

Interview – Rob Tharpe

Interviewee: Rob Tharpe

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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START OF RECORDING

Cecelia Parks (CP): This is Cecelia Parks. I'm here with--do you go by Rob or Robert?

Rob Tharpe (RT): Rob.

CP: With--with Rob Tharpe. It is Thursday, November 10th, 2022. We are in Rouss-Robertson Hall at the University of Virginia, and we're going to get started.

RT: Okay.

CP: So what words do you use to refer to yourself? Do you say “gay,” do you say “LGBTQ,” do you say “queer”?

RT: I--I really don't--I read this question beforehand--

CP Right [laughs].

RT: I--I really don't--I guess I'd say “gay”, but I really don't--I mean, I'm--pronouns are he/him/his...I don't--I mean, I guess I don't use it a lot. I'm a little bit different in that I--I mean, I have a son, who--who's--he'll be thirty-two next month. You know, I--I--when I was younger, I was...I guess you'd say into guys and girls, if you would. Yeah. Yeah.

CP: That makes sense. When you're talking about like a group of people, like do you say, "the LGBTQ community," "the queer community," "gay community"?

RT: I guess it'd just be "gay community." I mean, yeah. Yeah.

CP: Fair enough. So you grew up in Charlottesville.

RT: Mm-hmm.

CP: What was that like, growing up here?

RT: So, I--I was not--well, I'm a first-generation college student, so you know, my parents both had--you know, professional jobs, but not college degrees. And so I grew up, you know, in public schools here in Charlottesville. Had very few--I've met a lot of people now that were in private school then but not that, you know, I knew at the time. So it was--I mean, Charlottesville is a small town and I lived near Martha Jefferson, so you know, I walked to the Downtown Mall. And I remember the Downtown Mall before it was brick, so you know, it's--it goes back a ways. So just a normal childhood. I mean, I'd say small town. I spent my summers in Nelson County, where my grandparents were, helping them with their vegetable garden, which was huge, like over an acre, so that's where my parents shipped me off in the summer. So I didn't spend summer in Charlottesville, but I was here during the school year.

CP: Okay, yeah. And which school did you go to?

RT: I went to Burnley-Moran, Walker, and Charlottesville High.

CP: Okay. All right. And so that would have been in the '60s, '70s?

RT: Early '70s.

CP: Early '70s. Okay. All right. So, you sort of mentioned that you have a son, that you were, you know, into girls and guys from earlier in your life, but tell me about

some of your first experiences as a gay person.

RT: They would mostly be with, I guess, people I went to school with, not necessarily friends I would say.

CP: Mm-hmm.

RT: Also, when I was sixteen, I was--had my first encounter with someone, a male, who was much older than I was. I mean, twenty-five, thirty years older than I was. And so there was--I mean that experience. But mostly, you know, just people I knew through--the girl I was with, I happened to start dating when I was seventeen, and we were together until I was twenty-two, which was about the time my son was conceived. But I mean, I--I mean, I knew all along I was gay. It wasn't like I didn't know that, you know. It was just kind of--this was...I guess it was normal for around here, if you would. I mean, in terms of, you know. Everybody had a girlfriend, if you would.

CP: Right.

RT: You know--yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. So, anyway. Yeah.

CP: Yeah, so that's actually--so that's really interesting. So did you see other gay people when you were, you know, sort of in the community as a young person? Did you see that?

RT: Yes. So, I mean, for example, we would go--a whole--a whole bunch of us, let's say, you know, like ten people, guys and girls, would go out to a nightclub in Charlottesville, it was a straight-type nightclub. And then, you know, three of us guys would end up dropping the girls off and then we would be going to the gay club, you know, after hours [CP laughs]. So, it was kind of--

CP: So would that have been Club 216, or would that have been--

RT: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CP: The predecessor to--

RT: No--well--it was--it was Silver Fox, and then it became Club 216.

CP: Got it. Okay. Okay. So what was that like?

RT: Well, so interestingly enough, I have--so when--when Silver Fox--or I guess it was 216 at the time. When it moved--it was on the ground floor of Water Street and when it moved upstairs into this larger facility, they were looking for help. And the--my--the guy I was living with at the time was the DJ there. So I ended up getting a job there as a bartender and worked there for almost eight years, so.

CP: Okay.

RT: That was--that was a totally different experience than--than just going out, you know. I mean, I just figured, I might as well. He was going to be DJ'ing all night; I might as well work. [CP laughs] You know, I mean, it's--you know. Yeah, so. Yeah.

CP: Right. So I've heard that there--you--you--that there were a lot of straight people in 216. Was that something--

RT: Oh, totally.

CP: Was that something that you experienced as well?

RT: Yes, yes. What it was, it was a gay bar until 2:00 when everything else shut down in Charlottesville, and then it was--it was everything. And it was--I mean, it was interesting. You know, the--the straight people treated me quite well. I mean I--nothing like that. Being a bartender and your [indistinct] are seen as a little bit of a--I mean, a whole lot more people knew me than I knew. You know? I mean, by association. But anyway. Yeah, that was--that was...quite an experience. I mean, it was--the reason I

stayed so long, I guess because the money becomes addictive. I mean, you're making \$300-\$400 a night, you know, walking out of there with it, and it's like how do you say no? [CP laughs] I mean, that's what I was making all week long at my regular job. I mean, you know. So yeah, yeah, yeah. So it was--yeah.

CP: Right. So you would go to Silver Fox, you would go to 216.

RT: And to Escafe, which is Eastern Standard--became--well it was Eastern Standard and it became Escafe, but yeah.

CP: Oh, okay. What was--what was Escafe like?

RT: Escafe was great. I mean--I was a college student here and like some of the DJs down there were UVA students, too. And it was--it was quite a scene. It was a little bit--I mean, it was--it was packed. It was like, you know, being I guess people have told me like Time's Square at, you know New Year's Eve, you know. It's just, you know, you're packed in there and it's hard to move, and so. And there was--there was a fair amount of drugs. I mean, nothing I ever did, but you saw a lot of it. But it was--it was a lot of fun. I mean, I guess you would—it's the closest thing, I guess, to like a rave or whatever, I mean. It was pretty--and you know, everybody dressed up. I mean, especially when I was a bartender at 216, too. I mean, you know, you were dressing for tips so you know, if that meant that you, you know, wore nail polish or you wore glitter or you did whatever, I mean, you know. But it was fun, so. Yeah. Yeah.

CP: Yeah, absolutely. Did you see people coming in from out of town to come to those places?

RT: Oh, definitely. Definitely. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CP: Yeah.

RT: I mean I met people through the years, especially over in the Valley, that would--Waynesboro, Staunton, that would come to Charlottesville, but yeah. Since, you know, that closed down, I mean, to my knowledge there's really nothing--there's nowhere around here that's defined for, you know...anything other than straight lifestyle. I mean, yeah.

CP: Yeah. So you would go to the bars to hang out and to maybe meet other folks. Where else would you go? Were there--

RT: We went to Richmond a fair bit. But--I guess this was more so before I started working at 216, because the guy I was--I mean, we would, you know, three or four of us jump in a car and go to Richmond to some of the bars on Broad Street. I don't really remember their names, but there were some--there were some interesting ones. Yeah, yeah.

CP: Right.

RT: You'd walk outside and it'd be daylight. And it's like, "Oooh." Yeah. [Both laugh] So.

CP: Yeah, so how did you meet other gay folks when you were in--in Charlottesville?

RT: Through--mostly through Escape or Club 216 or whatever. And again, I was with the same individual from the time I was twenty-two until I was thirty-seven, so, you know, I didn't really--I mean, I met some friends, but not really--yeah.

CP: Right. That makes sense. So were you involved at all or did you do anything with the--I guess it would--the Gay Student Union here on campus?

RT: No, I didn't.

CP: Yeah.

RT: Because when I was in--so, well first of all, when I transferred into the [McIntire School of] Comm[er]ce school, I was--I was still living at home, which my parents had moved to Albemarle after I graduated high school, so I had like a twenty-mile commute to school here. It was not ideal. And then so--I actually withdrew when I first came here and then worked for a couple years at State Farm Insurance full time, and then decided I needed to come back to school. So I came back to school and lived closer to here then. So it made all the difference in the world.

CP: Right.

RT: Comm school's a very--group-oriented-type environment, which--every class you have group projects, so you have to meet outside of class to do--so you know, there was not a lot of free time. I remember seeing some of the, you know, events that the Gay Student Union was having or whatever, but I never participated.

CP: Right. That makes sense. How was it when you sort of came out to your family or your community? Was that something that was--did they have a reaction to it?

RT: Well so...I have--I have always been a don't ask, don't tell type of person. Mainly because when I was--when I was a teenager, my best friend who lived across the street, she came out to her parents and they like kicked her out of the house. And so, it was not a good--I was like--not that I thought that would happen to me but I didn't know. So I actually did not tell my parents until...I was already married and getting ready to get a divorce. So that was--that was in my late thirties. So. Not--yeah.

CP: Yeah.

RT: And--and they've always been--I mean they're not--they're just not--they're

not--I don't want to say not nosy, but they don't--you know, we don't talk about it. They know but we don't talk about it. They know but we don't talk about it, so yeah. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. That's reasonable.

RT: Mm-hmm.

CP: Did you ever hear anything sort of in that time period, you know, late '80s, about AIDS in Charlottesville? AIDS Support Group, anything like that?

RT: Not necessarily the support group, but obviously we always--I mean, we knew people that were positive, things of that nature, yeah. And people that actually passed, as well, so. Yeah. So it was always around. And the same people would be in the club where you were, and things of that nature, and you kind of knew it but you didn't really talk about it. I mean, you know, you just knew. I should--well, I should say, "You knew". You know... you just kept your distance. For--for--I mean--well, until--until you know, they got medications, and then you know, I had a--I had a friend--I have a couple friends that have lived with it for decades, now. So. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Was there like an awareness in the community around, you know, even if they weren't, you know, you weren't necessarily deeply involved with it, there was an awareness around like...I don't know, taking precautions?

RT: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I mean--yeah. Everybody did all the precautionary, you know, condoms, all that. Yeah, yeah. It was--they were quite prevalent. I mean, they had, you know, glass bowls full of them at the bars and stuff. So yeah, they were [indistinct].

CP: Yeah. Did you hear--and you know, being out in the community, especially being from the community, did you hear other folks, you know, straight people, sort of talking about AIDS in Charlottesville at all?

RT: The one thing that comes to mind--I--I bought a house with the first guy I was with over off of Jefferson Park Avenue. I just sold it in July, so I've had it for--for--decades. There was a gentleman--there was a house, a support house, that was being built up on Shamrock, and one of the elderly gentlemen who lived on the street was coming around with a petition to sign because there was going to be sewage runoff that was going to contaminate some--you know, it was--it was ludicrous and we were just like, "No, thanks, we are not signing this." [CP laughs] So, you know, there was--there was that. But that--that's really the only negative thing I guess I heard, yeah.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. So how long have you worked at UVA?

RT: Twenty-five years.

CP: Okay. Yeah. So, that--you started late '90s.

RT: '98.

CP: '98. Okay. Yeah. So what was it like being--you know, working at UVA as a gay person in this time?

RT: Again, it was one of those don't ask, don't tell--there were very few people that knew. I mean, just my friends from outside that might also work with UVA, but that was--that was about it. I mean, you know, we just--it just wasn't an issue. And of course, I think a lot of people assume or maybe--maybe not now, but at least twenty-five years ago, they assumed, "Oh, he has a child. He's straight." You know. So. Let them think what they want, so, you know. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. Did you know other gay people who were working at UVA at the time?

RT: Mm-hmm. Even--even some that, you know, I wasn't very...close with. I

mean, I just knew--knew of them. But yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I knew--I knew quite a few people. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Were most of them sort of taking a similar approach to you of sort of--yeah.

RT: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

CP: That makes sense.

RT: It wasn't a--yeah.

CP: And was that because--I mean, obviously some people, you know, it's your private life, people don't need to know. Was it more, you know, because of that, or for--

RT: For me, at least, it was more because of that. It wasn't because I was scared I was going to get fired or anything. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And then so were you involved with the UVA Pride group, UVA LGBT Committee at all?

RT: Mm-mm. No.

CP: Yeah. Is there anything like that in sort of the McIntire equivalent of that kind of effort?

RT: We have a student group. It's called Pride at McIntire. But, again, it depends on--I mean, you know, we've had very active members sometimes. But again, this is only a two-year school, so it doesn't last very--you know, it ebbs and flows, if you will. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. So UVA has a pretty big presence in the Charlottesville area, as you know. So I'm curious as somebody--as, you know, a UVA staff member, how do you see, you know sort of gay UVA staff and faculty interacting with the rest of the Charlottesville community? Like do you see folks sort of keeping to themselves,

mostly interacting with other staff or faculty? Do you see them sort of mixing a lot with people who don't work in the university?

RT: I mean, here, I would say in this school, we have a pretty good culture. And there are other, you know, gay employees here. We don't--I mean, we don't actively--I mean, we all--we're all a community, so it doesn't make any difference within the school. I guess though, for broader Charlottesville, I really don't--I want to say I don't know, but I'm just not that active in the community. I knew Jenny [Mead] through, you know, her parents. Through--through Richard Roberts. I mean, her mom was the director of the SPCA for a long time. So I mean I knew her out of that context, not out of, you know, what she did with Charlottesville Pride and things of that nature, so.

CP: Got it. That makes--

RT: So I can't really--I just can't really say that I know that much about how the gay community interacts with Charlottesville. I mean it used to be, as I said, you know like it--somewhere like Club 216 when all the bars shut down, I mean everybody would be there. And there was--I mean, they had police--I mean security presence, but there was rarely any altercations or anything, yeah.

CP: Yeah, it seems like--Jenny did an interview with Mike Fitzgerald and it seems like--

RT: He--he worked there when I did.

CP: It seems like him and Clyde [Cooper] were not going to tolerate a lot of...

RT: Right.

CP: Nonsense.

RT: Right, right. Right.

CP: Just in general [laughs].

RT: Mm-hmm.

CP: So I'm curious what your experience of living in Charlottesville as a gay person is now. Do you feel like you're part of a larger community?

RT: Not necessarily. So I will say, you know, I just moved from Charlottesville in July to a house in Albemarle, and I, you know, it's myself and my current husband as well as two other gay guys that live there. So we all, you know--and we're just--we're all friends, the four of us are. And you know, we go on vacation and stuff, things of that nature together, but I wouldn't--I don't really have that many other friends, you know, outside of there. And again--well, I shouldn't say that I don't. We have a few, but we might only see each other a couple times a year, you know. But, yeah. So. For me...you know, it's kind of--I mean, you pick your--you pick your tribe and you stay with them, is what it is.

CP: So how did you find--so how did you meet those friends that you live with?

RT: So one was from Appomattox that I met at--when I worked at Club 216, and we've just been friends and gone on vacations and he works for a doctor's office here in Charlottesville. And then the other...how did I meet him? The other--the other person that lives with us, he--he and his boyfriend, who I was just very, very acquaintances with, but he came to my wedding. So I met him on my wedding day. Anyway. So he and this other guy didn't work out, but he's a real estate agent, and he actually sold my house in Charlottesville, and so--but he's a--he just got his real estate license last November, so he's still, you know, kind of starting out, and I was like, "Well, you know, I got this big house down Blenheim if you want to rent a room, you know, that's fine." So that's kind of

how that came about. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. So how did you meet your husband?

RT: First or second? I mean-- [laughs]

CP: Whichever--whichever--one or either or both.

RT: So the first one was from Australia. And I met him when my basement wall, cinderblock wall, was sort of bowing in. And there was things called carbon fiber straps that they could put on--he worked for a masonry company in Waynesboro, but he was a recent transplant from Australia and he was an architect by--by training. So, when I mentioned like, I didn't know whether I wanted to sell my house or put an addition on it, he was like, "Oh, well, I'd love to design an addition for your house." Anyway, and so one thing led to another, and he had designed--you know, put an addition on it, it was in *Cville Abode*, and we--we were together about...five years. Married the last two. And then he had some mental health issues and so that didn't--actually, mental health issues that were combined with substance abuse issues that I was unaware of. And so by the time I found out, he had a psychotic episode. Anyway. So he went back to Australia.

And then--then my current husband I met...through a dating app. I--Grindr. That--but--but--what it was--he was--he was on there, and he was living up the street from me and he kept like, you know, saying like, "I want to meet you, I want to meet you." And he's younger than my son. So I was a little bit hesitant to even want to meet him. And finally one day--anyway. And so, I mean the rest is history. But he's from El Salvador, so. Yeah. So that's been--I mean, not that I was looking for people that were not from the United States, but he is--I mean, it is a different culture and everything and we just get along great. So. Yeah.

CP: So when--thinking about your first husband, did you all get married after marriage was legal or before?

RT: No, we went to--we went to New Mexico.

CP: Oh, okay.

RT: Got married there.

CP: Okay.

RT: But it was--it was May of 20--I'm losing track of--we got married May first and like gay marriage was legal in Virginia in July of that same year.

CP: Okay.

RT: So it was very close to the time it was legal. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CP: Okay. Yeah. Okay. And then so, your current husband, it was just you know a regular like--

RT: And the im--dealing with, you know, immigration and naturalization is not...has not necessarily been easy. You know, you have to go up there and interview with them. And the first time--first time was with the one from Australia, and he, you know, that one was actually a little bit rougher than--than the second one, even though I had the same attorney for both, so you know, I--but it was--it just depends on who you get as an interviewer. Second time around, I was--I was a nervous wreck because I'm like, you know, he's half my age and I don't want--you know, my mind was going everywhere. And it all worked out fine, so. Yeah.

CP: Do you think that that was just because--you sort of got any pushback because...because you--you know, it was two men trying to get married, or--do you think it was just, you know--hardasses in general.

RT: Well, I think--so my--right, right, right. Well, my attorney was like, "One should have nothing to do with the other one." Because like I said, the first one was a little bit more confrontational with the interviewer. The second one, you know, was a breeze, but my attorney said that you know--because I asked him like, "Well, what do you think about this? I mean, how would you see this?" Because I see as a little bit strange. I mean, you know. And he's like, "No, each case stands on its own, et cetera." I mean, that all worked out, but yeah. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. Fair enough. Let's see. Shifting tacks a little bit. I'm actually really curious, especially somebody who's lived in Charlottesville for so long, you know especially in the last five years, like race is a big issue when you sort of thinking about Charlottesville. So I'm curious about your experiences as somebody who's been in Charlottesville for a long time. Sort of thinking about race relations, either in general or as it particularly relates to you know, the gay community. Like, you know--

RT: Right. Well, I may have a different take on this than a lot other people would. You know, as I said, I grew up in public schools.

CP: Mm-hmm.

RT: Half of my friends were African Americans, you know. I always felt like--I always felt like I could relate to minorities because of my own sexual orientation and feeling like I was a minority myself. So, you know, I understood what--and it was actually a joke. I had a friend here at UVA who was like, "I have two strikes against me because I'm gay and I'm Black." And I'm like, "I never thought of it like that." But you know. I mean, anyway. So. But I will have to say--I mean, my experience pre-the last five years or so has been, you know, I've--I've had a great relationship all--when we were

in high school, we all worked at Hardee's on Ivy Road, you know, and we would go to school during the week and then work like the late night shift from like 10:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning. This is when they were open all night. And that also was--that was--that was kind of a precursor to working at 216, because you know, when the bar's closed, everybody comes together, and there was a little more violence there; it was actually why they ended up closing--they didn't stay open twenty-four hours anymore, but it was--it was definitely an eye opener.

But I never saw--I never saw race as a--as a determinant in terms of people, whether or not they got along. It--and it--as far as the gay community, when you're all at a gay club, I mean, you're just all people. It's not, you know, what color your skin is, so. That's--I mean, for me--well, and again, you don't know what you don't know, but I mean like as far as like, I grew up with these statues in Charlottesville and things, and it didn't make--you know, I didn't--I didn't see it, but once you--once you understand, "Oh, I see where that might offend somebody," I mean, I get it, but it just was not something that I experienced growing up, so.

CP: Yeah. So when you were bartending at 216, did you feel like--was that like a mixed crowd?

RT: Oh, totally. Totally. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And not just--not just, you know, Black and white but there was Latinos, a lot of times that didn't speak--and I don't speak Spanish, but you know, a lot of times that--I don't speak the language very well, but you know. You know they want a beer, you know. It was--we got along well enough. And again, it was so busy there. I mean, it was, you know, you didn't really have time to talk to people because it was, you know, next, next, next. [CP laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. So you--so going back to sort of something you said earlier and sort of talking about being friends with a lot of different kinds of people in high school made me think about it, but you know, when you were in high school and you sort of knew about your--you said you knew that you were gay, sort of all along. And you weren't sort of talking about that at that point in time.

RT: Yeah. Yeah. Mm-mm. Only like with my best friend who--we were best friends since like third grade, and we didn't come out to each other until we were sixteen, you know.

CP: Yeah.

RT: But we--we kind of like, "Well, there's some reason why we get along." I mean, you know, yeah, yeah, yeah.

CP: That's amazing that you had a friend who was also--yeah.

RT: Yeah, and he's--we're still good friends. He's getting ready to sell his house here in town. Charlottesville. He's born and raised here, too, but moving to Kentucky where his sister and family are, so.

CP: Yeah. And were you hearing things--I mean, were you hearing things in schools? I mean, it seems like you're a pretty private person and so, you know--

RT: You still hear things, but yeah--

CP: Yeah, like were you hearing things in school about you know, that sort of made you think like, "Oh, I really need to keep this to myself." Or is it something that you just--

RT: I mean, kids have always been bullies.

CP: That's true.

RT: So you know, I was--I was called "gay" and "fag" like from, you know, when--as long as I can remember, you know, but you didn't--I mean, it never bothered me really, I guess? Because like, yeah, maybe--you know. I know what I know and you really don't. I mean, you know, one of those things. So yeah. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. What do you think people don't know about being gay or being queer in Charlottesville that they should know?

RT: [Laughs] Well I've had a lot of people who have asked me like, "Where--you know, where is there to go and what's there to do in Charlottesville?" And it's like there's not anymore. I mean--I mean I have--I know someone who she's in her early twenties, and you know, she's--she's asking this question to me at the part-time job I work, and I'm like, "You know, I really wish I could tell you that there was somewhere. I just don't know anymore." I mean, it used to be a whole lot, you know. You could say, "Oh yeah, you know, you can go to Escape or you can go to, you know, to here." But it's just not that way anymore. That I know of, anyway, so. Part of it is I don't go--I guess having worked seven-plus years, you know, all night on weekends, I don't care to go out. I mean, I'm just as happy at home, you know, so yeah. I feel like that one--I burnt that out of me [laughs] the need to go out. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So.

CP: [Laughs] Yeah. That makes sense. Did you ever go up to like DC to go to bars or marches or whatever?

RT: So, yeah, I mean like we went up on the Fourth of July. Yes, there was a--yes. I mean, I went up there and saw like, you know, Debbie Harry and Blondie, Gloria Gaynor. There was one club that they've torn down for the new football stadium up there. But anyway, yes, so we--we did go up there, maybe once every other month for a couple

of years. I went to Montreal over fall break when I was here in school and went to a Black and Blue party that was something that I had never experienced before and you know, I was freezing. It was snowing up there. It was October, but it was snowing and there were people walking around nude and I'm like--I just--that was a little bit of a culture shock.

And we--I mean, we used to go to Key West at least once a year. So we went there probably ten, twelve times. And I mean, I would bring people from Charlottesville, you know, different people, you know. It was like, "Oh, come to Key West with us," so they'd come and like, my best friend that I was talking about since third grade, he actually ended up moving there for two years. But you know, it's fantasy island when you're there for a week; when you have to live there and work there, it's not so fun. Yeah, as I learned through his experience. But yeah. Yeah.

CP: So there were some Pride marches in Charlottesville I think in the like the mid-'90s.

RT: Mm-hmm.

CP: Do you remember those at all?

RT: Mm-hmm. Because, I mean, my best friend again, he was a lot more--I don't want to say "out there" but, yeah. He participated in things like that, but--but I didn't, not necessarily.

CP: Yeah, so what do you remember hearing from him or hearing anything about them?

RT: I mean, that they were fun. You know, he enjoyed them and, you know...I mean, everybody else seemed to too. I mean, I would see pictures and things of that

nature, but I'm--it just wasn't my thing, so. Yeah. Yeah.

CP: That's reasonable. And then so do you--have you done anything with like any of the stuff that like Cville Pride has done over the last few years?

RT: Mm-mm. And he did too, pre-pandemic, they would go down to the park and, you know, for the--I guess I don't know what you'd call it, festival or whatever they did every year. Yeah.

CP: Yeah.

RT: Yeah, he would do that, but.

CP: Yeah, fair enough. Well, we're sort of wrapping up. Is there anything else you'd like to share that you haven't yet, sort of for the historical record that you think is important to know that we haven't talked about?

RT: Well, just back to the whole, you know, I guess...places to--I mean like--like when I was growing up, you know there were places to go and meet people. Of course, we didn't have you know, all the social media things that we do--that people do now, and I mean I assume that people use that more now. But I don't know, I mean, I would like to say I think it was a whole lot more fun back then than the way I feel like it is now, but I don't know because I don't go out, but I wouldn't know where to go if I were to go out, so you know.

CP: That's actually an interesting question. So, you know, you sort of mentioned that you met some people, you know, maybe when you were younger or when you were--yeah, when you were younger. How--did you just meet them by going out to you know, to the bars, or were there other--

RT: Yeah, or--or, you know, they would tag along with a friend, like a friend

would bring another friend along, and we usually would start at my house before we went out, so like, you know, whatever place we went to downtown, and so yeah, that's kind of how I met a lot of people. I will say I did do this past June, there was like I guess a Pride month or whatever and they did a... what's it called? Anyway, it was put on by Cville Pride, I think, or loosely--but it was a trivia night. That's what it was. Trivia night. At--at--at the cidery that I work for. And so myself and you know, my ninety-one-year-old friend and my twenty-nine-year-old husband, we all went and we--and that was fun, you know, to do that. But I--and that was only through--through a guy who's a real estate agent. He's the one that was connected--or connected with that group and told us about it, so we did it, but.

CP: Yeah.

RT: Yeah. I mean, I don't know [indistinct] I mean I guess every--anybody my age who's been somewhere like this as long as they have, I mean, you know, things have changed through the years and I do think that there is a little bit of a disconnect between the university and the, you know, Cville as a whole. But I'm not really sure--I'm not really sure what--what could be done to change that, so. Yeah. But I do see it. I mean, again, when I was growing up here, I didn't know what UVA was. I mean, I didn't--I'd never been on the Lawn, any of that stuff. I mean, you know, and so like I lived in Charlottesville that did not include UVA. And I think a lot of people do, you know. And so it's--it's [indistinct]. And then, you know. Yeah. Yeah. And plus, just to me, the different types of people that have--that, you know, people from all over the world come here. And so you do meet different--different people from different experiences and backgrounds, so.

CP: Yeah.

RT: That's more so of a positive, I think. You know. More eye-opening than just being with your own kind in Charlottesville. And again, the whole political thing, you know, just politics in general, I don't know, I think amplified things in a wrong way. Yeah.

CP: Yeah. So you mentioned--so sort of thinking about that, that change. So it seems, you know, you sort of talked a little bit about how there's not that kind of like central like place that people go any more.

RT: Right.

CP: Are there other kinds of changes that you've seen? You know, particularly as it relates to like the gay community in Charlottesville over the last, you know, thirty-forty years?

RT: I would just say, I mean, this is--I mean, probably nothing--doesn't come as a surprise. But affordability in Charlottesville is just insane. I mean, that's why I moved to Albemarle. Because I fought with the city over my real estate taxes. They just kept jacking them up. And you know, I would--I would, you know, contest it and then they would drop it back, and then next year it would go back another fifty grand. I'm like--and well, I was--I was--thank goodness, in a little bit of a unique place in that I had bought this other place like three years ago, so back before things were crazy in Albemarle too. And so, you know, it allowed me the flexibility to kind of move out there over a couple of years. And that--I did miss the mark. I should have done it in July of '21 instead of July '22, but anyway. It--you know, the house sold and I'm comfortable with what I got. I--I actually--I actually reduced the price, I mean it was assessed at like \$450[000] and I sold

it for \$360[000]. I'm just like--because it was an all-cash sale, just I'm done with it, as-is. No inspections or anything. And it just--but it's just gone--because it's unfortunate, because I paid \$89,000 for that house when I bought it. I mean [laughs] I know. It's--

CP: On JPA?

RT: Off of--off of Shamrock on Center Ave. It's a dead-end street. Very private and quiet down there and everything. But yeah. Less than a mile from here, so.

CP: That's--that's amazing [laughs].

RT: But I would just say in general, not just for--not just for gay people, but just for anyone young now, the cost of living here is just astronomical. So, you know. And I kind of see some of it because I--I've catered for like thirty years. I worked for a caterer when I was in college, and so after I left there I have people that, you know, retirees around the Charlottesville-Albemarle area and they would, "Oh, well you still have to work for us." And so, you know, I mean, I've done things. I've worked for Charlottesville Opera and all these other venues, and that's been nice, but I think what that did show me too is that you know, part of the problem is that so many people come back to retire here that have money, and it drives cost of living up for everybody else, so. Anyway.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, so are there other things that have sort of changed in Charlottesville, like big things besides that affordability piece over the last forty years? Things that have really stuck out to you?

RT: Well, there's a whole lot more, you know, large-scale apartment complexes and things. I mean, West Main Street was car lots when I was a kid. I mean, you know, and now it's, you know. These larger apartment areas. But I think one of the reasons for that is that the--the available stock of--of--of apartments along JPA and all, I mean some

of them are--they were dumps when I was a student thirty years ago. You know, and I mean and I--I've rented--I get it, but they've done nothing to them and they're still--I mean, they're more affordable than other ones but they're still not that nice, so yeah. I think that's driven the new inventory up, but again has driven prices up too, so.

CP: Yeah, that makes sense. So is there anything else you'd like to share?

RT: Not that I can think of.

CP: Okay. All right. Well thanks so much, Rob. It was really great to talk to you.

RT: You're welcome. You're welcome.

CP: All right.

END OF RECORDING