I had been going illegally to Murphy's, which is a long-gone club that was in downtown Roanoke. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Murphy that were from West Virginia. During the daytime it was a luncheon establishment for doctors, lawyers, and professional people in downtown Roanoke. At night, after 10 o'clock, it was a different story. They had a DJ. They had a tiny dance floor. If Papa and Mama Murphy knew you, they'd let you in. Their sons were gay, so they knew about gay people. You were not allowed to close dance. But you could dance—you know, you could dance with somebody, but

you couldn't touch them. There was no drag allowed in there. You could never ever admit you were gay because that was against the liquor law of Virginia. You were not allowed to serve a 'known homosexual' liquor. You could lose your liquor license which Papa Murphy highlighted it with yellow and put it at the front door so if the [Roanoke Police Department] Vice Squad ever said anything you were like [*mimicking in a deep voice*] "Oh hell no, I'm straight! I don't know who these freaks are." You know that sort of thing. So, Poppa and Momma Murphy watched out for me. They knew that I was underage, they knew but they never said anything. And me and my best friend Billy, we were known as the Dr. Pepper twins because we didn't drink; we drank Dr. Pepper. And the Murphys watched out for us. And that was what I enjoyed because here by day I was at school being this prim quiet little queen, you know getting the snot beat out me but wearing my little outfits and all. But at night, I put on my tight botanical jeans and I'd roll downtown with Billy and we'd go to Murphy's. I had a lot of fun. I was wearing vintage stuff like velvet smoking jackets. I mean, this was unheard of in Roanoke, unheard of. And I was, you know, doing vintage shit and British punk looks. And it was a lot of fun. I hated high school, and I hated most of the kids there. But at night, I could be me. And I would go down there. And it was perfectly innocent, there was no sex or anything going on. It was just dressing up and having fun and knowing that you were among people that didn't look down on you because you were a fruit.

15:39

TF: So, the only good memory I have of high school with my peers [*pause*]... I would say there were three or four girls that liked me that I hung out with. And one of them's mother was the Charleston Champion of Roanoke. She had won the title back in the '40s or '50s and she taught me to Charleston. I enjoyed the Proms because I'd always wear tails and I was a very good dancer. I had a lovely time at the Proms. I had a wonderful voice. So, I was in an elite singing group, that the director was a horrible homophobe and used to give me shit. But I stayed in the group because we went on tour. I was at all-state choir. And my favorite memory of that is we sang—they did the Waltz of the Flowers, and we all dressed as flowers. And of course, being gay, I was determined to outdo everybody, and I cut out a tulip head of bright yellow construction board that was at least three feet off the top of my head and I went to Stritesky's Florist and got green floral paper and made a huge bow tie. And you could see me for ten miles on the back of the riser. I mean, my head piece was like, pure drag. I mean, and I didn't know what drag was but God, it was for days. It made the yearbook. I was in the yearbook with that outfit on. Jesus [*ES laughs*]. And I was chosen to dance the waltz with a young lady, a delightful young lady. So, the picture is she's in her ballgown, and she looks very white bread and pure. And here I am this bucktooth queen with a Donny Osmond haircut, and the biggest headdress on you've ever seen of a tulip. It was—oh, it was a sunflower! That was it. It had tons of points on it. It was a sunflower and oh it was awful. And it was tacky as hell, but it was fabulous. So.

17:23

ES: [laughter] That's awesome. That's amazing. So, you had briefly talked about the liquor law. I had not really known, do you know when that changed?

17:34

TF: Ooh! You could not. It was a state law of Virginia baby. You could not serve a 'known homosexual' liquor, or you'd lose your liquor license. So gay bars were, eh... alright, let me give you a little bit of history that I don't know if anybody has talked about in your interviews. When I started going to the bars illegally, it would have been the later '70s. You had the Last Straw, which was on Salem Avenue. I don't know if you've heard of the Last Straw. They probably have ads in the pink pages.¹ But there was the Last Straw. That was real cruisy—that was a pool table and older men. And it was dark, and it was real cruisy. And it was a real tight-knit little group there. Those men took care of each other like brothers. And that was where the Rouge's Levi & Leather club was. They hung out there. That was where they started. And I knew a lot of the founders, like Lee Cruise was a dear friend. He was a founder. Okay, then you had the Horoscope, which was a few blocks up and off, but I can't remember the name of the street. You had the Horoscope. I could not get in there because they had a very strict doorman or doorwoman. Carolyn Sue Wilson, one of the most famous drag queens in Roanoke, who was a Miss Gay Roanoke. I don't think she hit Miss Gay Virginia, but she was a Miss Gay Roanoke. She was the doormen there and you could not get your ass past Carolyn. If she knew you were underage, there's no way you'd get in. So, I never even tried.² Then there was Murphy's. I had a fake ID. I could get into Murphy's. That was good. All right. Then you had the big ol' bad granddaddy of them all: the Trade Winds [whistles]. God, the Trade Winds was legendary. It was where the very first Miss Gay Roanoke pageant was held back in the '70s. I only went there a few times. It was going downhill by the time I got there. [It] was a bunch of old trolls. But in its day, it was run by a pair of brothers who were straight but knew the gay community. And as long as you were cool and didn't act out too obviously, [or] touch other guys, they were cool with you. And it was another one of those things—it was a restaurant by day, a bar later at night. And it was on the corner of Elm...damn, I've moved... Elm and Franklin, Elm and Franklin. It's no longer there. There's a law office across the street from where it was. That's...Krasno [Crandall] & Katt?

20:11

ES: Okay. Yeah, I know where.

20:13

TF: [interrupting] The guy with the beard that's always on TV that handles car wrecks.

¹ 'Pink pages' is a colloquial name for the *Blue Ridge Lambda Press*, the longest-running gay newsletter in Southwest Virginia (c. 1983-2008).

² Miss Carolyn has also completed an oral history interview with the project. See Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, "Oral History Interview with Carolyn Sue Wilson," February 25, 2018, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Libraries.

20:15

ES: [*interrupting*] Always on commercials, yeah.

20:15

TF: Yeah, the legal community calls it the Taj Mahal because it's that big brick place [*ES laughs*]. All right. Well, the Trade Winds, there was a gas station there for years—it got torn down, but that was where a gas station was. Across the street was the Trade Winds. Oh my God, it was a bomb shelter. But it was historic. I mean, that is the granddaddy of Roanoke gay bars, the Trade Winds. They probably tore it down in the '80s, maybe? And by then, the brothers were older and dying. But that was the hub for many years of the gay community in Roanoke was the Trade Winds. Trade Winds and the Last Straw. Okay, so then came the later era, which I guess I'm a part of. I'm a part of the second generation of gays in Roanoke. The first generation was like in the '50s, '60s, early '70s. They started the first gay liberation organization in Roanoke. They started the Rogues Levi/Leathers club. Many of those boys were arrested by the Vice Squad. Many of the boys lost their jobs when it was found out they were gay. I knew quite a few of those guys who were all older. Danny Jones, who I know you all must have interviewed in the past, he worked at the downtown library for years. Danny can tell you all about those days because he was a vital part of that, he and Lee Cruise and a few others were very vital.³ I was the next wave. I came of age in the disco era. Donna Summers, the whole nine yards. I came around in the '70s was when I was a teenager. So, I'm the second wave of the gay tide in Roanoke.

21:54

TF: So, when I was in my teens, later teens, The Park opened, and I consider The Park the big deal. As far as the '70s, '80s, and '90s go, as far as bar life. This was before social media, any of that crap. I mean, back in that day, there was a magazine called *The Advocate*, they had the pink pages with classified ads that you could write to other men all around the country and become pen pals or go meet them and trick or whatever. So, The Park was very much... it became the hub of the gay community in Roanoke. They started really going to town with Miss Gay Virginia, Miss Gay Roanoke, Mr. Star City. They started sponsoring part of the gay pride—the Pride day that came around [*Pride in the Park*]. I was one of the first people involved with starting the gay auction that helped the gay organizations here. Howard Nash and I started the first gay auction held at Gerry Jennings house in the mid to later '80s.⁴ And we did two or three there, then someone else took it over and they started doing it at MCC [*Metropolitan Community Church of the Blue Ridge*]. But Howard and I were the ones that started that. Well, I guess I should talk a little bit about what I was in the gay community.

³ See Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, "Oral History Interview with Daniel Jones," February 20, 2016, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Libraries.

⁴ See Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, "Oral History Interview with Gerry Jennings," February 23, 2016, Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Libraries.

23:21

ES: [*interrupting*] Uh huh, absolutely.

23:21

TF: Okay, I was Tommy Feazell. And I was on the first board of the Roanoke AIDS Project. But I could not continue that because my best friend Jimmy became ill, and my mother became ill with cancer. So, I lasted on that maybe six months to a year, but I was there when it started at the Health Department in Vinton. That was where we met to start. I was part of Madonna House, which was the gay rap group that met once a week. Gerry Jennings started that. I got into it, I would guess in 1983 when I came back to Roanoke from college. I had been a guest there during college, but I became a member when I came back. And that was the gay rap group. There are still couples together to this day that met at Madonna House at the gay rap group. There are still men in the community, who because of the rap group got the courage to come out to their families. A lot of good gay things were born at the rap group at Madonna House. That was, you know, where the nuns lived over at Our Lady of Nazareth back in the day when it was downtown Roanoke. So, Gerry Jennings helped start that and then I got really involved in it. Okay, so then at The Park, as you see here [*pulls out multiple posters*], and I guess you can still hear me on your thingy. I did the posters. Like here's The Park's '93 New Year's Eve party. I did all the posters from the mid-'80s when I returned from college through the mid-'90s. Here's another Halloween party poster.

25:00

ES: [*interrupting*] That's so cool.

25:01

TF: All right, now this is from Lambda Horizons which was the gay student group at Virginia Tech, which was really kicking ass—and let me see the date on this [*looking at poster*], 1986. Alright, in the mid-'80s, there was a boy named Mark, I can't think of his last name. He was the president of this, he was out as shit, he was kicking ass. So, Lambda Horizons and the Roanoke Pride Group worked together often to throw events to raise money for Lambda Horizons. Like you can see this was at the Fox Ridge apartments in Blacksburg, the Briarwood Club. So, I mean, this is gay history right here because these kids were out there getting the shit beat out of them, but they were doing it. I was so proud of them. Okay, this is a New Year's poster at The Park. You know, so this was the sort of thing I did, and this was showing gay people that gay guys did art. You know, I also did artwork, but I couldn't sell it in Roanoke because it was too forward. It was more like Tom of Finland stuff and galleries were scared to touch it. So, I still have got some of that upstairs and I sold some of it. So, anyway.

26:08

ES: What was the process of you getting involved doing the art and things like that?

26:11

TF: Alright, I came back from college, from VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University] in Richmond, where yes, I did get fag-bashed. I had to have my face redone the first time but my sister sent money so my parents wouldn't know. So, alright, this is what I sort of looked like [*shows photograph*]. This was my senior portfolio picture. Yay! So, yeah, I did that. I did my own artwork [*shows multiple photographs*]. This is from college when I posed for the nude modeling sessions, good God! This is, like I told you before, the Park was known for its Halloween parties, and they had competitions and people would come from all over the state and West Virginia to be in this competition. I mean, it was something! It was something. And I remember one year, Dane, a friend of mine, and I'm not saying last names because I don't know if these guys are comfortable with being put on tape, he went as Glenda the Good Witch from the Wizard of Oz [*ES laughs*] and made that costume, and it was awesome! Hoops and everything. Cellophane crown with the jewels and he won, and then sold that costume to a professional drag queen who wore it in pageants nationwide. Isn't that cool?

27:18

ES: That's so cool! That's really cool!

27:19

TF: That's cool as hell!

27:20

TF: Alright, I was also known as Mary Read-your-Beads. Yes, here I am. Someone gave me a bolt of heavy blue fabric and I found an old pair of hoops at a thrift store, and I drafted it—and remember, my major was fashion design so I could make patterns and sew—so I made my own nuns outfit with hoops under it and everything. And here is my fly nun head dress that I made. So, Mary Read-your-Beads did two Pride in the Parks; it was when it was in Wasena Park. My tent was made out of Ralph Lauren chintz, and we hung a chandelier in the tree. I will never forget it. I mean, we were really kicking ass. We had tickets printed that said “Mary Read-your-Beads” and had a cross and prayer hands. So, people would pay me a dollar and I would read their fortunes. Now, I cheated. Like, some of the people came in and I knew who they were, and I knew what they had been up to. I was a horrible gossip. So, like I actually started some shit because like one gay couple came in and I knew one was cheating on the other one. So, I was reading my crystal ball and I had a button that made it light up, and if it went white you were going to heaven. If it went red you were going to burn in hell. So, I was reading my crystal ball and I would hit—the button was under my ass—so I would reach back and hit the button and it would go flaming red! And I turned to one of the gay guys and I said [*in low menacing voice*] “you will burn!” [*ES laughs*] and he was like “what?!” and I said, “you were in the back of a car with someone that looked like blah blah blah” and his lover turned to him and went “you son of a bitch! I know who it is!” And I mean, it was fabulous! [*ES laughs*] They started a fight in my tent. We had to get them out. So that was wonderful. I started a fight with a mother and daughter

because I knew the girl was fooling around with some trashy guy from Southeast Roanoke. And so, I described his car and everything and the mother was like “you whore!” and smacked the girl. Oh, it was wonderful! So, that was Mary Read-your-Beads.

29:05

TF: I was in the gay bowling league for many years. I started with them on their second... they had fall and summer leagues, they started with a summer league, and this was in the mid-‘80s, and I went in as a replacement bowler on their first league. And then from then on, I was a member for years. I was the first winner of the Miss Style award because when I started to bowl—and that’s not a drag award—I could not bowl. So, when I bowled to begin with, I was on my knees and pushed the ball down the lanes [*ES laughs*]. So, like a retardo. And they named me Miss Style and so as a result they had the Miss Style award, and for many years I won that award but then a hairdresser came along, and he had a lot of style. Then we started to trade it back and forth and back and forth. Me and Jim, Miss Style, Miss Style. But I was the first Miss Style.

30:00

TF: I was the first Miss Grandin Theater. Julie Hunsaker had this movie called “To Wong Foo, with Love [Thanks for Everything], Julie Newmar,” with Patrick Swayze. Well, the premier night, it was all over the news in Roanoke that they were going to have a drag competition. You won a year’s supply of movie passes and popcorn I think it was. Well, I didn’t do drag, but I did Mary Read-your-Beads which, you know, was kind of radical drag. I had a beard and all. But, so, what I did was I had a ’77 Monte Carlo, one of those big boats with swivel seats in it. That was the only way I could get the damn hoops in the car. So, I dressed up a Mary Read-your-Beads, got a parking space right in front of the theater, I will never forget it! Right there on Grandin Road. Went sweeping in, they had to put a chair in the aisle because my skirts were too big to get me into the theater seats. They had the competition and my friend said, “get up there, get up there!” It was a bunch of drag queens, street people. And I was like “Oh! Never.” But I went up there, and as part of your competition you had to dance. So, all these girls are up there shimmying and doing all this nasty shit. So, when I got there, I could sing! So, I started to sing “The Hills are Alive” with the Sound of Music and I started to twirl. I went into the rapture with my crucifix [*ES laughs*], and they started screaming “the nun! The nun!” and I won the competition. So, I am the first Miss Grandin Theater.

31:15

TF: Alright, this was when I was a character singer with Opera Roanoke. I was a trained vocalist, a baritone. And I won my state competition, and then I was in Opera Roanoke and I am very proud because I speak no languages. I learned everything phonetically on a tape recorder. My vocal coach...

31:33

ES: [*interrupting*] That’s very impressive!

31:34

TF: My vocal coach would speak the words for me, and I can't read music, but I'm very musical. So, I would learn the music and it would take me forever to learn the lyrics, but I learned them, and I won my state competition, and I was very proud of that. In my thirties by then. This was when I was a socialite. Now back then, gay was glamorous to a lot of people. So, I had Thomas Jefferson hair that was in a ponytail, and I would wear a maury ribbon bow tied in it and pearls around my throat and lace fish shoes and ascots and all this crap. And I had a riding habit coat that was tied at the waist and a flared skirt, you know, the whole nine yards. So, and that's how I would go out. I was, you know, Willy Waltzer, Tommy Feazell!

32:12

TF: Oh, Willy Waltzer. Willy Waltzer was the column that I wrote, oh my god, for fifteen years? 15 to 20 years? From the early '80s until the early 2000s. So, probably, I don't know, twenty years, I was Willy Waltzer. I didn't tell anybody, but some people knew. So, I wrote the Willy Waltzer column which was really well known. People liked it. I wrote about political issues. I wrote about how to date gay men. I wrote about when my mother died. I wrote about being proud and gay. I wrote about how to deal with harassment. I wrote about all sorts of stuff. It was just, you know, how to be gay.

32:57

ES: How did you find out about the *Blue Ridge Lambda Press*?

33:00

TF: Oh! That was Gerry Jennings. Gerry was one of my dear friends. Okay, let me get into this. Now we are getting into Lynchburg gay history. In Lynchburg there was a group called PALS: Positive Alternative Lifestyles. And it was up here in Lynchburg. And Doug and Dave ran it, and they were restoring historic homes on Madison Street and Harrison Street, off of Fifth Street in Lynchburg. They were part of the big gay wave of restoring historic homes. That's where that started. Later, ten years later, it shifted to Diamond Hill. But at that time, it was on... I think it was called Garland Hill. Anyways, the streets are named after presidents. So, Gerry started bringing me up there during my college breaks. I would go to PALS meetings in Roanoke... I mean in Lynchburg, excuse me. And we would go up there and it was a very active gay community in Lynchburg. They all came to the bar on Saturday night, to The Park, but all the rest of the time they were having dinner parties and things up here in Lynchburg. So, they had the gay newsletter, I think it was called the *PALS Newsletter* then. When those guys moved onto other things, they sort of gave the newsletter to Gerry and Gerry brought it to Roanoke and the name became the *Blue Ridge Lambda Press*, BRLA [Blue Ridge Lambda Alliance]. And it became known as the 'pink pages' because the paper was pink to make it stand out plus pink was the color of the triangles worn in World War II by the gay inmates in the concentration camps. I mean we had that blurb in there, that's why the pages are pink. So, we had the pink pages. And we handled a huge variety of topics. I mean it was the way the gay men communicated in a lot of

ways. They were at the bars, we put them at the bars. We had a mailing list that was highly confidential, highly discrete. You guarded it with your life. Cause back then this was when you could still get in trouble for gay publications. So, we would meet in each other's homes, and have the mailing parties where we would sit there and lick labels and put them on the things and we had to take them all to the post office and get them bulk mailing rated and mailed. It was a lot of work.

35:31

TF: I edited it for one year. 1985. At the end of '85, I moved to Charlotte for one year for my career—and the day that I moved down there was the day the Challenger blew up, because as I drove down the interstate 77 everyone had their headlights on, and I didn't know what had happened until I got to Charlotte and found out that the Challenger had blown up that afternoon. Okay, so, I was the editor of the gay newsletter for one year and then I moved to Charlotte for one year for my career, but my mother fell ill and my best friend fell ill. He had AIDS, she had breast cancer. So, I gave up my career and moved back here, to Roanoke at the time. I'm in Lynchburg now. But anyway, my career was, I went to VCU in Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth [University]. I got in a lot of trouble because in senior year of high school, my guidance counselor told my mother that I should not go to VCU because it was a bunch of faggots. And I got mad, and I said to her in front of my mother, "Oh honey, you haven't heard the little rhyme? 'Let's all go to VCU where girls are girls and boys are too.'" [ES laughs] And she got pissed. And I did a gay hand gesture and she got really hot. So, I went to VCU! And that was where I was fag bashed, twice. Both times I was perfectly innocent. I was going to class and was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

37:05

ES: If you are willing to talk about it, how did those two incidences really affect you and change you as a person?

37:09

TF: Pissed me off! Made me gayer than ever! Screw them! Be damned if they're going to beat me into the ground. Just like those damn kids in high school. You know, they had the nerve to push me into my locker and stroke me and say what they'd like to do to me but by God they wouldn't touch me in public. And these people the same way. A bunch of damn cowards. Beat me up in an alley. I mean, like I said, the first time was bad. I mean my sister sent me money so I could get my face fixed because I didn't want mama and daddy to know because they would have pulled me straight home. When I was in Richmond, gay wasn't really out. And you know, you had to kind of figure out if there was anywhere to go. There were two clubs in Richmond that were gay. But it was real quiet. One was called Locklands which was a dance bar and that's where everybody went on Saturday night. All the men went there, real cruisy. And there was another one that I cannot remember now but it was where I went my freshman year. It was a very small cocktail bar in downtown Richmond, and I had to walk there. That was scary and it took

me forever to get there. I can't think of the name of it. The reason I picked up on it, they advertised in one of the student newsletters and something about the ad struck me as really queer. I mean it was like cocktail glasses tipped to the side with bubbles coming out of the side. Something you wouldn't put in a butch, you know, publication. But I thought "that's a queer bar," and that's where I went. But they were only around a year or so after I came to school. It was an older man, and it had only been around for years but then it closed, and then Locklands became the big one. But then there was the Broadway café on Broad Street, which was mostly lesbian, but they had drag shows one night of the week and that was tons of fun. And then when I was there, the Cha Cha Club opened up my senior year. It was an old bank building on Cary Street, and it was a mixed crowd. Gay, drag, straight, real avant garde, real fun. I mean, and that was pretty cool.

39:19

TF: But then I came back to Roanoke. I had a summer at Dartmouth after I got out of college. I got a fellowship and went to Dartmouth for a summer in costuming. I got homesick, came back to Roanoke instead of going to New York like I should have. But I came home. And that was where I really started letting it rip. I got my own apartment in Old Southwest for 150 a month? Or 200 a month? It was rough. It was the worst neighborhood. Whores, drugs, a woman got shot to death behind my car my first weekend there. Scared me to death. Oh, it was wonderful. It was the middle of night, and these drunks were fighting, and I was asleep. It was Saturday night, I had to go to church on Sunday. I heard this voice in the darkness yell [*mimicking a high pitched voice*] "by God if you were any sort of a man, you would shoot me!" And it got real quiet, then there was this [*makes gunshot noise*] and then this other drunk voice goes "by God he did!" So, I look out the window and it's like the Wizard of Oz I can see a foot behind the bumper of my car and puddle of blood and I'm calling my mother at two in the morning on my rotary dial phone going [*makes dramatic crying noise*] "I want to come home!" And mama's going "you picked it out, you paid the rent, you stay." So yeah, it was cool. It was on 7th Street. Oh god, I used to remember the address, but I can't now. 708 something. But, yeah, that was really cool.

40:34

TF: So that was my first apartment. I always had my own apartments. That was my vow. When I got out of college, my father had a rule. You had a college degree, you had three months to get out. And that was the rule. He didn't care if you didn't have any money or not. If you had a degree, by God you could get a job and get out of the house. So, I did. And I became a window dresser. And I worked for Miller & Rhoads. I worked for Thalhimers. I had my year in Charlotte at Ivey's in the Carolinas. I worked for upper scale Southern department stores. That's where the mannequins come from that are around my living room...

41:11

ES: [*interrupting*] And gorgeous.

41:12

TF: In ball gowns and jewels. Yes, tres gay. So, window dressing was a job that a gay person could get into in Roanoke and do because there was the gay stereotype. Gay men have good taste. That is a huge stereotype. That's why so many women want gay friends because gay men, they know makeup, they know hair, they know clothes, they know interiors. And when my first gay pride I went to in 1983 in Washington [DC], they had signs they were carrying [that said] "gay myth number one," "gay number 8," "gay number 15." And one of them said "gay men have good taste." And I just screamed because that worked. If you knew how to work it, it worked in your favor in Roanoke. Because a gay man would know how to do hair. A gay man would know how to dress windows. A gay man could be a florist, an interior designer. So, there were professions that you could be gay in and be safe. It was expected.

42:12

TF: So, I was a window dresser. I did mannequins. I did floral arrangements. I did interior settings. You know, I had a career doing that. And back then, you could have a career in that field in smaller Southern towns. Now, you can't. All of that's gone. I mean, it's only in the big cities like New York or Philadelphia or Baltimore. I mean, it's gone. Back then—people don't realize—in small towns, even like Roanoke, there were department stores with big show windows, and they had mannequins and you showed the fashions. You did the accessories, you did the whole nine yards. And I had a background in fashion design, so I was used to designing clothes and I had a lot of models to dress for the fashion shows. I mean the girls would stand there naked with a panty shield and a pair of hoes and heels on and that was it. Didn't bother me any. I mean I'm just pinning the muslins on, the whole nine yards, trying not to stick them in the breasts. But the male models were a bitch. They were the [*mocking voice*] "Oh I don't want a queer looking at my junk." And I'm like "shut up and just shut your mouth! That is not what you're paid for. You're supposed to be pretty and stupid. Now shut up!" You know, and I would tell them "And you better be quiet, because I got a straight pin in my hand baby and I'm fitting a Jansen on you and I will stick you in the dick!" So, you know, they learned real quick that I was a mouthy queen so leave me alone. So, in Roanoke that was an occupation I could do and be gay and get away with it. So, I was a window dresser, and I was very, very good at it. I had a good career going with it but then it went away.

43:42

TF: The next thing I went into was furniture sales because I had a very good eye and I could do interiors. So, I became a furniture salesman, and I would go to people's homes for free and give them consultations and tell them what it should look like and what to do, and sell them furniture, and that went very well. Until I got married and moved up here, and then I started as an assistant to an interior designer, but her clients liked me and started calling me, so I lost my job. And this is a very small town, and I couldn't get a job to save my soul once phone calls were made. All designers up here are married to doctors, lawyers. It's all women. And I couldn't get a job after that. So now, at the end of my life, I am a janitor! And I clean commodes and toilets at an elderly

care facility. And let me tell you, old people are full of shit! I see it daily. I clean it up every... ugh! It's disgusting! But I do it. I'm an adaptor, I survive. My late grandmother raised me that Southerners bend, we don't break. So, you do what you have to do. I mean, you come here, and I've got a pretty house with mannequins and ballgowns and jewels. You'd never dream that at 4:30 in the morning Tommy's in his khakis and a work shirt scrubbing crap out of the toilet, but yessiry bob. That would be my message to y'all. Your life is never going to be what you think it's going to be. I had dreams of glory when I was in college. I was winning fashion awards. I mean, I went to Dartmouth for a summer. I thought I was going to be it. But I got homesick, and I came home, and I was the one—my sister had left—and I was the one. You end up having to stay to take care of your parents. And I took care of my parents until both of them died. I took care of my best friend until he died. I took care of four other gay boys that died.

45:35

TF: I was in Roanoke when AIDS hit. And it was a fucking plague. It was called the gay cancer. Acquired immunization... Oh, what was it known as, it wasn't even called AIDS back then; it was called the gay cancer. It hit Roanoke like a ton of bricks. Nobody knew what the hell was going on. All of a sudden people were sick. And the thing about AIDS, it was hitting people in all economic levels. Back when I was in the gay world in Roanoke, in the social scene, you had A gays and you had B, C, D, street trash. I was on the B level; I didn't have money so I couldn't travel with the A gays. The A gays were like wealthy hairdressers, business owners, things like that. They were usually discrete. They might have younger 'toy boys' if you want to call it that. They had beautiful homes. Some A gays, quite a few of them, were married with families but were not out at all. Their wives might have suspected things, but you didn't say anything. But they had their guy friends, and they would go out of town. A gays mostly went out of town. They'd would go on vacations. They'd go to Washington or they'd go to the Bahamas, or you know, they and the guys. I wasn't part of that circle. I didn't have money. I had a lot of style, a lot of pizzaz, but I didn't have any money. I wasn't part of that set. So, I watched them with great interest. Then it was B level like me. Fun, young, no money but tons of style, lots of fun. Threw fun parties. That was my set. But I was also part of the political scene. A gays did not do politics. Nuh uh uh uh. No. Nothing that would blow the cover. Many gays in Roanoke would not invite me to their home or their parties because I was known. I was a known homosexual. Once you were known, it was like you made a lifestyle choice. You could either stay in the closet and get married and have kids and be quiet and be on the down low, like you know going to the public parks and picking up guys, shit like that. Or going out of town and doing guys. But that was a whole different world. Once you were a known homosexual, it was different. There were homes you were not allowed in. There were people that would not speak to you. It was different. And you paid for it. But I never minded because I was not going to be quiet. I was not going to be a hypocrite. I went to church every Sunday at my parents' church but everybody damn well knew I was gay, and when I had my first boyfriend I dragged his ass to church with me. The preacher had a fit, but I dragged him to church with me. I mean I was gay. I didn't see any point in trying to hide it. I didn't see any point in trying to be a liar. I didn't see any point in trying to be

something I wasn't. I was gay and either deal with it or to hell with you. And it cost me a lot, it really did. But I wouldn't redo any of it because my father and mother raised me to be a gentleman and to always be proud of yourself and to never behave in a manner that would embarrass you. So, I was never drunk. I've never been drunk in my life. I've never had a beer in my life or a joint or anything. But I was gay, and I was proud of it. And I behaved with dignity and had boyfriends that were out with me. I didn't hide out in the closet or sneak over to their apartment. Oh, hell no. They were with me. We would go to movie theaters. We had our heads up and we got called names but by God we were out there doing it. It was just a different world and I'm so proud now of many of the youth that I see. They don't know what struggles it was to get where we are now. Like, marriage equality was not even dreamed of when I was starting out. I mean the thought of having a gay husband, oh my god! That was just beyond the pale. That, ugh, please. But yeah, as soon as we're legal in the state of Virginia, within that month...

49:56

[Tommy's husband enters the room and chats with Tommy and Ellasen briefly. TF then goes on to describe how he and his husband met.]

50:07

ES: When did you two meet?

50:09

TF's husband: At a funeral.

50:10

TF: 2003. May the 8th at a funeral at St. John's Episcopal Church in Roanoke. Yes. I remember the day, May 8th, 2003. We met at a funeral. He came from Lynchburg to the funeral. I was in Roanoke at the time living there. We'd never met, the church was packed, and he ended up sitting beside me because he couldn't find a place to sit. And he had the ugliest shoes on I'd ever seen, and I told him so, and I knew he wasn't an Episcopalian because he didn't know the first damn thing about a prayer book [*ES laughs*]. After the funeral, he pursued me.

50:43

TF's husband: I brought you a glass of wine.

50:45

TF: And I said, "I don't drink!" So, then he went and got a glass of water and came at me and I said "I'm not thirsty." So, then he came at me when I was talking to someone—oh, look at him shaking his head; see how discrete he is [*gesturing towards his husband; everyone laughing*]. You know what he said to me? "Where do you live?" and I said, "Up on the hill," and he said, "Well, what are we waiting for?" That's how we met.

51:05

ES: *[laughter]* Oh my goodness, that's an awesome story.

51:10

TF: He was very forward.

51:11

[TF's husband mentions Kent's grandmother]

51:14

TF: Oh my God. Kent was the boy, the only other serious relationship I've ever had. I was nine years older. Oh god, he was young *[whistles]*. Kent was maybe 18? We met at a Labor Day party at a gay man's home. Kent was one of the prettiest boys I've ever seen in my life. I had just got back from a beach vacation. The last one I took was 1990, that tells you how long ago this was. So, I think that was 1988 I met him, '88 or '89. So anyway, we were at this Labor Day barbeque, these gay men, that was how it was done in Roanoke. It was a private event. And Kent, I didn't know this till many years later, Kent had been getting around quite a bit, and the man that invited him to the party was the host and Kent and he had had some encounters. Well, the man's other half was there. Kent didn't know the man had another half. The other half didn't know that his partner was fooling around. So, we were all eating lunch, and I said in my ignorance to Kent, "How do you know our host?" And Kent without thinking said "Oh, we've met a few times." The partner was sitting two people down from him, and stopped eating, turned to him and said, "What the hell do you mean by that?" Woohoo! Fight on! *[laughter]* It was fabulous, oh it was wonderful. I had to meet Kent after that...

52:41

ES: *[interrupting]* Oh my gosh!

52:41

TF: Had to meet him. I thought anybody who could start a fight like that. And we ended up dating for several years. And I dragged Kent to my church, set the minister off, but I dragged him to church, I dragged him to family reunions. I mean we were out before it was out, you know? We were wearing rings. Oh God, that sent 'em off. But I was queer, and I was proud, and Kent was young and stupid and didn't know any better. So, I'm dragging him all over the place and we were together during his college years, and I went to his graduation—Roanoke College—but he dragged me to Thanksgiving at his family's home in Buchanan, Virginia, which is the back of hell. And we're in Buchanan, Virginia, and his grandmother Margaret who is a bitch, a Pentecostal bitch, mean as hell, sitting there at the table lunch, glaring at me the whole time. Kent was her favorite. She finally goes, "You're gonna burn in hell!" And the table got dead quiet, and I smiled my nicest smile to her, and I said, "And I'll meet you there, bitch" *[laughter]*. Well, yeah, that did it for that. We had to leave real shortly after that. She was choking on her

damn gravy and potatoes. She had never been talked to like that. Never. So, yeah, I was mouthy. So... but the rest of the family liked me cause I was mouthy.

53:59

TF: Things still haven't changed that much, kids. You know, this year my man and I have been together twenty-some years. He took me home to meet his family last year. We've been together forever, and he finally took me home. He's not as advanced as I am in many ways. And he finally took me home to meet his family, and it was brutal. His brother, the brother's wife and their children, were, oh god, cold as ice. Would not speak to me even when I was introduced to them. Turned and walked away. While the other cousins and all were fine, couldn't have cared less. We sat there screaming and throwing food at each other and having a great time. But the point I'm making is, there are still many people and many parts—this was in Ohio, where it just simply still is not the thing. Where being gay is beyond the pale. His family is very religious like mine was, but my parents loved me and gritted their teeth and put up with it. His family is [whistles]. But it's just to show you that you can be gay at any age, but still in this day and time, being gay is not accepted to many people and you have to have the courage to stand up. And even if you're not standing there waving a flag and screaming "I'm gay," I'm standing here with my husband with our wedding rings on and they know damn well what the deal is and I told him when you introduce me you either say, "I'm your husband," or we're gonna have a fight right in front of them. So, he had the balls enough to say, "This is my husband, Tommy." He used to not be able to do that.

55:29

ES: Why do you think after so long... You know, you grew up through the scene in the '70s, that it's now 2022 and we're still facing these issues?

55:38

TF: Because America is the only nation in God's world, the only democracy that's based on morality. We were started by Puritans. We were started for religious freedom. So, to the vast majority—and I live in Lynchburg where Jerry Falwell's school is, you know Liberty University, where kids if they're openly gay get thrown off of campus, that's still the deal. I mean, open homosexuals cannot teach there, they cannot attend school there. I mean we have friends who worked at Liberty and were thrown out when they got married, and it was found out. That was this last year, and they were young. They were young guys in their twenties. They got married and got thrown out. And they were alumni. America is based on morality. As long as someone can point to Leviticus or to one or two other places in the Bible, the letters of Paul, and say gay is sinful, it is an abomination unto the lord, then they've got an excuse. They used to justify slavery by the Bible. My grandfather used to quote it, it's in Genesis. And they talk about the sons of Ham, the dark sons of Ham and how they would forever be slaves to the other tribes and all this crap. And my grandfather used to read that and he'd go [mimicking deep southern voice] "There right there. God is saying. God is saying the Black man is inferior and slavery is the way of the

righteous.” And you’d sit there and go “oh my God.” I mean, he threw a drinks party the day they buried Martin Luther King. He had the TV on with that and was having the drinks party. Honey, let me tell ya, I’m from a different time. When I went to college in Richmond, I lived at the Chesterfield which was Richmond’s first high-rise apartment building, six floors high. But anyway, on the very first floor Robert E. Lee’s I think it was great great granddaughter lived there, Miss Lee. And every afternoon Miss Lee would take the air and she and her Black maid—she was the only person who lived on the first floor, it was the tea room, where everyone in the building ate, but she had the one apartment there—and when Miss Lee came through the lobby and this was the late ‘70s, we all stood for her and if you didn’t stand someone would smack you, and we all stood for that lady because she was Robert E. Lee’s great granddaughter, great great granddaughter. She was old as hell. But her Black maid and she would go to take the air. They’d go out and walk on Monument Avenue. When I was in Richmond, you used to see Black maids in their little outfits on Broad Street waiting to catch the bus to the west end to clean the houses. Now it’s Hispanic. You have to remember, Americans always have to have somebody to look down on. With whites, they came over, they looked down on the Indians, so they stole their land and killed them and put them on reservations. Then, when they got rid of the Indians, they didn’t wanna do the work on their plantations raising the cotton and the tobacco so they started kidnapping Blacks and bringing them over from Africa. You know, so they had someone to look down on. Well now it’s changed in the fact that now Blacks have won a lot of their liberties and civil liberties. So now who’s turn it is? Hispanics. “Keep ‘em out,” you know, “the wetbacks, keep ‘em out. They speak a different language.” And so now the jobs that Blacks used to have, that whites wouldn’t take, now the Hispanics are taking them. And it’s just, in America it’s a land of hypocrisy. There will always be someone to look down on. Always.

59:10

ES: So how did the segregation and prejudice kind of change the bar scene and the club scene?

59:18

TF: Oh god, okay. When I first started going to bars, you did not see a lot of Black gays, and god knows you didn’t see any lesbians. Women and men did not mix. The men had their bars, the women had theirs. And women had a lot easier time of it, I have to admit that, because in the South especially, a girl could have a girlfriend. You know, “me and my girlfriends are going out,” “me and my girlfriends are going here,” and nobody thought a damn thing of it. I grew up in church where there was spinster women that roomed together cause they didn’t have anybody so they’d room together and now I look back and go “hmm.” You know when you room together forty some years. But anyway, you know Miss so-and-so and Miss so-and-so roomed together. Women had it a lot easier because they could pass. Men like me who were flamboyant, we couldn’t pass, you know. We just couldn’t pass. Women had a lot easier time of it. There was a lot of prejudice in the gay community towards women. I can vividly remember having gay rights organizations and the guys didn’t want the girls in ‘em, you know. Didn’t want no ‘fish’ in the organization, and it was like “oh come on guys, we’re all gay. Get over it.” But it was like that,

you know, they didn't want that. And Blacks... that was, I won't say it was much a gay thing as a white thing because this was the South. I didn't see Blacks in gay clubs, and I went to school in Richmond which was a bastion of Southern civilization, and there were certainly no Blacks in the clubs there. Ever. Maybe it's changed now, but yeah it was pretty segregated when I was coming along. And I saw the last gasp of it all. I'd say I saw the last gasp of the Old South in Richmond. Now you've seen most of it get toppled in 2018 with Monument Avenue coming down, and things like that. It's a different world. I grew up in a family [where] my mothers' side was very, very proud of their Southern heritage. Black people fought in the confederacy and one of them is in a history book and my mother's family was very proud of that and it wasn't a race thing then. Their thing was "these damn Yankees came down here and burned the houses and left us to starve, screw 'em, get a gun, we're going after them." They could've cared less about Blacks because they didn't own any slaves, but they sure as hell didn't like the Yankees coming down here and kickin' our asses. So, that's how my mother's family got involved in the war. It wasn't a Black thing. It was a Yankee thing. Daddy told Mary Jo when she was going away to Norfolk that he would shoot her if she ever dated a damn Yankee. She needed to marry a Southern boy and she did, she did. It was a big deal. One of my cousins is married to a beautiful woman of color, but they did that back in 1990 when it was unheard of, and I can vividly remember going out in public with them to dinner, me and Kent, and you know my cousin and his wife, and oh god. I can remember it being very unpleasant, very unpleasant. I mean the world hopefully will change more, in many ways it has not changed. I mean, you know... I never asked you all, are you all heterosexual?

1:02:40

ES: I'm queer.

1:02:41

TF: Okay. You're queer.

1:02:42

ES: Yeah.

1:02:42

TF: You're straight [*to other student in the room*]?

1:02:43

Other student: Yeah.

1:02:44

TF: Okay. So you're young. You all are what, in your twenties or something?

1:02:46

ES: Twenty-one.

1:02:46

Other student: Twenty-two.

1:02:47

TF: I mean, do you all experience prejudice because of your sexuality?

1:02:52

ES: I do. Yes.

1:02:54

TF: Still?

1:02:55

ES: I'm very religious, grew up in a very religious household.

1:02:58

TF: Oh yeah.

1:03:00

ES: So it's... I've kinda fallen into faith and falling into religion, and it's been fighting with that, so that's kinda where mine's been.

1:03:10

TF: Religion can really hurt you. I was raised to believe in the love of Christ, that you know, all men are sinful, blah, blah, blah. And I was raised that by being gay I was picking sin, that I was choosing this, you know. And I kept telling mama, "No mama. I was born gay." I said, "I've always wanted men. I've never wanted a woman." And she's like "No you choose that, that is your sinful nature" [*scoffs*]. So, as long as our country is based on religion and as long as people can get away with kicking your ass in the name of religion, it's gonna be a fight for gay youth. Because their parents will have the best of intentions, but they won't want their child to be gay, and that was where my family was coming from. It was sinful, you know. "Why would you choose that, it's an abomination unto the lord," and it's like oh god almighty. So, hearing you say that amazes me that still it's like that, but then again, my husband's family last year. My God, we're in our sixties, so...

1:04:12

ES: What would you say to queer youth now who are gonna potentially be facing things like this?

1:04:18

TF: Keep your head up, chin up, screw 'em. Be yourself. Screw them, screw them, screw them. Do not give in. Now, I would say if you live in the backwoods, and it's a matter of life and death, then you keep your mouth shut till you can get the hell outta there. Protect yourself. But if it's

you're not gonna die, you might get the shit beat outta you like I did, but you know you're not gonna get killed. Yeah, try to be yourself, try to set an example, try to be proud. I was just too dumb to know any better. You know, if I'd thought about it, I'd probably kept my mouth shut. But I didn't know any better. I was always me and that was it. I would just tell kids, love yourself, take care of yourself, don't be afraid to love other people, know that like straight people you're gonna be hurt. Love is not easy, and you're gonna be hurt. Know that gay love is different from straight love. Straight love is accepted by society; gay love in many ways is still not and you better be damn strong if you're gonna be in a relationship and be out in public. You better be a strong person. I would tell gay youth don't drink, don't. That was the big crutch of my day. Drinking and drugging because people couldn't handle the pressure of being gay and not accepted. I didn't do it because I promised mama and daddy I wouldn't, and I was just too damn bullheaded. I would've made a nasty drunk. You know, I was proud of myself, so, I would tell kids don't use drugs and drink as a crutch. Be proud of what you are, be who you are, if you have to wait till you can get the hell outta town, then do it. I had to wait till I was, well... I say I waited until I was at college, but shit I was getting beat up anyway in Roanoke. I was known as a queer. It's not gonna be easy and if I had kids, I would pray to God they would be straight so they'd have it easier. But at the same time if they were gay, I'd say, "Alright kid, just get your chin up and know that you're gonna get your ass kicked, but you gotta keep going, don't give up. You don't get nothing by giving up."

1:06:21

ES: Absolutely. And I guess my last question to kind of encapsulate everything... we talked about your childhood a lot and if you had the opportunity to go back and say something to your younger self, what would you tell that person?

1:06:47

TF: [*Pause*] I'm gonna put a condition on that. If there had been no AIDS in this world, I would've told my younger self, for God's sake, be a lot more of a whore than you were, cause there's a lot I didn't do cause I was too scared to. If there were no AIDS, I'd just tell myself, for God's sake experiment, go out there, have fun. But I was prissy. I was scared of diseases. You know, daddy told me horror stories of World War II where he watched these social disease movies where the sailor's peckers fell off from social diseases, and he said he was a virgin for years after that. So, you know, I was scared of anything. But, if AIDS hadn't been around, I would've told myself experiment, try things, don't be afraid. Now having said that, what would I tell myself knowing that AIDS was around? Never give up. It'll come out alright at the end, but you gotta keep fighting, ya can't give in. Don't give up. Don't let the bastards whip ya. Because at the end, if you're lucky, it comes out alright.

1:07:57

ES: Absolutely.

1:07:58

TF: I'm sitting here in 2022 in a home with a legally married husband. My peers that died from AIDS back in the '90s, my friends that died of natural causes all through the years, none of them would ever have thought this was possible, that you could sit here with a wedding ring on your hand, that you could've gotten married in a mainstream church, that you can say, in public, "Oh this is my husband," which I now say all the time. That would've been science fiction back when I was coming up. No one would ever have believed that. But I do think we have to be on our guard. I think we could lose that privilege. I think that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned. I think that abortion will be outlawed again. Now, if people had to grow up here... What my mother, the story she used to tell of women who didn't have an alternative, so you ended up going to a backstreet butcher is what they called 'em. Mama told me stories of knitting needles, clothes hangers, stuff like that because "good girls didn't get knocked up, honey." So, if a good girl all of the sudden was pregnant you had to do something about it, and if your family didn't have the money to send you to a doctor quietly, then you did whatever it took. Mama knew girls that died because infection set in. So, I think that we have to be on our guard. I think abortion's gonna be overturned. I think the next thing on the agenda will be gay rights. I think gay marriage is a huge burr up the ass of conservative America. It drives them crazy. There are people in Lynchburg when they see me and Rodney out and they see our rings on, you know, you see their ears just lay back. There are people when I say "this is my husband," I see them just [*makes face*], but they'll be polite. You know, I have been called names here in Richmond, several times when Rod and I have been out in public. And I just grit my teeth and just, you know, because of him and his reputation, and his job up here, I have to be somewhat dignified, you know. Once you get married, you have to learn, you have to consider someone else besides yourself. It's not all about you. And when you're married to someone who has a certain position or certain job at a certain corporation, you have to grit your teeth and you have to bite your tongue, and you have to tone it down. Oh, those are three words I hate that I've heard my whole life, "tone it down." I hate that damn phrase. Tone it down my ass! Get out of here So, you know, I've had to be polite to people in this house that just pissed me off. That I felt like a hypocrite, but because of my husband, I had to be gracious.

1:10:44

TF: You know, it's just one of those things. That's one thing I would tell kids. If you choose to be out, there will be a price to be paid. I would tell any gay kid that. It's still that way. I don't care how far they say we've come. You know, you get a lot farther in America in the business and professional worlds if you grit your teeth and get married and have kids and go on the down low. I had that opportunity. I dated a girl five years, we almost got married. My father adored her. She was gorgeous. And she was cool. She said as long as you screw guys I don't care. She said "The first time you touch another woman I'll kill you," and I was like [*whistles*]. Daddy told me, he said "That's a hell of an offer, take her up on it." He said "your life will be a lot easier." But I couldn't do it because I had been raised that wedding vows were sacred. That you take someone for life in front of God and man and I couldn't do that to her. I told her, I mean, oh it

was a horrible... we cried our eyes out when we broke up, but I told her “I want you to have a man who loves you thoroughly, in bed and out.” I said, “it would eat you alive to know that I was always looking at guys, even if we had sex and had kids.” I would’ve loved to have children. My husband has a son. He was married for 20 some years.

1:12:00

ES: Wow.

1:12:01

TF: And has a son who now has a fiancé. It’s been different. Yes, I have a stepson. That feels strange, strange.

1:12:11

ES: Does it almost feel like you’re living like the part of you that always wanted to have children even though he’s older?

1:12:18

TF: It’s not the same. I would’ve dearly loved to have a child who would’ve had like my father’s eyes or my mother’s eyes. Someone that I could look at and see one of my parents who have been dead. Momma’s been gone 30 some years, and daddy’s been gone 15 or 16. I would’ve given anything to look at a child and see my mother’s face again. I mean that sorta thing. The fact that my sister is named after my mother and my grandmother, that sorta thing goes on and on. Now, this is a strange note. My sister is very religious. When she found out I was gay and I told her, I was 15, she made a decision not to have children because she thought that gay was hereditary—which it is, the genes, you know. You know. She thinks that being gay is an abomination to God and she never wanted to have an abomination on her.

1:13:10

ES: Wow.

1:13:11

TF: So, my sister has never had children, which has broken my heart. But she will not have children because she believes being gay is an abomination.

1:13:19

ES: How did that affect your guys’ relationship?

1:13:27

TF: [*Pause*] We love each other, and she’s very gracious to Rodney, but we’re not bosom buddies. We don’t visit each other very often. We have phone calls every couple of months, every four or five months. We might see each other at a family reunion. But we are not an active part of each other’s lives.

1:13:55

ES: Well, is there anything else that you want to speak about, talk about? Anything at all?

1:14:02

TF: Is there anything you wanna ask me? I'm an old fag, you better be asking me. God knows how long I've got to go.

1:14:08

ES: I guess the one thing I did want to ask you and then this will be the last thing that I ask.

1:14:14

TF: I don't care, ask away baby.

1:14:17

ES: I was very interested in kind of knowing what life was like after the tragedy of Backstreet Café?

1:14:24

TF: Alright. Backstreet. I'm trying to remember, my memory's not as good. I think it was the early 1990s, early to mid... I would've been there that night, but I had another engagement and went to The Park later on. The man that was the shooter whose last name was Gay, had always been teased and tormented because of his name, and was determined to seek vengeance. The whole thing about Backstreet was he went to the wrong bar. He wanted The Park. And had been to another bar in downtown Roanoke. I'm trying to think if it was Billy's Ritz or Alexander's—a straight place—and asked directions to a gay bar. And ended up, as far as I remember, he was walking and ended up stopping at Backstreet because it was the first bar he came to and he did not realize The Park was two blocks further. That was where he was supposed to be.

1:15:19

ES: Wow.

1:15:20

TF: That was where he meant to go. But they gave him directions and he ended up stopping at Backstreet. That was a fluke. If he had gotten to The Park, it would've been a damn massacre. Because The Park was swinging in those days, baby. I was part of that. It was swinging. Instead he ended up at Backstreet and he shot a lovely young man, Danny, and killed him. A lovely boy. Danny bled to death in someone's arms. He didn't die immediately, but he bled to death. I had friends that were injured that night. I had a girl that grew up over the hill from me, in my childhood. Who lost I think it was two fingers of one hand. She was never the same after that and committed suicide. I had another friend, he was there that night, and he committed suicide down the road.

The Backstreet massacre really brought to light a lot of damn ugliness because Ted Koppel and *Nightline* came to Roanoke to discuss the Backstreet massacre. They had Neff Powell, the Episcopal archbishop, was on the panel. They had some Baptists ministers and I think they had an educator. But anyway, it was heartbreaking because the majority of the audience and the people interviewed said there was nothing wrong with him taking out the trash. Getting rid of the faggots. It was a huge thing. And kids in high school, which I had really hoped would start coming out, I think that really stymied a lot of kids when they saw the hatred and the ugliness. You know it was not a positive experience and it scarred the people that were in that bar that night. It ended up causing deaths down the road from people that just couldn't handle life anymore. You know, the one boy died that night and it caused a lot of pain and misery but beyond that it's like a stone in a pond with the circles, the ripples. The out ripples went out into the community. And all of a sudden people were afraid again. It had been loosening up, you know. There was a lot of hope in the community, but it started tightening back down and the religious people got their oars in the water and then the kids started being scared again, you know, and it was... [sighs] of all the damn places in America, it had to happen in Roanoke, Virginia. But it could have been so much worse. If he'd made it to The Park, I can't tell you how many people would have died. I can't. Because he had enough ammo he could have taken out more people than the one guy he killed and the few that he hurt.

1:18:03

ES: So, Gay, the one who had shot [them], just recently passed away in prison. How do you think that kind of reacted to people who were there and people who knew each other like yourself? Did it bring up like old memories and kind of almost like reliving the situation?

1:18:23

TF: No. No, it's in the past. It's in the past. I would have hoped that we would've gotten farther down the road to equality and acceptance, but I don't think we're that much farther down the road. I think a lot people pay lip service—to be politically correct—but in their heart of hearts they still don't like gay people and they wouldn't want their child involved with one and they'd rather see gay people die. It's just a harsh truth. And besides, you gotta remember you live in the South, the Bible Belt. But it's equally ugly up North, you know. People just don't talk about it as much. You can still, for years, you could still get away with being ugly and nasty and hateful to gays and even killing them. Because it was such a moralistic society and there were no laws to saves gay's asses. I mean, we still don't have proper safety nets for discrimination in housing, jobs. We don't. I mean, if you keep your mouth shut and think of another reason, you can still deny a gay person the privilege of renting from you. You know, marriage equality. God! That's been a fight from hell, and I think we're gonna lose it. I mean, as long as we're a faith-based country, you're always gonna be able to discriminate and get away with it. Because it's part of your religion and we believe in religious freedom.

1:19:49

ES: So what specifically or like what kind of ripple effect do you think would have to happen for there to be change? And how long do you think that would take?

1:20:05

TF: [*Pause*] I can't answer that because I would have thought that gay people being shot and massacred would've changed things, like the Pulse night club, in Florida. But it hasn't. You can still get away with killing a gay person or beating the shit out of 'em. A straight boy can get away with beating the hell out of a gay guy if he goes "He made a pass at me!" You know, it's just that way. It's just that way, and gay people can't claim the market on bigotry and oppression. Women still face horrendous fights every day of their lives. I mean, you were probably too young for this, but I'm trying to think, the Supreme Court nominee, Clarence Brown [Clarence Thomas]. Was it Anita Hill? That huge battle, she was a legal assistant or something and he sexually harassed her and she brought it to court and testified at his hearing for the Supreme Court and they still ignored her and put him on the Supreme Court. That was an outrage! Then, he tried to paint that woman as being a stupid bitch. She was brilliant. She had a legal degree. She was no fool. I mean, but [*shrugs*] she was a woman. She was a Black woman. You know, and the thing that got me so pissed was he was a Black man! And they still treated her like that! His own wife came out against her. I was like [*gestures questionably*]. And it's still that way. I'm looking now at the situation in Ukraine, which horrifies me. We should be helping them and we're not. But one thing that people don't realize is when Putin takes over the Ukraine, all gay rights will instantly be done away with. Gay people will instantly be imprisoned. I mean, you can't be gay in the USSR, or Russia as it's now called. You can't be gay in Russia. I mean, there are stories every day of atrocities, gay youth and all. You're arrested, you're put in prison for immorality, and as soon as they get the Ukraine. Ukraine has civil liberties for gays. They had equality. And I mean the gays there, I would be trying to get the hell out as fast as I could go because once the Soviets get their hands on you, you're gonna be imprisoned. And it's not a damn thing you can do about it.

1:22:28

ES: Absolutely.

1:22:29

TF: I mean look at the African countries. To Africans, the number one religion—European religion—that has been brought to them is Catholicism. And as a result of that, African nations, with strong Catholic heritage, view gayness as a sin and they have horrible punishments for it. Horrible! I mean, right now, the Episcopal Church is being torn apart because the Episcopal churches in Africa do not want gay clergy. Do not want gay marriage. Do not want gay acceptance.

1:23:07

ES: How has your religion been through your life with being out and gay and growing up religious and seeing all of the things that are going on around you?

1:23:17

TF: Okay. I was a Presbyterian for many, many years. That's the way I was born and bred, that was my heritage. Through mother's side of the family, we were purebred Pres. And I can vividly recall, before I left the Presbyterian church, for about five, six years in a row, I would be nominated every year from the floor by the Congregation to be an elder. And every year, the pastor would squelch it, because you didn't put a gay man on the session. And that used to enrage me because my fellow congregants thought enough of me that I was a Sunday school teacher. I was a youth group leader. You know, I did all these things with kids and all and they trusted me and, yeah, I had a boyfriend, and we were in a monogamous relationship. He came to church with me. And yet by being honest and all, I was denied a place at the table. That used to enrage me. The Episcopalians are not that much more liberal. I have a friend who is now an openly gay man, in a relationship, he's not married. But he has been asked to serve on the vestry of his church, which is huge because he's openly gay. So, we're making a little bit of progress.

1:24:24

ES: Absolutely.

1:24:25

TF: Presbyterians not so much. Episcopalians are trying. Catholics, no way! Uh, uh! Pentecostals, oh hell no!

1:24:33

ES: How do you feel about Southern Baptists? [*laughter*]

1:24:35

TF: Now, Southern Baptists, when I was growing up, Southern Baptists were cool. As long as you kept your mouth shut, and your zipper shut around the church, they would kinda overlook things. If you went to church on Sunday, paid your tithes. But then, it went all to hell. When, as my mother said, "When you gays started pushing," you know? But I was like, "Why shouldn't we push Momma? Why shouldn't we have a place at the table?" I said "You raised me!" I said, "Think about that. You raised me with my morals and I still turned out gay!" You know that used to burn her ass up. Daddy used to tell Momma all the time [*mimicking deep southern voice*] "He's queer, it's from your side of the family, Jo!" Daddy didn't know he had at least five gay people on his side of the family and none that I could find on Momma's. And she'd always go, "Keep your mouth shut, you'll kill him. Don't say a word."

1:25:33

ES: At this point, what would you, if you had the opportunity to also see your mother and father again and show them everything you have built and have done, what would you like to tell them or hope that they would tell you?

1:25:47

TF: I'm okay. It turned out okay. Nobody killed me. I'm fine. I got a husband, we're monogamous. I ain't burned the house down yet. We still got our jobs. You know, I would tell them "Don't worry, it's okay!" You know, I think that's what they were so scared of. Because they knew about one of the fag-bashings and I mean, they were so terrified. Momma used to tell me all the time, she said "Now, son, one of these days after I'm gone, there will come a time, like was in the war." She said "They're gonna come for y'all." She said "They're gonna get you 'cause you've run your mouth all these years and pushed." And I said "That might be true." She said "I just want you to know, they're gonna come after ya'll again." She said, "Now we wanted you to be safe, but you kept running ya mouth. They'll get you." And I said "I know. I won't back down, Momma. I'll stand up for myself." She used to worry about that all the time. I remember when AIDS really hit. Ronald Reagan was Governor in California. And he wanted to take all the AIDS patients and all the gays and put 'em on... I wanna say Alcatraz. It was an island there in California, out in the bay, and he came out in public and said that we need to put all of 'em together. Put 'em all in the same place. Get that sickness all together, they can be sick. And a lot of people still feel like that. I suppose if you ask Mitch McConnell, he wouldn't be too gay-pro.

1:27:29

ES: I'd have to agree with you.

1:27:30

TF: Yeah, there's a lot of ugliness still out there. You can do the easy thing and hide. Marry a straight person, have your kids. But I tell you if you did that, by God, if one of your kids says "I'm gay," then you back them up. Don't you dare give them shit! You know, have the guts to back that kid up and say... You might not have to come out to them, I know it might kill 'em! But you can tell that kid "Okay, I'm with ya." That's what enrages me so much when I know gay people in the closet that talk against gay people. I've been spit in the face at gay parties before and been told [*mocking deep voice*] "Because of fags like you, it makes it harder for fags like us!" And then the same damn people end up benefiting from the fight of people like me. They get their marriage equality. They get their rights. But they didn't have the balls to fight for it and that just pisses me off. I mean, that burns my ass up. How dare you. You know, you fought against us that were out, and denigrated us, and spoke against us in public. But yet down the road, you get to benefit from our fight and that just burns me up. You know, I've been at parties where I got spit in the face and told by a church person, "Cause of fags like you it makes it

harder for people like us!” And then damned if he didn’t get married to his partner of thirty-some years! I mean that just burns me up. Rod’s always like “You gotta let it go. You gotta let it go!” and I’m like [*scoffs*]. You know? Gay people can be their own worst enemies.

1:29:03

ES: Absolutely.

1:29:03

TF: Can be their own worst enemies. So, what else baby?!

1:29:09

ES: Um, I think my last question that I have is, how would you like to still be involved in activism and what would you love to do now to like be back in the scene? Or would you want to go back in the scene?

1:29:28

TF: [*Pause*] For the tape’s benefit, the man is thinking. He is pondering.

1:29:44

TF: [*Pause*] I’m in my sixties. My time has come and gone. It’s up to the young people now to kick ass. People like me should be used as reference points by the young. Maybe we can steer them. Maybe we can help them not make the mistakes we made. Maybe we can tell them who to watch out for and be careful around that, you know, might turn around and stab you down the road. We have experience. It’s like an old hooker training a new one. You know, you’ve been around the block. My time has come and gone. I did my bit. I fought. You know, I don’t have any regrets. I paid my dues. And I got the rewards. I reaped the rewards in the end. The marriage equality thing especially. I think back to when I had friends who had AIDS and they’d be in the hospital in Roanoke and the nurses and doctors wouldn’t come in the room. They’d put the tray on the floor and kick it through the door to my friends. They wouldn’t even come in the room. They put caution tape across the doorway. They made you wear this whole outfit and gloves to go in there [*background noise from the other room*]. I mean, people with AIDS were treated like they had some bizarre disease from the moon. You know? Kids nowadays don’t realize that. I mean, there are now medicines and antivirals and things like that. Back then there wasn’t anything of this, and I think kids should look to people like me and say, “okay, you went through this, you saw it, so what should we try to do to make it better?” You know, use people like me as reference points. You know, we might not be technologically savvy, but we’ve lived.

1:31:40

TF: Would I get re-involved in the movement, probably not. I’m old, I’m tired. You know, I’m cleaning toilets at 4:30 in the morning. Truly, when you’re young is when you need to be kicking ass, when you’ve got the strength and the heart, and you haven’t been kicked a lot. That’s when

you go. That's when you don't have enough common sense to know what might be different. You've still got that boldness, that dream. You've got your dreams. I'd say the young people are the ones to move forward. Young peoples are the ones to fight for marriage equality protection. The young people need to realize that if they don't keep their damn eyes open, they're going to lose it. I mean, this is not an accepting society and kids need to know that. I think a lot of gay youth take it for granted that they're going to have all these privileges when they get older. Uh uh. They can be revoked in a heartbeat. That's a democracy. You can vote on it. And I just think you know young people need to keep their eyes open. They need to be on guard. You never know marriage equality might be revoked. It could happen. People like me will probably be grandfathered in because we're already legally married and recognized. Young people won't have the opportunity. I really think that people need to keep their eyes open and watch out. And for straight women, I would say *Roe v. Wade*, fight for that. Because it's coming and it's coming soon. I mean, if the way the Supreme Court is going, they're going to revoke *Roe v. Wade* in the next five years. And after they knock that down, it'll be marriage equality. That will be next because the pendulum is swinging back to the right, and it's swinging hard.

1:33:30

ES: Absolutely.

1:33:31

TF: We have a president in the White House that has no balls, because he can't. Because he has a Congress against him, because he cannot find the votes, because there is no more bipartisanship. You're either this way or that way. People don't work across the aisle anymore. America is a polarized society. You should see that with all the race problems that have now erupted that we worked so hard to put behind us. My mother was a civil rights person. She was with Church Women United, and she was fighting to integrate the churches in Roanoke. We used to get calls in the middle of the night to burn the house down. Daddy was petrified. I mean, but my mother was a quiet woman of faith, and she didn't back down. I was so proud at her funeral, here at a white church, there's a whole row of old Black ladies and they had fought with Mama for Civil Rights, and they were so proud of mama because she was one of the few white women that would go with them, and they showed up for her funeral. And I was so proud of that. I mean, it's never gonna be easy. As long as we have morality in this country, they can beat us over the heads with it. You just got to be strong, and you just got to believe in your dreams.

1:34:41

ES: Absolutely, Well, thank you so much, this has been amazing. Honestly an honor to talk to you and we thank you for everything and all your words.

1:34:54

TF: I have no children. This will be the legacy I leave.

1:34:58

ES: Well, I think you definitely have an amazing one to leave. So, I'm excited to show this and have this around to people.

1:35:08

TF: I'll be curious to see the outcome. They're either gonna say, "What a tired old queen," or they might actually say "He might have a point or two." So, I do thank you for being a guest in my home. I'm very honored you drove an hour up to talk to me, and I hope to God in all my ramblings there's been something you can take with you that will be of use.

1:35:27

ES: Oh, absolutely.

1:35:31

TF: And that was Tommy Feazell, and I'm so glad that you came up here today. Thank you very much.

1:35:33

ES: Thank you.

[END]