

Interview – Wynne Stuart and Vicki Hawes

Interviewees: Wynne Stuart and Vicki Hawes

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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Location: Wynne and Vicki's house, Charlottesville, VA

Length: 1:51:57

START OF RECORDING

Cecelia Parks (CP): Okay. All right. So we are recording. This is Cecelia Parks. It is November 8th, 2022. I'm here with Wynne Stuart and Vicki Hawes in their house in Charlottesville, and we're going to get started. So, first question: what words do you all use to refer to yourself? Do you say that you're a lesbian, do you say that you're gay, do you say "LGBTQ"? Do you say "queer"? How do you all do that?

Vicki Hawes (VH): So we had this conversation on the way home from DC, and we both use "lesbian" and "gay," and I think I'm the only one of us that uses "queer," but I use it--

Wynne Stuart (WS): No, we both.

VH: Yeah.

WS: We both. We both do.

VH: But probably preferentially, it's lesbian and gay.

WS: Uh-huh. And the--the initials LGBTQ, LGBTQA just come up more in written and in responding to something that someone has said using those initials, but they're more--what is the word? For me, they're more administrative than--or journalistic

than they are something that you're talking about. You know, we would--if we were referring to the community, we'd say, "the queer community" or "the gay community." Now, talking about community it's more queer than gay.

VH: But I think it's also generational. It may not be the right word but with my parents, we'd always use "gay," because "queer" would--

WS: Just set them off.

VH: They would just--it would set them off. And--and I'm not sure they would--how they would do with "lesbian." But I think even with our older friends--because we're old. [WS and CP laugh].

WS: Almost seventy-one. And sixty-eight.

VH: Sixty-eight. So I think--I think even with friends of our generation, we mostly use "gay."

WS: Yeah. And--yeah, and it is generational.

VH: It took me a long time to embrace "queer."

WS: Well, see, I think it took me--

VH: It took me a longer time to embrace "lesbian" because it was always derogatory in the--in the '70s and '80s, you know, it was, "Oh, that lesbian." So I think I got that first, and then "queer" was a little bit harsh. But I got it.

WS: Yeah, I think I took on "queer" sooner than you did just because I'm with the students more.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. And then what pronouns do you--do you all use?

WS: She/her.

CP: Yeah, okay. And--yeah. Vicki's nodding. Okay. Great, so Vicki, can you tell me about where you grew up?

VH: I grew up in a very small, like--

WS: Rural.

VH: Rural town. In Maryland. It was a railroad town.

WS: Not Frederick. It was Brunswick.

VH: Yeah, it was Brunswick. Like all the directions in town were given from the stoplight on the corner. "Go to the stoplight and--" Yeah. So... there--I guess I wasn't exposed to a lot of gay people except my father's younger sister was gay. And I intuitively always knew that and loved her, but it was never, ever talked about on any level.

CP: What time--what time period would that have been? Would that have been in the '50s, '60s?

VH: Yeah, so I was born in '52, so in the--I guess in the '60s I became aware of-- that Donna Jean was--

WS: Different.

VH: Different.

WS: As the saying goes.

VH: Now, I knew that I was different long before I realized Donna Jean was. I mean I remember in the first grade that this little boy wanted to kiss me and there was a little girl that I wanted to kiss, so. But typical small-town rural America. Just--

CP: So did your dad's sister also live in that small town?

VH: Yes.

CP: And what was--did other people sort of know that she was queer? Like--

VH: I think that they had to. It just--if you didn't talk about, it didn't exist.

CP: Right.

WS: Right.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely.

WS: And she was one of the few people of her age, female, who hadn't had children by X age.

VH: Correct.

CP: Right. Yeah. Yeah. That is--just Donna Jean.

VH: Donna Jean.

CP: What are you going to do?

VH: She had a roommate [CP laughs] for, you know, twelve years. Whatever.

CP: Right. So how did you get to Charlottesville?

WS: By car. [CP and VH laugh]

VH: My father worked for a defense contractor and they lost their government contract, so he transferred with Westinghouse to Verona, which is just outside of Staunton, Virginia, and I had already graduated from high school and was working on the railroad. But my--I have three brothers who are much younger; they're seven, eight, and twelve years younger, so Dad said, "Why don't you come back to Virginia with us?" So I quit my job on the railroad, came to Virginia, hated it. We got here in February and I think by June I was back in Maryland. Also had a girlfriend, which helped. And then realized I was going nowhere with my life, so I went back to Staunton.

WS: She did have other jobs after her railroad, until--

VH: Went to work for a bank--

WS: In Staunton.

VH: The guy who was my boss was just a jerk, and I realized the only thing he had that I didn't was a college degree, so I thought, "Well, I'll go to college. And there's a college in Staunton. It's probably a two-year school; I'll go apply." So I--I'm first generation college, so I go down and apply and got accepted. And fortunately ended up in my first class with a woman who sort of put me under her wings and got me through that first year. And after graduation from Mary Baldwin, I stayed on for a year and worked in student affairs and realized I was never going to make any money in student affairs, so I left that position and came to Charlottesville.

CP: All right.

VH: So I got here in October--September of '77.

CP: All right. And Wynne, where did you grow up?

WS: I grew up in Richmond.

CP: Okay.

WS: Eighteen years.

CP: Okay. So what was that like? Growing up?

WS: I had a typical middle-class white bread educated family. You didn't--you didn't walk and talk until--much--until you had graduated from college. So complete difference in expectation. My father got an MBA from Harvard. He was a much older father. He got an MBA from Harvard in--oh, in 1923. Just to give you an idea. And I'm born in 1954. So...

VH: Your mother got her degree in '32.

WS: My mother got her undergraduate degree from Farmville in '32. So, yeah. They were also eleven years apart. And--and in those days, I don't think it's still true, but in those days, Longwood, which was then the State Normal School at Farmville. As JMU was the State Normal School in Harrisonburg. It had a high school that the women students--because Longwood then was all women--the women students taught in. So my mother actually went in four years, did five years of school. She finished high school--two years of high school in one and then did college actually in kind of three and a bit. So in terms of being gay, I don't think I ever put a wrap around it until I went to France, but I realized in the eighth grade that I really wanted to see one of my classmates [laughs] in clean white sheets, so that was when I sort of first realized that, but again, it was unspoken. I was friends with some folks who later--I later learned were gay. Like after college. And one, ironically, was the gym teacher's daughter--speaking of stereotypes.

VH: And she [WS] went to private school.

WS: I went to private school. I was in a prep school, seven to twelve collegiate in Richmond. So very different life from Vicki's. I was in a private school because--my brothers are much older. I--her parents are eighty-eight--to give you context, her parents are eighty-eight. My most--my oldest sibling turned eighty-five on Friday last week. So the boys had been to public school, but now Richmond was going to integrate. My mother was very concerned--as was her former [housekeeper], then nurse to my father when he was ill--they both--who was Black--and they both thought this was a terrible idea. What's the education going to be like? There's going to be so much attention on this, there will be no attention to education. Which for a while in Richmond was true, and so my mother was determined that I would not go to an integrated school. An integrated

public school. And thus, in the seventh grade, I ended up in a private school. Which they could afford partly because I came so far behind everybody else. They could never have afforded it when the others were there, but then it wouldn't have been an issue either, so.

VH: I didn't have a private school in my hometown. [CP and WS laugh]

WS: As opposed to multiplicitous high schools--private schools in Richmond. And so then--so then I was--from Richmond, I spent a year in France with American Field Service. Before I left, I knew I was going to Randolph-Macon Women's College, because AFS recommended that you have a college acceptance and not have to think about that. And so I went to college for three years, finished in three years. Both of us went to college in three years, ironically, to save money, but me because any money that I had that my father had left behind for me for college could then be applied to graduate school. And I knew when I went--went to college that I wanted to teach on the college level. So I knew graduate school was an inevitability. Well, everyone in my family except my mother also went to graduate school. And everybody except my mother taught.

VH: But here's a big difference: I thought, "Oh, I'll go to college. There's a college in downtown Staunton. I'll go apply there." Wynne did the whole college tour thing, and "Oh, I could go here; I could go there; I could go here." And I was like--

WS: Never in your wildest dreams.

VH: Our backgrounds could not be any more different.

WS: No, they couldn't. And so I ended up in Charlottesville because I came to UVA. There were--I had three choices: Indiana-Bloomington, Carolina, and Virginia. And I absolutely did not want to go to the Midwest. And at that point my girlfriend at the

time and I were choosing where we were going to go, and she was going in Russian and I was going in French. And UVA--we both got money here; we came here. So, that's how I ended up in Charlottesville!

VH: But weren't you also recruited in the first women's class at UVA?

WS: I was. But that was undergrad. I was--because that was--no, not the first. We were the third entering class. But prep schools in Virginia were very heavily recruited for Virginia and at that point I absolutely didn't want to come here undergrad, because I knew that Virginia would be an option probably for grad school.

VH: For grad school.

WS: Although I didn't know it would be French. I knew Virginia would be an option for grad school, but I didn't want to be in the fishbowl either. That that was. So, yeah. I was not interested. I had several friends who came here.

CP: You mean just you didn't want to be like kind of stared at as the--the first?

WS: Right. Right, well the first five classes, you were just a specimen.

CP: Right.

WS: So all those women who graduated in the first place are more than pathbreakers. They are--they are intrepid.

CP: Was that your experience in grad school as well?

WS: No. In grad school, you were simply--in French, it was not an anomaly for--to be a graduate student in French. Certainly, until recently, it was an anomaly in engineering. But in French, it was not an anomaly, but there were a couple of professors, one in particular, who we would have called it now--and before now--gender harassment for the things that--two, but one in particular said. "Why are you here? You're--what are

you going to do with this degree? You're just going to get married?" Blah, blah, blah, blah. Yeah. He was charming. But at that point, you just--you know, either you sucked it up and ignored him, because he was pretty obnoxious in many ways, and only took requirements that you couldn't get out of taking with him. You'd wait until another semester when somebody else was teaching another requirement that rotated to avoid him, for example. So he was just generically a jerk.

CP: [Laughs] Right.

WS: And anyway. The other person was older and a little more in the clueless, going-to-retire-soon, not the aggressive--and he--he was a very [clears throat] he didn't realize--he just thought if he had the knowledge, it was going to absorb to the students by osmosis. So it was a different kind of--and that was kind of men and women. He was sort of--not so gender-specific as the other guy about thinking we were all clueless.

VH: I think in women's colleges though, both of our women's colleges--there were certainly lesbians besides me in my class.

WS: Oh, yeah.

VH: You just didn't talk about it. You knew it.

WS: Well, that's not so true for me.

CP: Yeah, I was going to ask--because right now--

WS: I had classmates that I knew were queer.

VH: Yeah, you knew, but--

WS: But we interacted on that level.

VH: Well, we did too, but--at large, people didn't talk about it.

WS: Oh, at large, no, people didn't.

VH: My straight friends didn't.

WS: No, at large people didn't talk about it. But--but yeah, you did have gay friends.

VH: Right.

WS: Which is unlike high school, where you didn't have gay friends.

VH: It was probably easier at an all-women's school than a coed...

WS: University.

VH: University.

WS: In those days.

VH: In those days, yes.

CP: I was going to say, because this was in the '70s, and so there was a lot--

WS: Right. This was the mid-'70s.

CP: You know, there was of stuff happening [laughs].

VH: Right.

WS: It's a lot of upheaval.

VH: There's a lot stuff in the '70s.

WS: Well--I mean but yeah. There's still racial stuff, there's the whole Vietnam War thing, which I got full in the face because I lived in France for a year before--that interim year, I lived in France, so I got that full in the face, and then there's the queer stuff.

VH: I think racism was probably a much bigger issue on our campus. Of course, if you know, queers were all purple--

WS: Right.

VH: We'd be having a different conversation, right?

WS: Right, exactly.

VH: Because you can walk into a room and people will think, "Oh, I wonder if she's queer?" But they don't really know unless you say so. You don't have that option if you're Black.

WS: Right.

VH: Anyway.

CP: Yeah. Were there--I'm trying to think. My context is Hollins [University], obviously, but were--how integrated were Mary Baldwin and Randolph at this point?

VH: We might have had [laughs] well, we had 600 students total. How many did you all have?

WS: 750, including the ones in England.

VH: And we were not ten percent Black. We didn't have sixty Black students.

WS: No. Nor were we. No way.

CP: Yeah.

VH: Twenty?

WS: So this was '70--we were both in college fall of '73 to spring of '76. So.

CP: Got it.

WS: I don't know if Mary Baldwin--I mean, we don't pay attention to Mary Baldwin because Mary Baldwin pissed Vicky off [CP laughs] a while ago for donor reasons that we don't need to go into that have nothing to do with the conversation.

CP: Right. Fair enough.

WS: I am still interaction with Randolph enough to know--and it changed; it became coed and it's Randolph College--so gee, I know that--but no, but I'm a donor. I still donate a minimum amount because I know from working at UVA, participation is more important than the amount. You know, even if you give \$5, you've participated. So--in case, you're interested for your future if you want to keep track of how much you're giving to an entity, use your zero or five age until you get to the next age, and then you know--I have seven--between us, we have seven alma maters to donate to, and so that's what we do. We base it on my age. And so right now, everybody's getting \$65, and when I turn seventy, everybody will get \$70. It's not a lot of money, but it's participation.

CP: Yeah, I usually donate my class year.

WS: Oh, there's--there's another way to do it.

CP: Yeah. For that same reason. It's not very much money, but--

WS: It's not much money, but you're participating and you can keep track of it

16:44

CP: Yeah.

WS: Because I got tired of the "How much did we give them? How much did we give them?" Let's just--because I have AFS, I have Experiment for International Living, I have Collegiate, I have UVA...did I say Randolph?

VH: Unh-unh.

WS: No. Randolph. We did have Mary Baldwin.

VH: She even continued to give to Mary Baldwin after I was done with them.

WS: For a while, until she told me--oh, I gave to the Gay Squirrels! I didn't think that we should penalize the gay students of Mary Baldwin because the alumni donor

system was stupid. But eventually, she said, “No, you can't.” And then UVA on the ed[ucation] school side for her, whereas I'm Arts & Sciences.

VH: I think I've had two absolutely stunning conversations with people in positions of power at universities. One was at Mary Baldwin when we had a little--just a racial bubble. It wasn't--wasn't a huge fight, there wasn't a lot going on, but some of the Black students were concerned.

WS: And this was when she was in school.

VH: And--and I was an RA. I was the head RA. So I was called in--

WS: This was your third year.

VH: To talk about the problem.

WS: With [name removed].

VH: I wasn't going to use her name!

WS: Well, let's just say, the person who had been your--

VH: The person who had been my mentor.

WS: Her mentor.

VH: And she called me in and said, “Vicki, I have--you have to help me understand this. Like, I was raised by a Black nanny.” And I was like, “Oh my god, [name removed], you can't say that! That's like a--that's--” So felt like all the air had been sucked out of the room. And we--we got through it. I had a great conversation with her. And then fast forward, I don't know, thirty years, and I'm having a conversation with the dean here who said about a colleague, “Well, doesn't this person identify as bi?” And I said, “Yeah.” And he said, “Oh, for God's sake, just make a decision!” And I was like, “Okay...”

WS: And once again, the air was sucked out of the room!

VH: Yeah, and I--I'm not--

WS: And that's a man who is ten years younger than you are.

VH: And gay.

WS: And gay.

VH: And I am not often at a loss for words. But in both of those instances, I got knocked back on my feet and had to--okay, like how do I respond to this without saying, "You fucking idiot."

WS: And Vicki came from industry, so she's worked with a lot of New Yorkers, and so I'm always very happy when she doesn't use the F word [VH and CP laugh]. But you've gotten much better about it.

VH: So. I rambled on, so.

CP: That's fine. No, that's fine. So--

WS: But those were both contextual.

CP: Yup. So how did you two meet?

VH: At a New Year's Eve party at her house.

WS: It was not a... anybody, you know, tell people party. It was by invitation only to avoid a specific person who I found obnoxious and gate-crashing and very much a me-me person. Which neither one of us are. Neither one of us is. And Vicki--

VH: And there were all lesbians at the party.

WS: Yeah, it was all lesbians. Is that true?

VH: Yeah, this was going into 1988.

WS: Right, it was all lesbians. Jack and Jeanette weren't there yet.

VH: No.

WS: And Vicki was a friend of friends. And they would not have had to ask, but they did ask if Vicki--if they could bring Vicki and I said, "Sure! If a friend of yours is staying with you for the weekend, of course! Bring her with you." And so that's how we met. She came to that party and then it was love at first sight on her side. But not on mine. I was too busy thinking about keeping people from eating the Linzer torte and other such things to--

VH: So my side of the story is that these friends said, "Hey, do you want to go to this New Year's Eve party?" And I had been dumped a year before that. And I was like licking my wounds thinking, "I don't--this whole lesbian thing just can't work. I'm just going to be single." So they said, "Come on, go to this party, it's all women." I said, "No, I don't want to." Finally, I said, "Okay, I'll go." And then they said, "Well, it's invitation only so we have to ask Wynne Stuart." And I said, "Well, screw that. I'm not going to that."

WS: Something that elitist?

VH: They said, "No, no, no, you have to go." So I said, "Okay." So we're on the--

WS: And of course, if they'd asked beforehand, it would have been much smoother, but they were too clueless to do that!

VH: So we're on the way to the party, and I said--

WS: And we still know these people.

VH: And--and this is 1987. And almost all of the lesbians in Charlottesville knew one another at that point in time.

WS: Which is weird. But true.

VH: So I'm thinking--I said, "I don't--I don't--I don't know this Wynne Stuart. Does she know anybody that we know?" And they said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, she dated so-and-so." And I said, "Oh." And this was a woman that I played softball with... And so [laughs] that's what I know getting out of the car. And we walk up to the house and I open the back door and look up and there was a woman in a red dress. And I was like, "Oh my God. Who is that?" And my friend said, "That's Wynne Stuart." Again, air is sucked out of the room [all laugh] and she paid absolutely no attention to me. But I was quite smitten.

WS: So subsequently, we were set up on a date for dinner with that couple and another couple that I knew. And it was very usual for Vicki to come down.

VH: Because I lived in Northern Virginia at the time.

WS: Yeah. And so nobody told me that it was a setup, because I would not have gone.

VH: So we have dinner.

WS: So we had dinner and here we are. You don't have to go into all the details. [CP laughs] But it was the night that Brian Boitano, in 1988, that Brian Boitano won the gold medal for men's skating.

VH: See what she remembers from our first date.

WS: It's not the only thing I remember! [CP laughs] But it's--you know, when we are senile, we will know when our first real date was.

VH: That's true.

CP: That's what Google is for.

VH: Right.

CP: So how--so you obviously were in Charlottesville for a little while before you met Vicki; you were sort of established.

WS: We were both here from the same time.

CP: Okay.

WS: We both--I came in August of '77 to start grad school with my girlfriend. She came in September '77 to find a job.

CP: Right.

VH: With a girlfriend.

CP: Right. So how--when you first moved here, how did you meet other queer people?

VH: I did through softball.

WS: And I did at school. Because there was--the GSU [Gay Student Union] already existed and there was a women's group, and I had a friend from Richmond who went here as an undergraduate, so it was not particularly hard. It really wasn't.

VH: And the softball team was local people plus--

WS: Yeah.

VH: So the local rednecks kind of had their own team. And then the Charlottesville team was a mixture of doctors and nurses and grad students and--and so our communities intermingled all of the time. And then there were monthly dances--

WS: I don't know if it was monthly.

VH: Or bimonthly at the Unitarian church. And I--

WS: At the time they were in the basement.

VH: Every lesbian in Charlottesville went to those dances.

WS: At the basement--except the teachers, who didn't want to be seen, and the doctors that didn't want to be seen. So--

VH: Who could have lost their jobs.

WS: Right, at that point. They could have--

CP: Were the dances--were they just for women?

WS: Lesbians. Yes, they were women's dances. And the safe place to have them was the basement of the Unitarian--well the Unitarian church would let us have our parties there for free, at the time.

VH: So it was like a big club. I mean, everybody knew everybody. There was a thing back then called the Thawing Out party. And it was [laughs] out in the country and it was--

WS: It was started by local lesbians before our time.

VH: And it got to be a huge--

WS: Event.

VH: Event. And there was music and food and beer and all the lesbians in the world. In this world, anyway. So there were huge lesbian gatherings in the '70s in Charlottesville.

WS: Early '80s.

VH: Early '80s.

CP: Yeah, I was about to say, I--yeah, how--do you have a sense of how late into the '80s those Thawing Out parties went? Because I've heard--I've heard about them from other folks.

WS: The Thawing Out parties? Yeah.

CP: Yeah.

VH: So we met in '77 and we had been at the same Thawing Parties.

WS: No, we met in--we came in '77. We met in '88.

VH: '87. End of the year.

WS: Well, '88.

VH: But we had both been to a Thawing Out party.

WS: Well, more than one.

VH: Yeah. Before we met. So '80--

WS: So it was still going at the end of the '80s.

VH: Yeah. '85-'86.

WS: And then something like--it got too big, and the people who--at whose house it was always said, "No. No more."

VH: I mean one of the things when you start dating, I mean you compare, "Oh, I did this and did this." [WS laughs] For years, we had been to the same parties. But she would go at 8:00 and leave at 11:00 and I would get there 11:30 and leave at 3:00. So.

WS: Yeah. So we knew the same people and in fact, I had been to many of the softball games because there was this group of lesbians on the softball team. And one--

VH: She dated my pitcher! I was the catcher.

WS: Right. And I would go and grade books. Workbooks. French workbooks. Because I was teaching as a TA then in the French department. And they would go drink beer and I would go home! Because I'm not--I'm still not a beer drinker. I've never been a beer drinker. It was not--I was not--I'm just not a hang out person very much. This whole, you know, hang out after volleyball or softball and drink beer at what was then Random

Row in the space that is now called Siren. Just--it wasn't what I did. And so now that has evolved into our generation--our generation now, at this age, going to hang out and drink wine at the wineries. And it's like--it's still not what I really want to do [WS and VH laugh]. You know, I am--I am more relaxed; I am not trying to get a degree, and I am at the end of my career, so I will go and sit there and have a sparkling water, but I'm still not really going for--for that.

VH: No.

CP: So you all would go--

WS: So somewhere in all this we're answering your questions?

CP: Yeah, absolutely. I mean--

WS: Okay.

CP: Honestly, it's--anything you want to tell me is--is fine with me. I know, baby [to dog]. So you would go--you would hang out at softball, you would sort of go to people's houses--

WS: Yeah.

CP: You'd have parties like this, where else would you go in town to--to hang out, to see other queer people?

VH: Well the first gay bar that I remember was Muldowney's.

WS: Yes.

VH: And it was in an alleyway [laughs] off of First Street on the Downtown Mall. I mean literally, you walked in and there was a bar and enough room for like three tables over here. And it was 99% lesbian.

WS: Yep.

VH: I think Ted and Aron would go now and then, but it was all women. And then--did she move it into--

WS: 216.

VH: Well, it was the Silver Fox.

WS: It was the Silver Fox then, yes. The Silver Fox then became 216.

VH: The Silver Fox then became open more to the entire gay community, so it was men and women.

CP: Because it changed owners at some point; it got bought by two gay men.

VH: Right. And--

WS: Well, that's as it became 216.

VH: But you know, historically, and it's still that way to some degree, but gay men have more income. A greater ability to go out and spend money on nothing and have a good time than lesbians who, in the '70s and early '80s are still trying to, you know, get a job making their age, right? Because that was--I remember when I graduated from college, that was--that was the goal. To get a salary that was your age. \$24,000 a year, really? So once it became the Silver Fox and it got bigger, then the guys kind of took over. We still went. And then I don't know how many years after that, straight people found out that it was a great place to go dance.

WS: And then, never mind.

VH: And then it got to be 216 and then it was...yeah.

WS: And then there was--it was another place. Upstairs.

VH: Our first dance date was at 216, wasn't it?

WS: Was it the Silver Fox? No?

VH: The Silver Fox. Yeah.

WS: Silver Fox, yes.

VH: So I went to Muldowney's without you.

WS: So did I. [CP laughs]

VH: Right.

WS: Once again, I was on the early shift; she was on the late shift. In those years, she drank a lot of beer.

CP: Fair enough. So it's interesting, hearing you talk. I mean, it makes sense that you all sort of interacted mostly with lesbians, but it sounds like there was a huge lesbian community in the area. Do you get the sense that there was a similar but separate sort of community of gay men?

WS: Yes.

VH: Yes, absolutely.

CP: Were they about the same size?

WS: Yeah.

CP: Okay.

VH: Yeah, because then--

WS: And they would touch at certain--with certain people.

VH: When the AIDS epidemic hit--

WS: 1986.

VH: Wynne was on the--the board that started the AIDS Support Group. Like she was one of the founding members. And that sort of brought the lesbians and the gay guys together and we became an entire community. And I think it was then that I realized--I

subconsciously knew that there had to be as many men as there were women, but it--it became very visible.

WS: Yeah, but you already knew Jim. I already knew Pete.

VH: Right.

WS: For whatever reason, I already knew Aron. And I had known some of the gay men in town--Blaise, and his partner's--

VH: Yeah, the fingers started--

WS: When I was in grad school, I knew some people because I--I'm--shockingly, I was like, "It's the GSU. That doesn't mean lesbians are excluded." And so while some women were like, "Oh, we're not going," I went. I was the treasurer of the GSU back in whatever day I was the treasurer of the GSU; I don't remember now. And--and so that was a very radical thing that--because lesbians basically just weren't socializing with the men. And I would go to the women's coffees and I would go to the GSU meetings on Thursday nights at 9:00 in the Wesley Foundation.

VH: And as one of my--my gay male friends explained to me like, "You women, you just don't get it. Sometimes...a fuck is just a fuck, you know. You all are looking to fall in love." I'm like, "Well, you know it's a little bit more than that, but I don't--I'm not going to dances to hook up." And the gay male mentality at that point was. And so two very--

WS: It still is.

VH: Yeah, it still is. Our son is in Paris, and he's--he's taught us many things. But I think that that was a--a hurdle that we're still kind of overcoming because we're just...different. Different roommates [WS laughs]. Sorry, that was--

WS: That was a UVA thing. Oh, it felt so good like--

VH: So it's--it's hard to have a group that really wants to socialize and party and drink beer and another group that would be perfectly happy to go someplace and have wine and some beer and sit around and talk. Maybe dance. But it doesn't have to be bump-bump-bump-bump-bump, you know? And poppers and...

WS: Oh, they were fun. [VH and CP laugh] I think I did more recreational drugs than you did.

VH: But in the '70s the place to go was DC, to the Lost and Found.

WS: Oh yeah, absolutely.

VH: And that was--you're driving two and a half hours to get to DC to drink? And then do what? Get in a car drunk and drive two hours to get back home? I--

WS: It wasn't a great scene.

VH: We did crazy stuff.

WS: Yeah.

CP: Were you all--

WS: From William & Mary, because we know some women in this situation--for William & Mary, they would go to the bar in Norfolk, which was frequented also by ODU people. So we know about that from our friends who went to William & Mary.

CP: So, would you all--you all would go to DC; would you also go to Richmond to like I don't know, go to Babe's or anything like that?

WS: No, I never did.

VH: I went a couple of times.

WS: Maybe once, but...I had grown up in Richmond so Richmond didn't really hold any appeal because I was very happy to leave Richmond behind. And quite frankly, I didn't love the going-to-DC thing because I have never loved a throbbing bar. It's just not who I am. The dances in the Unitarian church were loud enough for me. You could dance; the whole point for me is dancing. We went to my collegiate fiftieth reunion the other day. And nobody else danced--of our class. The fiftieth--this is our fiftieth class. We are in this enormous gym with all the reunion classes. Every five years. And the young ones, their tables at the front and they're up and, you know, they're doing this. And we're dancing back in a corner on a fabulous wood floor because it's where they play basketball! Yeah, so for me it was always about the dancing. Yes, you can look at them [about texts on VH's phone].

VH: I don't know where it is.

WS: It's behind me; I can hear it.

VH: I even forget what you asked us.

CP: [Laughs] I think about--

WS: She asked us about bars.

CP: Yeah, like where did you go--where did you go to hang out with folks.

WS: Yeah, yeah.

VH: Yeah, I went to Babe's and I didn't--I didn't really like Babe's. It was--

WS: It was a meat market.

VH: Yeah.

WS: Babe's was a meat market.

CP: For women or for men or--?

WS: For women.

VH: For women, yeah.

WS: It was a pickup place. [CP laughs] It was definitely a pickup place.

VH: It was a little--I mean I'm very masculine. I was, by comparison to some of the chicks that were in--in Babe's, I was like, "Wow. This is--this is what--this is my worst vision of what a dyke is." [Dog whines]

WS: Right, because they did it on purpose. This is what you look like, this is how you like your hair.

VH: Right.

WS: It has nothing about your searching to be more masculine.

VH: Right. Yeah. I was very intimidated at Babe's.

WS: And she also grew up socialized with her brothers. Which was because all of her cousins--

VH: All my cousins were boys.

WS: Were boys. And she went out and, you know--in Maryland, in this town where half of this whole section of the town was that whole big family, and they would go off and play wherever they wanted all day long and doing whatever they were doing, playing softball or baseball or running around. So she was just socialized with the boys. And--for a decade--for over a decade.

VH: Yeah. The difference between Babe's and Lost and Found--

CP: And Lost and Found was a lesbian bar in DC? Or was it just a gay bar?

VH: It was--it was a gay bar. It may have started off as a women's bar, but you know, all the gay bars quickly got taken over by the men because they had the money.

But the first time that I went to the Lost and Found was probably '75? Or '74? Because my aunt killed herself--so it was '74. Donna Jean. And it was just night and day. Like the lesbians in Richmond were there to show that they were lesbians. And the bar in DC was a place for like-minded--

WS: To go have fun.

VH: To go have fun. Just totally different. And maybe if I hadn't gone to the Lost and Found first, I would have been more comfortable in Richmond. I don't think so.

WS: No.

VH: Anyway.

WS: Which is not to say that Babe's was not a completely valid place for many people.

VH: Right.

WS: Just wasn't either of our cup of tea. Again, separately in our lives, we have all these parallel experiences. Just with different people at approximately the same time [WS and VH laugh]. Which is one of the things that we are--as you can tell, probably, even superficially, we are very different. But we come--but we've had a lot of similarities. And one of--and this I'm going to completely deviate, and you can tell me to be quiet, because Vicki says their eyes are glazing over when I am--

VH: Talk too much.

WS: Yeah, when I talk too much.

CP: Well, that's--that's the point, here.

WS: This is--this is familial. So it's really interesting. We are really close. We get along very well for people who've been together for 34 years. And--but we have some

values that came from our families that are exactly right. Exactly right--exactly the same. Tell the truth. Be ethical. Have dinner with your family every night, because it's a foundation of your life. Talk to people. Now, Vicki's version of "talk to people" and my family's version of "talk to people" is different. Definitely different. But still, things that like, "Oh, we have this interview. We need to look at the--have you looked at the questions?" "Yes, I've looked at the questions; I made sure they're on the phone. We talk about them in the car." This is something we both think is normal that other people wouldn't necessarily, we have learned, think is normal, you know? One of our lesbian couple friends--one of them would do it over here, and the other would do it over here and they would come for the interview and say, "Oh, I didn't know you knew that! I didn't know you thought that." The people we saw today in the parking lot.

VH: Correct.

WS: Yes, you knew who I was referring to.

VH: I did.

WS: Yeah. So, it's interesting that we have such different socioeconomic starts in life and yet the foundations of both of our families.

VH: Right.

WS: Hers in a very young family. Her parents were seventeen when she was born, and mine were fifty-three and forty-two when I was born. So very--

VH: So her mother was born the same year as my grandmother.

WS: Yeah.

CP: All right. So shifting gears just a little bit. So, Vicki, you're retired from UVA, and Wynne, you're still working at UVA, right?

WS: Correct.

CP: So, how--Vicki, how long did you work at UVA?

VH: Twenty years.

CP: Twenty years. Okay, so you started like late '90s, early 2000s?

VH: Early 2000s. I retired in 2020.

CP: And then, Wynne did you--I mean obviously going back to when you were a grad student, you were working at UVA. Yeah.

WS: Since the fall of 1977.

CP: All right. So, for both of you, I mean what was it like to work at UVA in that time period? Like were either of you part of the UVA Pride organization, like were you--

WS: There wasn't a Pride organization when we started.

CP: Right.

WS: [Laughs] Let's--let's--

CP: Right. That was like the early '90s. That came in in the early--that was like '90s I think. But yeah.

WS: Yeah. Yes.

CP: Yeah.

WS: Well, I was--as a grad student, I was in--in the GSU. That became then the LGSU [Lesbian and Gay Student Union].

CP: Mm-hmm.

WS: Which then got other initials, so I was part of that as a grad student for about five years, until it was like, "Okay, don't have time for this anymore; need to get my

degree done; need to go do research in France.” And sort of left that behind. You sort of grow out of it, in most cases. But I think that's where I met Jim and Pete.

VH: Probably. Or AIDS.

WS: Well no, I knew them both before we started--before we had that gathering of five people to say, “Okay, there's this guy in Scottsville who needs our help; what are we going to do?” And Pete didn't--Pete and Jim didn't want me to take a shift sitting with him because they thought it was going to be so terrible for me. And so I walked in--because they--they had already visited him. And this woman's--the sister was supporting this guy who was the first known person to have AIDS in Charlottesville, and her living--she was trying to finish Piedmont [Virginia Community College], she needed support, that's how the AIDS Support Group, which became the AIDS Services Group, was born. And the boys thought that I wouldn't be able to handle it. And I walked in, and it was my father's illness--I mean my father--I grew with my father as an invalid, so it was fine. But it--so yeah, I knew them before 1986. And I think it was from the GSU.

VH: And Wynne has always been out. And so when we started dating in '88, and she's at UVA, I just got, you know, I had--she would drag me with her to all of her stuff, and we became sort of a known entity... And then when I--

WS: Right, because it was not anomalous to be gay in the French department.

CP: And so--you worked in the French department. Did you teach in the French department and then--

WS: I was a grad student in French.

CP: Right.

WS: And grad students in French, if you had money, if you got money in those days, you were teaching the required sequence.

CP: Right. Right.

WS: And so there were already gay--gay--out gay people, men and women when I started in 1977. And that just always continued.

CP: Okay.

WS: And so, I told the woman who would be my best friend in graduate school, who died when we were forty-eight, so she died twenty years ago this November.

VH: Wow.

WS: She and I had a conversation very early on. She always knew I was gay; she was the first person I told at UVA. And she was just--you know, she was always a good friend. And--and--so, but it became pretty clear that that was accepted. And there was one flaming queen of a faculty member, who was just a sweetheart.

VH: So I didn't do--

WS: So there was one of those in French and in Russian.

CP: Got it.

WS: Since I came with my girlfriend in Russian.

VH: But there were still a—well, this group that got together at the Unitarian church, there were a lot of university people there.

WS: But also locals.

VH: Yeah, also locals.

WS: That crossed over from the group that created the Thawing Out party.

VH: Maybe it depended on where you were at UVA. Because Wynne was always in a position of authority. And--

WS: No, I wasn't.

VH: Well--

WS: Not as a grad student.

VH: You were, but you had the language lab.

WS: Well, that--that--my first professional position was also in Arts & Sciences, coming out of French to the Language Lab.

VH: So I think once you made that transition, and then how long were you there before you went to the Provost's office?

WS: Nine years.

VH: And so we always--since we've been together, we've always had this circle of UVA people. Either UVA academic division or medical division because she dated a nurse for a long time.

WS: And--and it was in fact two nurses that brought us together.

VH: And then after we--after we got together, I don't know when I started my master's program. But I got involved in a course in the Ed school that--

WS: Have you heard the name Bob Covert?

CP: Mm-mm.

WS: Oh, interesting. Okay.

CP: Wait, Bob--what was his name, I'm sorry.

WS and VH: Bob Covert.

CP: Was he an RA?

VH: Do you know Lisa Spidell?

WS: Oh, no Bob Covert--Bob--you're thinking of Bob Elkins.

CP: Yeah. That's the Bob--yeah. I didn't know his last name, though, so.

VH: So Bob Covert taught this course called--called "Multicultural Ed." And it brought everybody in and you talked about all of the issues. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and it was a semester--

WS: Hey, speaking of which, how about me saying to Adam, "It was just too heteronormative." Did you believe that I actually said that to him? [WS and VH laugh] We think that a lot of today's language is a lot of gobbledegook. But I was speaking in the--we don't have any children of our own; we have eight kids that have been absorbed into our lives who call us their second moms.

VH: Or the gay moms.

WS: Or the gay moms. And one of our sons and his husband have a new baby. And I got this book that was indeed--it's the perfect description, way too heteronormative--to give to them. It was just not fair. Because the book was written from the point of view of the dog. It didn't really have to be so heavy. And it's--

VH: I think it would be fine, but.

WS: No. Adam agreed with me, that there were plenty of those on the market and it was nice to have. They're younger than we are, dear, they're thirty years younger than we are. Different point of view.

VH: And so when UVA Pride really started moving forward, I was already involved in Bob's class.

WS: Yes.

VH: And they used to do these panels that they would ask--it was the Gay Panel. And so we always got dragged out for the Gay Panels. You know, you--

WS: Otherwise known as the Pride Speakers Bureau before it was called Pride.

VH: Right, it was the Pride Speakers Bureau.

WS: Which is now QVA. Oh, by the way.

VH: And so everybody would sit in front of a class and tell their coming out story. Ours is really no longer relevant, but you know, we would, and then we'd open it up to questions. And anybody could ask you questions. So, the two of us have kind of been on display at UVA for decades. [WS laughs]

WS: I would go talk to nursing students. Before I knew Vicki.

VH: And we were involved peripherally in Pride, but at--when it first started up, there was a guy who assumed the leadership role that just drove me nuts. And I--

WS: So you kept your distance.

VH: I did.

WS: More than I did.

VH: So I'm teaching this class on whiteness and something else.

WS: With Lisa Spidell.

VH: With Lisa Spidell.

WS: Have you heard that name?

CP: Mm-mm.

WS: Well, she's now a member of the faculty of WGS.

CP: Mm-hmm.

WS: She has a husband and a child.

VH: At least one published book, and.

WS: Yeah, and--so she's just your basic academic. Took a long time to get through, partly because of the way Bob ran things. She was one of his graduate students. But Lisa and Vicki were teaching this offshoot course that they were asked to teach. It was just like--

VH: It was for the community. Anybody could sign up for it.

WS: For the community, through--because of a show--an exhibit at the Fralin [Museum of Art].

VH: Right. So we've got like forty people in this circle around us.

CP: Sorry, was this something that you--were you a graduate student when you were teaching this, or were you--

VH: Yeah, I was a graduate student.

CP: Okay.

WS: But she had started--

VH: But I was working; I was a part time grad student; part time working.

CP: Got it. Okay.

WS: Right. Because this is 2000 or later, so--Vicki was born in 1952, so. Forty-something rather than fifty-something.

CP: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

VH: The three of us teaching this weekend seminar is me, Lisa Spidell--straight woman--well.

WS: Mostly.

VH: Mostly. And LA the GA. Leslie Ann Pittard, who was a graduate student.

Tall--

WS: Gorgeous.

VH: Incredibly gorgeous Black woman. So the three of us stand in a circle and we rotate, like every two minutes for--every fifteen seconds for a minute. And at the end of that, we open it up for questions. And so this guy, who has taken over the UVA Pride thing, that I think is a jerk, first words out of his mouth to me, he says, "Well, clearly you're transgender, so how does that make you operate in the world?" I said, "Well, I'm not." And he said, "Well, it's clear that you are." And I said, "But I'm not." And I said, "Edward, this is not--this is not your decision to make. It's mine. And I'm not transgender. I'm a woman. I like being a woman. I like wearing men's clothes. Does that make me transgender? No." But it--you know, the rest of the people in the class are like, "What the hell is going on here?"

WS: Well, there's another moment when you had air sucked out of the room.

VH: Yeah, I did. [WS and VH laugh] I guess I've had a few of those.

WS: Yes, you have.

VH: Well, we talked our way around it--

WS: I don't know how that experience relates [laughs].

VH: And it ended up being like, for the first two hours after we finished this thing, that was the conversation of, you know, "Why did he feel he had the right to judge you? Why was he comfortable saying what he said? How did you feel when he--" Anyway, it was a hot mess. So we have been peripherally involved in UVA Pride while not being active members of the UVA Pride group.

CP: Right.

WS: Since it began.

VH: And we stopped doing the panels probably five years ago.

WS: Longer than that. Five years ago was--

VH: Because I've been retired two--three years.

WS: Almost three. So it's more--it's more like ten years.

VH: Ten years.

WS: Because you age out of having relevant experience, quite frankly. And while--while we're talking about history and pride: Gary Nimax. Nobody has done more for the profile of gays and queers at UVA than Gary Nimax.

VH: Right.

WS: And he deserves every bit of recognition that anyone would give to him for that. He's terrific.

VH: In all the right ways.

WS: In all the right ways. And he's a pleasant person and he gets people to do things and he's just all the way around, he's just to be admired.

VH: Yeah, if you sat down and said, "Here--who would be the perfect person to lead this charge?" And put all of those qualities together, Gary just is--that's it.

WS: Yeah.

CP: Is there anything in particular that stands out to you that he has worked on?

WS: Well, very simply, he--well, a couple of things--well. He professionally was in a position where he had the opportunity to learn things so that he was instrumental in helping the UVA upper administration to understand the value of same-sex benefits

before marriage was legal in Virginia. So yes, in a heartbeat, he was in the right professional environment to do that. Now he has moved up, not because he's gay and somebody's checking a box, but because he is very competent, he's very well-spoken, he's learned his jobs and moved on. So both where he was and the work he could do and then moving up become even more seen and more influential, that this is a norm. Both--so both--and his ability to talk to people. But so that--so that--same-sex--he definitely--

VH: Benefits.

WS: Benefits, definitely he had an effect. And then the other thing is in his consistency for twelve years? More than twelve years? An ever-increasing of information sharing.

VH: Right.

WS: Both in the gay community and for UVA Pride, QVA, and to the administration within UVA of what's going on in the world, whether it's social for the queers or whether it's something administrative to be paid attention to, like the Youngkin situation relative to what we're going to teach and allow in our public schools.

VH: Or to the arts of, here are the films in this year's Film Festival that would be--

WS: That he communicates not only to his community, but to the world at large as well. So he--he's very thoughtful in what he conveys. He's always been very diplomatic. He is a flag-carrier but he is a superior flag-carrier in that he can speak to power in the language that it understood in terms of the upper administration. So, yeah. There's some specifics for you.

VH: Well said.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. That's great.

WS: So he is a huge part of like at least the 2000-forward UVA queer history.
How much before that, I don't know. But yeah.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. That's amazing.

WS: And a just plain nice guy. I'm happy to have him as a friend.

CP: Right. So it sounds like--I mean neither of you encountered any--sort of any resistance or anything within UVA, you know, working at UVA because of your sort of sexuality.

WS: No. It--it could have happened with the faculty member I mentioned, who was a rabid Baptist Christian who refused to be an advisor in Arts & Sciences because you had to meet with students on Sunday, the Sunday of arrival in those days. And so he refused to do it. But, you know, obviously you pick your battles. I wasn't going to come out with him in the room and nobody was going to do it for me, because everybody understood. So I actually felt protected in the French department more than bothered. And then just the longer you're here and you know people and... you know. I was once walking down the street on the Corner my first year and had a tomato thrown at me, but--holding hands with somebody, but that's--that was 1977 and who cares? You know, it's a long time ago. It's--is that fifty years ago? Not quite. Forty-five years ago. It's forty-five years ago. You?

VH: You know, I can't--there's a part of me that thinks [name removed]'s problem with me is that--

WS: Oh yeah. That's true.

VH: That I was gay and I was out and--

WS: But you were smarter than she is and--

VH: [Laughs] This is her protective--

WS: No, but it's true. You were smarter than she is and you weren't a yes-person, and she needed yes-person. People. Persons. I'm having ankle claustrophobia.

VH: Anyway, I think--and I was on a three-year contract with her, and it became clear early on that--

WS: She was going to cancel it.

VH: She was--she hired me, I think, in retrospect, as a way to get to her [WS], and--

WS: To manipulate me into what--because she was reporting to me at a certain point.

VH: And she's as queer as I am, but doesn't want anybody to know it. And I--and I think that that was a problem. And so, at UVA, if you're in a contract and you're not going to be renewed, you're given a year's notice. If you're not, you get an extra year. And so like three days before my year was up, she came to me--no, she sent me an email and said that she--

WS: No, it was a letter. It was not an email.

VH: That she was not renewing my contract.

CP: Hmm.

VH: And it didn't take me long to find another job, still at the university.

WS: It never has taken you long to find another job.

VH: So--

WS: She was fired once for insubordination and she said, "I quit" before they said, "You're fired." Which you should have let them say, "You're fired" because you could have gotten--

VH: Yeah.

WS: Unemployment benefits.

VH: Anyway, I think part of her problem--

WS: No, because two weeks later she had another job.

VH: I think part of her problem was that--

WS: We were so out.

VH: We're so out and not--not--we're just--

WS: We're not even--it's not that we're out. We just are.

VH: We're just comfortable with who we are and everybody knows us. And I think that it just--she couldn't stand it.

WS: It was not part of her worldview.

VH: Anyway.

CP: Yeah. We've touched on this a little bit, but just sort of thinking about how in your experience as folks who worked at UVA and were also pretty active in the community, did you see like queer UVA staff and faculty sort of interacting with other queer folks? Did you feel like there was kind of like a segregation, like UVA folks mostly hung out with UVA folks, Charlottesville folks mostly hung out with Charlottesville folks? What was your experience of that?

WS: Well, now I think it's evolved. As oldsters, most of our remaining social group is post-UVA.

VH: Right.

WS: But like the group of ten that we do the most with. But if there were still some large party, it would still be the same group of fifty that would be about fifty-fifty, no pun intended.

VH: But at the--

WS: Initially--

VH: At the parties in the early '90s, like at the Thawing Out party, it was--

WS: It was more local than it was--

VH: Yeah, it was more local than it was UVA. But it--even as that evolved, it was everybody. And I don't--I don't really think there were sects. Although, you know--

WS: Well, there are always smaller social groups because you're going to evolve with a few people, because you can't be really close to but so many people.

VH: Right.

WS: So, you know, there are lots of little nodules of eight and ten, and where you worked was immaterial.

VH: Right.

WS: It was more who had time at the same time. If you were nursing--if you were a nurse and half of your time you were up at night, you were not socializing a lot but with people who had the same schedule you did. Unless you had a partner who was working somewhere else in town. So--that--that subset of medical people, because of their schedules, was definitely a subset by dint of schedule until they all evolved out of having to work shift work and working days.

VH: Yeah, there was this little clutch of them that worked nights.

WS: Yes, there was! [Laughs]

VH: And you would only see them like--

WS: Every two weeks on a weekend.

VH: Yeah, maybe. I was going to say a couple of times a semester that they would--

WS: Emerge.

VH: Have a weekend off and they would be out and about, but then they were on nights.

WS: Yeah.

VH: Yeah, that was--it was funny.

WS: I don't know about now. We don't--we don't know about now because our life now is either the small group of people we know or bigger--the next biggest group includes Nancy Kechner, you know, and other old friends, so there's eight people, and then there's the next like eight people, and so--and we don't--I wouldn't say we make an effort to meet anybody new now. But we have our kids and our grandkids.

VH: But we're always conscious and Wynne especially if we meet a new graduate student or an undergrad who just, you know, looks and smells gay, of reaching out and saying, "Hey, this is who we are, we've been in Charlottesville for forty years, fifty years, if there's anything you need to know--"

WS: "We can put you in touch with someone." Now it's not "We can tell you," but "We can put you in touch."

VH: “We can put you in touch with whoever does--what you need to help you.”
So we haven't--we haven't lost that, and we do still get occasional--like we go to the queer faculty first drink thing, just to say, “Hey, we're still alive and still here and--”

WS: Yeah. Now that the queer faculty first drink thing is back, because--

VH: But we really have eight--

WS: Because it wasn't there for a couple or three years. Yeah, but we have really aged out of a lot of stuff, which is fine, you know.

VH: Mm-hmm.

WS: I think it--like dress your age, act your age, you know.

VH: Yeah. You know, I had a little meltdown this morning about...the Women's Center.

WS: No, not about the Women's Center.

VH: No, not about the Women's Center. About the name “the Women's Center.”

WS: And about the students who say the name needs to change because it's not inclusive. And--

VH: And so I went--I went off. Just--

CP: Well, there's a whole conversation about women's colleges that we maybe don't need to get into--

WS: But there's a whole 'nother conversation.

CP: I imagine that that's a similar--it's a similar conversation [laughs].

WS: Yes. Yes. Well, the person who's the most--the Women's Center reports to me, administratively.

CP: Mmm.

WS: And the person who has been the most pointed about saying the Women's Center needs to change its name is a guy who is not transgender. He is cisgender male. And he says he feels unwelcome, while happily going and using their available study space in the hours it's open. So he must not feel very unwelcome because he's always there.

VH: I like--Wynne has a t-shirt that--it's not--"Randolph Macon Women's College is not a girls' school with no men, it's women's college with no boys." [VH and CP laugh]

CP: That's incredible. I do get a lot of pleasure in saying, "Oh, Hollins is an all-girls school?" "No, it's a women's college, thank you."

WS: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, isn't it great?

CP: Yeah. Tell me a little bit more about the kids that you have. Like how did you get connected?

WS: How did we find them? They found us!

CP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Tell me more about what that's like.

VH: So the first kid that we got was--Wynne used to mentor for African American Affairs. And one year, she was assigned a young woman who played basketball who had broken her ankle? Broken a foot? Something. She--

WS: We were trying to keep her in school to keep her eligible subsequently.

VH: So she was like dropping out of the world and we--I took her and picked her up and took her to class every day so she didn't have to walk, and we had her over for Sunday dinner and--

WS: And she had very marginal background, familiarly, and she was first gen.

VH: Yeah. Sort of got her re-engaged in the world. And she...asked if she could bring a friend to one Sunday dinner.

WS: To dinner.

VH: And we said, "Sure. That's fine." So [laughs] she brings in this undergrad, but an older undergrad. And so after Sunday dinner, Wynne and the--and the student that we had got up and were cleaning the table off and taking stuff into the kitchen, and I ended up at the table with Kelly, and Kelly looks at me, an African American from New York City, she looks at me and says, "How do I get in on this?" [CP laughs] And I said, "How do you get in on what?" And she said, "This. All of this." And I said, "Well, if you want to come to dinner, you just call. And I'll cook for you."

WS: And at that time, we lived on Stadium Road near the intersection of Alderman and Stadium, and she lived in Gooch-Dillard, which was then all upper-class housing.

VH: And her father was long gone, but her mother's goal for her--

WS: Had been--

VH: To be a FedEx driver. She didn't understand why Kelly wanted to go to college. And so Kelly's spending time--first of all, Kelly would have gone on to graduate school without us. I think.

WS: Yes.

VH: But--but it certainly made it--

WS: Easier for her.

VH: Easier for her. So Kelly was the first.

WS: Well, the whole--the whole Peace Corps thing. But Kelly found a family with stability. She's now fifty-two. She just turned fifty-two on November the first.

VH: And has--has a PhD from Columbia and teaches at Hunter College in New York. So Kelly's our first.

WS: And her partner at the time--they never married--her partner at the time had their child, our oldest grandson, who's nine. They since separated.

VH: Meanwhile, kid number one decided after college she--it was a couple of years after college. She called us and said she needed to talk to us. And she did at least do it in person. She came to the house.

WS: Kelly?

VH: No.

WS: Kelly is kid number one.

VH: Well, who brought Kelly?

WS: Yes. Oh, you mean that young woman. She was--yeah, well. She dissed us. She would have been a kid.

VH: She at least called.

WS: And she came to the house.

VH: Came to the house, and said, "I--I started going to church. I'm very religious now, and I can't come see you anymore. I really don't approve of your lifestyle."... So we both said, "That's your choice, and good luck." So. Kelly. Who's next?

WS: Jason.

VH: Jason is next. Jason was a student of Wynne's.

WS: Mm-hmm.

VH: In French.

WS: His second year--second semester first year.

VH: And I don't know how--

WS: It just happened; I don't know. It just evolved.

VH: Yeah. That--well, we used to do a dinner for her French class. And I would cook. I'd fix them a French meal on Sunday afternoon. And they would all come over and so Jason--

WS: The Sundays had nothing to do with religion. The Sundays had to do with free time.

VH: Free time.

WS: It was always Sundays, because it was free time.

VH: So Jason came over to dinner and then he just kept coming over, and so that was Jason. Next is--

WS: And he introduced us as his gay moms before we knew that that was the--
[VH and CP laugh] He--we--he was in--not the Virginia Gentlemen, what is the other thing? The big chorus? The VGs is small.

VH: The Glee Club.

WS: The Glee Club. And he was in the Glee Club and so he and some other-- some other person he knew, this is his second year, were in the back seat of the car. We had picked them up to take them in their tuxes to the Glee Club concert. And that's--he introduced us to--

VH: "These are my gay moms."

WS: "These are my gay moms." And he too, his father had died the year before he came to UVA. And he is, like Kelly, of modest means. Not the first person to go to college? Kelly was a first gen.

VH: No, I think he is first gen.

WS: I think he is first gen, too, out of West Virginia. His father was a coal mine supervisor. [Some background noise] And so, both of them had only mothers at the time.

VH: And Jason's mother has since died.

WS: So has Kelly's. We are the only living parents.

VH: So those are the two oldest.

WS: For the three oldest children.

VH: So the next two are Shayna and Tenecia.

WS: Tenecia and Shayna in age.

VH: Tenecia was an RA--

WS: An RA. They both were.

VH: In Hereford College.

WS: Oh--

VH: And we used to do--

WS: Her second--her second year.

VH: So we would go up there--

WS: We were Hereford Fellows.

VH: And we would do this thing like Cookies and Milk. So we did Cookies and Milk--

WS: That was the introductory thing that we did always.

VH: And somebody had spread the word, “Hey, Wynne and Vicki are coming. They're lesbians.” And so--

WS: We learn later. [Laughs]

VH: So, yeah, we learned later. So Tenecia tells us later that the only reason she came down for Milk and Cookies was she had never met real lesbians, so. So she came for Milk and Cookies and I--I don't remember her. But the next week, I had gone to--

WS: No, not Milk and Cookies.

VH: I went to Hereford for dinner and she was standing on the street waiting for pizza delivery. And I said something about, “Hey, what kind of pizza you getting?” She said, “White pizza,” and I said, “Who are you sharing it with?” And she said, “It's all for me.” And then she--

WS: That was it.

VH: She said, “What are you doing here?” And I said, “I'm here to eat dinner. I come up once a week.” And she said, “Oh, I'll come down and have dinner with you the next time.” So that's how we got Tenecia.

WS: And these two were both in school together. They knew each other because they were both RAs. So Tenecia is at Hereford, and Shayna is at Brown College.

VH: And Shayna's father and Wynne worked together on the Mid-Atlantic Language Association. And he talked to Wynne and said, “Hey, my daughter's coming to school there; can you keep an eye out for her?” And Shayna didn't need us. At all. But she latched on to us right away.

WS: Well, and I did some academic help for her, and then Jeanette and I became her Echols non-major advisors, another friend of ours.

VH: Shayna's like Wynne on steroids. So that's the first four.

WS: Yes, and so Shayna--so Tenecia and Shayna are both--well, Tenecia has turned forty-one and Shayna will be forty--so it's fifty-two, forty-four, Tenecia's already forty-one and Shayna will be forty-one in January. And those two graduated the same year. And they knew each other also because of RA, and then they became the head RAs in their respective residential colleges eventually.

VH: And the next two are Adam and Chelsea. And Adam was a dogsitter for us for not these two but another dog. And--

WS: And we met him through...a long UVA connection led us to Adam.

VH: And so he just started coming back when he wasn't dogsitting. And we had told him about our other kids and he was like, "Well, I--I want to be a kid." And we're like, "Okay. That's fine."

WS: So can you press pause? So we all--we either have known--so the oldest three, Kelly, Jason, and Tenecia's mothers, they came--they came to us with no fathers. Their mothers have all died. So the oldest three we are their parents, their only parents.

VH: And met them all. We know all of the parents.

WS: We know all the parents. Okay. Chelsea and Adam.

VH: So Chelsea was a student of mine. And I was working in the Dean's office then, and did this thing that we called Grounds for Discussion, and I had--

WS: It has to do with the orientation.

VH: I had Chelsea and I just ended up adopting her.

WS: Chelsea was one of the student directors.

VH: And Chelsea found out that Adam was one of our kids, and so she wanted to become a kid.

WS: And Chelsea is light up the room, blonde, gregarious, warm...

VH: Yeah.

WS: And a little bit of a mess. And they were good friends. And Adam is neat, tidy, plan in advance. And one of the things at his and Tom's wedding was that Adam promised or Tom said that Adam had promised to be less everything must be planned five months in advance. So it's really a very funny dichotomy between the two.

VH: So Chelsea and Adam were kind of--there was a group of them that knew one another at UVA. So then the last two...Alanna was first.

WS: Alanna was first, yeah.

VH: We needed a dogsitter, and we went to Nancy Kechner. And she sent us--do you remember the kid's name?

WS: I don't remember the kid's name right now.

VH: So she sent us a kid that was going to be the dogsitter--

WS: And Alanna came with her.

VH: And Alanna came with her. And this kid couldn't make eye contact with us and was just a nervous Nelly, so it was clear to both of us that Alanna was going to take care of the dogs.

WS: And Alanna loves dogs.

VH: And so she ended up dogsitting for us for a while. Well, Wynne, you went someplace.

WS: Was I in Turkey?

VH: I don't know.

WS: I was away for school for some reason.

VH: And there's a knock at the door at 11:00 at night. And I open the door and Alanna's there in tears. And I'm like--I'm not the one that does tears. So I'm like, "Do you--do you want to come in?"

WS: "Yes!"

VH: "Yes!" [CP laughs] So she came in and we talk until like four in the morning. And I got in the car, drove her back to her apartment. Next night, same thing--

WS: Was she living at Hereford? No, this was after.

VH: She was living at the end of--

WS: Yeah, this was after she had lived at Hereford. And subsequently, she realized that she had interacted with her when she had a stalker situation when she was in Hereford.

VH: So the third night, I said, "You know, why don't you just spend the night. Because I've gotta get up at 6:30 and go to work tomorrow." So she ended up staying the whole week while Wynne was gone. And just--I don't think she ever went back to her apartment.

WS: No, she didn't. That was a very hard time for her.

VH: She was a hot mess.

WS: And she lived with us. Kept her apartment; kept her stuff there. Her snake could not move in, and so she--and we had a bigger house then. We're also--

VH: So she had the downstairs [phone rings]

WS: Two blocks away, and she had the downstairs. Whenever [phone rings] one of the kids came to stay for any amount of time, they had the downstairs.

VH: So the last one is--and Alanna's mother is--

WS: And Alanna is youngest, chronologically.

VH: Alanna's father is still alive. He's a--he's a hot mess, and her mother is a lawyer for--

WS: DOJ.

VH: DOJ. We've met them.

WS: They're divorced.

VH: And the last one, Wynne and I used to work for Ac--

WS: Volunteer.

VH: Volunteer for--what did they call it?

WS: UVA Express.

VH: They used to take buses--

WS: Part of the engagement in the Alumni Hall.

VH: They would take buses to Dulles and pick up international students. And bring them back. And then there was a group of people like Wynne who met the students, talked to them, got them something to eat, and then escorted them to their dorms.

WS: And to get keys for the dorms.

VH: I drove a Gator and got all of their suitcases and took the suitcases before the kids got there. So I'm sitting on the Gator and I see this young woman walking down the sidewalk. Six feet tall, blonde--

WS: Gorgeous.

VH: Definitely not an undergrad. And I was like, "Hmm." So she goes inside and Wynne comes out before I leave with luggage and says, "Hey, I just met a grad student." I said, "Tall, blonde?" She said, "Yeah." She said, "She's rented a place in town that's partially furnished, a room--"

WS: On Virginia Avenue.

VH: "And so I'm going to take her to her room before I come home." I said, "Okay." And it's like 10:30 by this time. So 11:00, Wynne calls and says, "Well, we're at her rented room and there's a dresser and that's it. So I'm bringing her home." I said, "Okay." So we set her up downstairs and she stayed there for two weeks until we were able to--so we had to talk to the coach--

WS: Because she's her to row for UVA for her last year of eligibility, from the Netherlands. Amsterdam, to be specific.

VH: So we had to get the okay to buy--she needed a bed, she needed a desk, and so the coach--and we, you know, we didn't want to step on, make any NCAA infractions, and so we talked to the coach and he said, "Well, would you do this for any other students?" And we're like, "Yeah."

WS: Yeah, we've bought a car. We've paid back loans.

VH: We paid back student loans. So.

WS: At--the first student who said that she could not be around us anymore, that's when we learned the NCAA rules. And she--we had more access to her than usual because I was a mentor to her through this academic program. But we learned all the NCAA rules and basically, you can't do for one--so and actually, we did not buy the mattress for her. It was bought as Andy's mattress that she would be borrowing that

would then go on to Andy when she left. And yes, of course, we would do that for anybody.

VH: So, and we've been to Amsterdam and met her mother.

WS: Her father was out of the picture, also.

VH: She stayed with us for two weeks and then when I got ready to take her--no, she was riding the bike over. I had a bike in the basement, which I gave her. She was getting ready to go move into her room, and she said, "Can--can I come back?" And I said, "Of course you can come back." So she had dinner with us once a week for the two years that she was here.

WS: No, honey, it wasn't two years.

VH: It was a year and a half.

WS: No, it was only a year.

VH: Was it?

WS: Yeah. She came in August--

VH: She rowed, and finished in the summer. Yeah.

WS: Right. And she lived with us in the summer. After her eligibility, then she moved back downstairs.

VH: So all of our kids have at least master's degrees.

WS: Mm-hmm. In something.

VH: We've got--who's got a PhD? Kelly's got a PhD. Shayna's got a PhD.

WS: I think that's it.

VH: Chelsea's got two master's. Tenecia's got a master's. Alanna's got two master's.

WS: Jason has two.

VH: Jason has two master's.

WS: Because he has an MBA. He has an academic--

VH: Chelsea has two master's. Did I say her?

WS: You said her before you said Jason. Because I always think--

VH: Is that it? Is that all of them?

WS: Everybody has at least a master's; a couple have PhDs.

VH: So they're all...successful. And they would have been without us.

WS: Without us.

VH: But I do think that we gave...

WS: So we have now--

VH: Five grandchildren.

WS: And one on the way.

CP: That's very exciting.

WS: Yeah. But Alanna, whom we met before Ella, is actually the youngest. And Ella came with her eligibility year, so she actually in age order is older--she was the last one that we took in but not the youngest child.

VH: Right...

VH: Tenecia's mother was the highest-ranking woman, Black woman, but the highest woman in the Air Force.

WS: At the time that she would come--that she became a general.

VH: So, when she died, we went--she had a horse-drawn--

WS: The full-on caisson, the whole thing.

VH: Horse-drawn caisson, twenty-one-gun salute in Arlington. And Tenecia had been coming down to see us probably for--was it during the summer? Because she was spending a lot of time with us in the summer. She said, "My mom wants to come--"

WS: Oh, that was years--this was years before her mother died. She's jumped forward--

VH: She said, "My mom wants to come meet you two. Is that okay?" And I said, "Sure. That's fine."

WS: Of course. Yeah, so this is the summer that she's living down the street, ostensibly, but spending every day on our sofa with Annie, the dog. The previous dog.

VH: I said, "Well, tell me something about your mother." And she said, "Well, she's a general. Like a three-star general in the Air Force." I was like, "Oh." So I open up the door and I just immediately like snap to attention. And here's this little Black woman who is clearly in charge of the world. And I better not question it. And she came in and drilled us for about a half an hour.

WS: And then she relaxed.

VH: And then she relaxed and was like, "Okay."

WS: And we had whatever we were going to have to eat, and blah blah blah.

VH: Kelly was gay when she came to us. Jason was gay when he came to us. Adam figured it out after he graduated from college.

WS: And everybody else is straight.

VH: Everybody else is straight.

WS: Married or unmarried. And then after--assuming that this baby is safe and healthy, because Ella's first child was premature and she spent a month on bedrest before

he was born prematurely--assuming that number two is okay, there's likely to be only one more grandchild.

VH: Yes.

WS: Jason will not have kids; Chelsea's aging out, and I don't think she'll adopt given her family's needs.

VH: I don't think Alanna will have kids.

WS: Alanna will not have kids.

VH: So Adam and Tom will have one more.

WS: Yeah.

VH: Because they did the whole--they have a...baby. They did egg donor, surrogate, frozen embryos.

WS: Everything.

VH: And they decided that Tom would be first. And so Adam will be second.

WS: And they also decided not to mix their sperm because--

VH: Well, Tom's Jewish, and he wanted to know--

WS: He wanted to know that the baby was his. And oh my God, you can tell.

VH: So there's a long-winded answer to "How did we get our kids?" Yeah, the baby--Tom's a redhead. And the baby has this red peach fuzz. It's really--and looks just like Tom.

WS: Except his nose.

VH: But his nose is growing.

WS: No, but Tom said it would be good if he got the nose from the mother donor; that would be a good thing. It was very funny. The odd--the odd thing about the boys, the

two sets of boys, is so Tom and Adam, it's been very thoughtful, it's been five or six years, they've gotten to know each other so well, they moved in together during the pandemic after they'd been dating, blah blah blah. And they only got married as soon as they did, which was February of last year, when they had been planning a July wedding at a certain location, because for all the legal paperwork for the adoption and the surrogacy, they had to get married in February. So they did. Meanwhile, Jason, who's lived in Paris since the--

VH: Jason's our diva.

WS: Oh, yeah. He is the quintessential diva. He's also an artist in his own right in terms of musician, but that's not what he does for money. He was dumped summarily, and it was a good thing, we think, by a guy that we are still very fond of, but they should have broken up four years before JB got around to it. Broke up during the pandemic of overexposure. But Jason can't be alone. And so in very short order, he was dating somebody that was already in their friend group. They decided they were getting married, and then they got married here in May.

VH: I married them. I was the--

WS: She was the officiant. I was the witness. But both boys ended up with--Adam and Tom and Jason and Tomas. So really kind of odd. But, so that's our kids.

CP: All right. That sounds--that's amazing. [WS and VH laugh]

VH: Aren't you sorry you asked that?

CP: No! I think it's--I think it's incredible. I think it's incredible. I mean honestly, and like from a, I don't know, a historical perspective, like anything you all want to share

is like--it's amazing. Somebody's going to listen to this in fifty years and find it like I don't know, super useful.

VH: I think most of our friends, gay and straight, are surprised that we know all of the parents.

CP: Mmm.

VH: And it's like, well we didn't--we weren't stealing these kids or anything. And we didn't--it just sort of happened.

WS: We were additive for something for each of them in their lives.

VH: How many kids have been in and out of our house over our thirty-four years together?

WS: A lot.

VH: Hundreds. She taught. I taught. You know, there was--but these eight--

WS: There were Hereford events.

VH: These eight just stuck. And we get Mother's Day cards and they call us at Christmas.

WS: And the birthdays.

VH: And the birthdays.

WS: And we just saw two this past weekend when we went up to see the baby. Adam, of course, and then Chelsea came from Baltimore, so.

VH: And now, they're--they're talking about--they want to have some place--

WS: Well, they've been talking about this--this is now the second year.

VH: A gathering of all of the Wynne-Vicki kids.

WS: And they're called the Wynne-Vicki siblings, and--

VH: They all know about one another. And they--and some--

WS: We send out a news email every now and then.

VH: Yes. Some of them, like Jason and Shayna, are close.

WS: Yes.

VH: Adam and Chelsea are close. Alanna and Ella are close.

WS: Are curiously close.

VH: Yeah. Ella has--

WS: Jason also knows Kelly.

VH: Yeah. So they, you know, they've all got some connection somehow, but they all want to get together. Everybody.

WS: But five of them were at Tenecia's mother's funeral celebration. We only--

VH: Yeah, we sent a note out: "Tenecia's mother's died. Here's when the service is. We will buy dinner at this restaurant on this day, and--"

WS: As many as could, came. So that was Alanna, Chelsea, Adam, Tenecia--

VH: Shayna.

WS: And Shayna. So those five. And of course, Tenecia and Shayna have known each other for a long time. They're not close the way Jason and Shayna are close, but they're friendly. They get in touch with each other when they need to.

VH: The first time they met, Kelly said, "I was first."

WS: Oh yeah.

VH: Kelly's a force.

WS: Kelly's--Kelly's less territorial than she used to be. But she was--when the second Black child came, Tenecia, she--

VH: Kelly was--yeah. She needed to know she was first.

WS: But they've gotten over that, too. Because they both live in New York City. They see each other rarely, but they both are there and sort of communicate by Facebook I guess most of the time.

VH: Alanna's Dutch--I mean, Ella's Dutch and Alanna's--what's her father?

WS: It starts with a "G." And all I can think of--

VH: Yeah. Guatemalan.

WS: Guatemalan. All I can think of--all I could think of was Guadeloupe.

VH: So we have a mixture.

WS: A Jewish daughter, two Black daughters, two gay sons.

VH: Chelsea and Ella.

WS: Chelsea, Ella, and Alanna. And Alanna, with her medical needs.

VH: And they're all good kids.

WS: They're great. And Alanna's an artist. That's--she's--she--is doing other things tangential to art, like she's working at someplace outside--in suburban Maryland that's art-related and she taught art to children because she is still not making a living as an artist, but that's the goal. And Adam and Tom did their big wedding event that they planned all along before the paperwork need came along. Adam called and said, "Would you all mind sitting with the UVA crew?" Meaning all these--Courtenay. Do you know about UVA's housing arrangement for first years?

CP: Mm-mm.

WS: So in--

VH: Well, the short thing is, Courtenay has suites.

CP: Got it.

VH: As opposed to a room with two people in it.

CP: Got it.

WS: Well, no, I was going to say that there are first-year dorms and you might make your friends mostly in those dorms.

CP: Right, right, right.

WS: And everybody in this group of friends except for Chelsea lived in another dorm that was happening, and she met the--the Courtenay crew and there's this group of seven or eight friends, including Lodge, would make eight I think, that they are still tight. They are tight, they go places.

VH: A bunch of them--so we left here and a bunch of them stayed in the house for their fifteenth reunion. So we just turned the house over to them.

WS: Right, so. So they're a great group. And so Adam called and said, "Hey, can we put you at the table at the wedding for dinner with the Courtenay group?" And we were like, "Yeah, it's fine, but do they want the oldsters there?" And he said, "Yeah, yeah, it'll be good." And then Adam's father made a toast and made a joke about it. Do you remember what he said?

VH: He said something about that he was glad that the Courtenay table had been assigned chaperones.

WS: Chaperones! [All laugh] They loved it. But they--that group of kids has really embraced us because we are part of the family of two of their members. They are--they are all just kind and thoughtful to us and it's really--that's--it's really been amazing. For their reunions, this is the second time--like so five years ago and then this time. And

if more than three of them are in town they all gather--they say they're coming and we have them for a meal while they're in town.

VH: And at this weekend in West Virginia, we--all--so there was dinner one night and a barbecue one night and these people would come up, you know, young men that were friends of Adam's and Tom's and say, "You're the gay moms!"

VH and WS: "Yes we are!" [Both laugh]

WS: Yeah, so all like their DC friends that had heard about us. It was funny. It was fun. But--but yeah the Courtenay crew is really amazing. And this is, you know, like their--Lodge is a doctor. The guy in Texas is a doctor.

VH: Ritchie.

WS: Richie. It's just--so amazing that these kids are--

VH: [To dog] Don't bark.

WS: They've gone out and, you know--

VH: [To dog] Let's turn around.

WS: Melissa--Marissa, who really wanted to married and be a mother, has three adorable children and she's still the same, easy--easy--and we met her because she was the nanny of our niece, and it's because of Marissa that we met Adam, to babysit Annie. [Recorder is turned off and back on again] And so--I thought you finding a picture of Annie, and you were finding an example of Ella's artwork. I mean of Alanna's artwork.

VH: More questions?

WS: Are there other questions on your list?

CP: I have--I have a couple.

WS: Sorry!

CP: No, it's--it's totally fine. I love to hear about it. So it's, you know, whatever people want to talk about. Like, it's what's important to you, and so that's what I want to hear about. But I'm curious to hear a little more about ASG? I've--Cville Pride did an interview with Blaise, so I heard--

WS: Oh you did?

CP: I didn't.

WS: Oh, Cville did.

CP: But Jenny Mead did. And so I've--I've seen the interview.

WS: Jenny Mead, daughter of the historically famous Sally Mead, defender of the SPCA in Charlottesville.

CP: Yeah. She did not tell me that.

WS: Yeah.

VH: That must have been her grandmother.

WS: No.

VH: Really?

WS: Yes. [CP laughs]

CP: But yeah, so I--you know--

WS: I think it was her mother. Anyway. Yes. Blaise was amazing.

CP: Yes. Is he--is he still alive?

WS: I think so. Last I knew.

CP: Okay, I thought so.

VH: I saw Blaise someplace not long ago.

CP: Okay. I was about to say, I thought he was still alive. But anyways. Yeah, so anything that you would like to share about the work that you all did?

WS: ASG? Well, it was really important at the time.

CP: Yeah.

WS: When the world was not acknowledging how serious the epidemic was. And it was, you know, it was the whole Anita Bryant, "This has been visited on them because they're evil people." And so yeah, it was just people--it was a community banding together because we needed to support the men--it was only men at that time--who had been affected by the disease. And we got a lot of medical support in terms of information and knowledge and what to do about what, where to go to get support services from Brian Wispelwey, who [sighs] was--I don't know if he was an epidemiologist or just--there's another word for it. For medical practice. But I don't--I don't--I want to say he was an epidemiologist, but he was an amazing person and we had support from, gosh, I can't remember who, at the Blue Ridge Health District and the churches banded together and gave us money to help support people.

VH: So there were five of you, originally.

WS: Pete, Jim, Aron, Wynne, and somebody. I don't remember who the fifth person--yeah, there were five of us, originally. And we got volunteers. You know, people--I don't know--I don't know how it got publicized.

VH: Who led the charge? Initially?

WS: Well, Pete, for the--all the organizational stuff.

CP: What's Pete's last name?

WS: Pete Delate. D-e-l-a-t-e. He just moved away from Charlottesville a while ago. He worked for UVA. He knew finance, he knew systems, and so he could organize us, create a constitution, create a financial plan that then the churches would support. Gosh, who was the--Bertha Armstrong, who was part of MACA, I think she's deceased now. Black woman. Somebody who was the head of--another woman, head of Blue Ridge Health District. So, Charlottesville, for a straight, white, you thought they were conservative but really they weren't, because they were active in Civil Rights back in the day, really surprisingly supported AIDS Support, then Services, more than you would have expected. We got enough steady, guarantees of income that we could ultimately, when it was just becoming too much to be an all-volunteer group, we hired someone who already knew how to run 501(c). She was--for some other volunteer group.

VH: You and Aron were the last volunteers.

WS: Aron Teel and I were the last two volunteer co-chairs, and we hired, with the initial board, hired Emily Dreyfus, at the time, to be the first paid director for the AIDS Support Group that became the AIDS Services Group. But it was...I don't know--I don't know, I guess Aron talked to me? Or maybe Blaise was the fifth person. I think Blaise was the fifth person.

CP: I think he was--he was there from the beginning.

WS: I think he was then the fifth person. So he's the fifth. So it's Jim Heilman, Pete Delate, Aron Teel, Blaise, and me.

VH: Aron Teel, you--

WS: And--

VH: And how did they get you?

WS: I guess it was Aron. It could have been Blaise. I've known Blaise--

VH: I think it was Blaise.

WS: Yeah. I'd known him since almost the beginning in Charlottesville. We just got to know each other over the cookie counter at--what was the bakery's name?

VH: Rising Sun.

WS: Rising Sun. He and someone else did Rising Sun Bakery for years, until Blaise decided to go to nursing school and the other guy went and opened BreadWorks. And--was BreadWorks here when you got here?

CP: Is it--

WS: It was a shelter-workshop-bakery that was on--in Preston Plaza.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WS: And it closed in the course of--of Jim's retirement and--

VH: [To dog] No.

WS: Different Jim, not Jim of ASG. But the--Blaise and Jim who had the bakery, Jim went to do BreadWorks and he retired and then it closed, basically. But it had been a very successful--

VH: It was on the Corner for its first--the first part of its life.

WS: Yeah. But BreadWorks was never on the Corner.

VH: No. Rising Sun was on the Corner.

WS: Rising Sun was on the Corner. BreadWorks was in Preston Plaza, but it was a very successful shelter-workshop for high-functioning mentally differently abled adults. And he oversaw it, created it, conceptualized it, he continued the bakery there when Blaise, after other experiences, went to nursing school.

CP: All right.

WS: So. Yeah. I don't know what else--we--the community really came together. Not--not the gay community, although those were the volunteers primarily, to begin with, but...Charlottesville as a community supported the fact that we had a--the gay community had a need.

VH: It grew like, exponentially. It was like boom, boom, boom, and you needed to hire--

WS: Yes, it was.

VH: Because I remember you and Aron going through the hiring process for the first part-time--

WS: Yeah. And then full-time. It was really good. How we got the money, I couldn't tell you now, except the churches. And how we got the money--what Pete did to get grants and guarantees of long-term funding so we could hire somebody? That was Pete Delate, you know. Aron and I were more go talk to the churches, talk to the medical people, get the--but we also all went--were out helping people and finding donations for what families needed to support their loved one, if the fam--if the loved one was being supported or not. Oh my God, I forgot--I have a terrible memory, also. Very unfortunate in terms of I do hold a lot of Charlottesville history in various areas. I forgot about the house. The house was being--was developed before I got out of it, too.

VH: Yeah.

WS: We--we got the money to develop a house and the medical support for people whose families were shunning them. Oh my God, I completely forgot about that.

VH: Yeah.

WS: Yeah. It was--it was very important in the '80s. Very important in the '80s. And by the early '90s, we had a functioning structure that was the AIDS Services Group that went ahead and became another one of the many 501(c)s in Charlottesville that Charlottesville runs on. I mean, Charlottesville, you know, I don't know if I would have been happy in Boulder. We would have had to see about what the--

VH: We talked one time about where would we live beside Charlottesville. And I had a conference--

WS: Well, it was a little less--every time we went somewhere for a conference for either one of us, the other would take time off, because in those days you couldn't telecommute while you were with your spouse somewhere else, and every place Vicki would go, or we would go, Vicki would say, "Well, do you want to live here? Do you want to get jobs here?" And I always said, "Ah well, I don't think we could get jobs here." But in Boulder, which so fit life in several ways, I said, "Yeah, see if you find job--I would move here if we could get jobs here."

VH: And I said no.

WS: And that was the only place I ever said that about. But--but it was an amazing community that got us through.

VH: It was--I mean if you think that the--

WS: It was zero--it was nothing to need, instantly.

VH: If you think of the time warp that was COVID, that time warp of the first five years of the ASG was absolutely incredible. I mean, you all went from nothing to like full-blown support.

WS: In five years. And see, I don't really--you were watching it; I'm just doing it.

VH: Yeah.

WS: But--

VH: Meanwhile, I'm trying to grow my own business, so I have no time for this.

I'm like, "No. I can't."

WS: Yeah. But. Anyway.

VH: I made sure she was fed.

WS: She's a great cook. Then she was just a cook, now she's a great cook. I was going to say something else. You said you wanted to make sure that we said something.

CP: The hand-holding study.

VH: The hand-holding thing.

CP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

VH: So they did this hand-holding thing at the hospital.

WS: A study. A psychological study.

CP: Uh-huh.

WS: And physiological study.

VH: With heterosexual couples. Married couples.

WS: I don't know if they had to be married. But heterosexual; they had to be long-term of X years. Jim Coan in psych did the--did the study.

VH: So it was to have the partner hold...the hand of the other one while they're doing a test. In a--

WS: An MRI.

VH: An MRI. To see if the anxiety level was reduced.

WS: To see what the effect was.

VH: And after a couple of years, somebody realized--

WS: Well, it was getting used--

VH: Maybe we should do this for gay couples.

WS: Well, why did Jim decide to do it? It was getting used for "This is--this proves how much better--that you need heterosexual couples," and this was being used against gays.

VH: Yes. Against gays.

WS: And against the concept of gay marriage.

CP: Mmm.

WS: And so Jim said, "Like hell!"

VH: And so--

WS: And he did it again. He did the--he got more money and he did the same study over again with gay couples. And you still had to be long-term and so we participated in that study. And it was very interesting and very important. And they--gee, guess what? They found the same results for the gays [VH laughs] as they did for the straights.

VH: The gays! Those gays.

WS: So somewhere, I don't know if we still have it, we had the picture of my brain, because the one thing--it was supposed to be randomized and we said, "We can't--we don't know if we'll qualify. It can't be randomized because Vicki can't go in the MRI tube." And--because of claustrophobia. What do they do for you now if you needed an MRI? You'd have to have some other test.

VH: They have--there's a different MRI.

WS: Because she has two metal knees now. That was before the knee replacements, but we knew that I had to be in the tube. And they said, “You're going to feel X and such,” and it was aversive input to you when you're in the MRI tube, and what would the stress be when you are going to get the aversive stimulus. But I could have a mirror in there so I knew that the top was over here, it was open and Vicki was right here holding my hand and it really was--it was a pain in the ass filling out all of the questionnaires we had to fill out.

VH: Oh my God, yeah.

WS: But the test itself--

VH: Was easy. And so, you know, whenever there's a test like a psych, you know, psych students all over Grounds are, you know, doing this or that to get--to learn about how to do psych testing. And--

VH: We laughed when we got the request from you, because it's been a long time since we were dragged out to do something.

WS: Yeah. And it's like, “Are we too old?” That's what I think I asked you, if you really wanted an age range, because I walked up to a test--a test--a psych test on Grounds the other day and said, “Hi! What do you want your test subject age range to be?” And they said, “College students.” I said, “Okay, just thought I'd check.” Because what we used to do, they'd have tables at Foods of All Nations when they wanted randomized age-ages, and we'd walk up and they of course are expecting to pay people \$5, they give you thus-and-such, and we'd always say, “No, no, no, now you can get two more test subjects.” Because of course the amount of money they had for the test was limited, so. Is there anything else? Do you have other questions? Did we answer all of your questions?

VH: It's very different--

CP: I have like--I have like one or two more. They should be pretty brief. I've taken up a lot of your time, and I really appreciate it.

WS: I was going to say, well, and we yours, but as you can tell, we're both used to talking in the world.

VH: So [indistinct] we have nothing to say. But go ahead.

CP: [Laughs] So do you feel like you're part of a queer community here in Charlottesville?

WS: No and yes.

CP: Okay.

WS: In terms of a larger queer community, I wouldn't say that we don't feel that we're part of it but we know it exists and that is comforting and we know enough of the people who are doing other things. Everybody no longer knows everybody so well that you're going to have an enormous party once a year. [Recording switches to iPhone recording] But I think enough of us who are older... [Recorder is turned off and back on again] So I don't think that we think that we're part of a close-knit gay community. But there are always activities. We know what they are. If we needed to find something, both--there's a Catholic ministry that's open to gays. St. Thomas is actually open to gays, although it's not the known Catholic ministry, and there's the Unitarian church that's two houses away. So we know if we needed spiritual backing or support, that that's there.

So I would say, no, in that we don't have a huge, large--we're not active in promoting gay agendas or politically active any more. Instead of volunteering in the bigger sense, the people would look at us and say, "Well, Wynne doesn't volunteer at all

anymore and what Vicki's doing is not gay-oriented." But...we're both always helping somebody. Whether it's public or private, you know, we're at a point in life when we've got a very close friend, the person I referred to with Shayna, she and I did her Echols non-major undergraduate thesis. She's now in Martha Jefferson House, having retired and needing some support in a retirement home. And so we are as close to family as she still has in Charlottesville, because her daughters are all away away. So we are supporting here, we tangentially more and then less have the parents of friends--a friend who lives in Australia. They're now in the nineties, so whenever they need something, that doesn't have to do with hunting or animals, Vicki is the go-to person. Vicki has a lot more free time than I do.

VH: I think that we're not part of a--an identified--

WS: Gay community.

VH: Gay community in Charlottesville.

WS: Or a queer community.

VH: But we're sort of like the ambassadors for the gay community. Just by virtue of the fact that we've been together for thirty-four years and--

WS: Right. Well, Charlotte and Debbie have been together a long time.

VH: So there's us. Charlotte and Debbie. Ted and Aron are gone now.

WS: Well, they'll be back. We think.

VH: Becca and Charlene...

WS: Yeah.

VH: So there are couples from--

WS: A long time ago.

VH: A long time ago. That I think that we're--from now on until we're no longer here, we'll serve as ambassadors, of a sort.

WS: Yeah. And Nancy. But--but now gay marriage is accepted, you know.

VH: Well, for now.

WS: For now. But I mean, city--the city of Charlottesville, if you have a gay, married, partner--husband or wife--you--they can get on your insurance with the city. Mary Kay and Jane!

VH: Right.

WS: So there--it's--there's infrastructure--in the infrastructure, in UVA's benefits for same-sex partners. There's an infrastructure that exists, but beyond the infrastructure it's not just a queer community, it's that overall, queers in Charlottesville are an acceptable part of society. And that is very different from forty-five years ago. But then, we also have the small group of friends [phone rings], our kids, none of that is gay. But it's--it's who we are. And we've also never been separatists. We've always been interactive with our families, the guys who were gay--so lesbians who are separatists, and your gay brethren? What exactly is that? Oh, it was just--it was too perfect an absolute for me from the word go, to be a separatist in the days of card-carrying, sign-carrying, you know, the women--Michigan Womyn's Festival, you know, there was a whole separatist--kids, boys under eight. Oh, and then--

CP: Well there's that land out in Louisa County that's--women only, no men under, no boys under eight or five or whatever.

WS: Twin Oaks. Over eight or five or whatever.

CP: Yeah, that's what I mean. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WS: Yeah. Yes, yes, yes. But that's just never been our scene. It's just like, life goes on. You couldn't--if you could not have more babies without men, one way or another. It just doesn't work.

VH: Not yet.

WS: Not yet.

CP: Not yet [laughs].

WS: Well, even the test tubes, we still have to have both sides of it.

VH: Ehh. [WS laughs]

WS: So far, you mean.

VH: So far.

WS: Yeah, yeah. Well, Vicki--we have another friend that was--who else was a test tube baby? Ian wasn't a science experiment except that his parents were afraid he was going to get sick.

VH: Yeah, whatever.

WS: There was another--there was another test tube baby. Vicki's always been fascinated by the science.

VH: Our first was a test tube baby. Well, it was artificial insemination.

WS: Artificial insemination, but his mother carried him.

VH: Yeah.

WS: Yeah. Is there anything else--back to your question--

CP: My last question is: is there anything else you would like to share for the historical record that you haven't yet?

VH: Mmm. You know, a lot of people in Charlottesville--we are WynneVicki, because I think some people don't know which is which. [CP laughs] And so it's just not even a hyphenated, it's just WynneVicki. And so I laugh when somebody says, "Hey, Wynne." And I just say, "Hi."

WS: Oh, I say, "I'm Wynne" when people say I'm Vicki to me. [VH laughs] But we do get mail that's simply addressed to Wynne and Vicki. And it is the first--the one syllable and then the two syllable, almost always.

VH: It's--it's--

WS: It's very odd, aging so long in the same place.

VH: Right.

WS: You--you just have no idea what it's going to be like as your life goes on.

VH: I don't think it's ever been difficult for us in Charlottesville to be gay.

WS: No. Not since--

VH: Now, we went to my twenty-fifth high school reunion. And we walked--

WS: Twenty-five years ago!

VH: Twenty-five. And we walked on to the dance floor and everybody else walked off. And I said, "What do you want to do?" And Wynne said, "We're going to finish the dance." Okay.

WS: But we haven't been back.

VH: So being gay in Brunswick, Maryland, would have been a very different experience than the educated population that is Charlottesville. We're--we're all lucky to be here, right? I don't say that because I'm a Charlottesville woo-ha; I think that's probably true in most college communities, but an educated population makes you think

differently. My parents are still very small-minded. You know, it's okay about me, I'm their queer. But it's the rest of those queers that you have to--

WS: And I'm fine because I take care of her, in certain ways.

VH: But she's from the wrong side of the tracks.

WS: Oh yeah.

VH: You know, my mother had a very hard time when I started dating Wynne, because, you know--

WS: Vicki was being uppity and she was going to get hurt because I was not from the socioeconomic group.

VH: So it's--it's kind of whiplash, sometimes, for me to be around my parents because that's--that's what I could have had. And fortunately, I didn't. But Charlottesville's been a great place to be for the past forty-five years.

WS: But I don't think it's true of all college towns. We wouldn't want to be in Kansas, necessarily. There are places we wouldn't want to be. When we were driving across country, we were very careful--was it Texas or Kansas?

VH: [Laughs] Where were we?

WS: Kansas.

VH: We were in Dodge City. Wasn't that--

WS: But that's Kansas, right?

VH: But I don't think--if--the closer you are to the actual college itself, I think--

WS: Well, that's probably true. That's probably true.

VH: I think that's a little bit different.

WS: Bigger schools, not--we're not talking about the many private, Christian schools or Jewish schools across the country.

VH: But if we ever get our eight kids together, we will do a family picture and send it to you.

CP: Great.

WS: Yeah.

CP: I would love that.

WS: I'm not holding my breath that that's going to happen [CP laughs].

V H: Oh, I think it's going to happen. Jason and Shayna are pushing it. They'll-- they'll make it happen.

WS: Yeah. But--one thing we know, Ella came for Vicki's retirement party.

VH: Yeah, she flew from California for it--

WS: So our Dutch daughter lives in California. Her husband's also Dutch, but he is binational because he was born here while his father had a postdoc here. In--in the US, not in Charlottesville. They were in New York. And so he was bored with his job. He's a PhD physicist, so he's in Silicon Valley figuring something out. And so, they're married, so she could be here with the marriage visa, and so Ella came. So we know that Ella would fly wherever we're going. I think it would be Rhode Island or New York.

VH: So my retirement slash birthday party--

WS: Because she--her official retirement was the day after her sixty-ninth--

VH: Sixty-ninth--sixty-eighth birthday.

CP: Oh, wow.

VH: So we had it--we had a combined party at the Villa. Because I wanted--

WS: Do you know about--about the Villa? Are you familiar with the Villa?

CP: The diner?

VH: Yeah.

WS: Uh-huh. The diner. They close at four.

VH: I asked them--I asked them if they would cater and open up their space, and they said, "Sure."

WS: Well, for a fee, but she's also an absolute regular [CP laughs]

VH: So we had 125 people. I never--I thought I was going to be able to go around and visit with people. No. I never got to leave the door because people are coming in, "Oh, hi, how are you?" You get a hug, but the fun part for me was hearing all the conversation. "How do you know Wynne and Vicki? How long have you known Wynne and Vicki?" So it was great to have our people all meet one another.

WS: Right, right. And another--

VH: And they all kind of knew one another, but it's like they didn't know that they knew us.

WS: Right, right. From the most perfectly impeccably genteelly dressed and self-presenting Iranian, no longer a national because she's got a US passport, Farzaneh Milani, who's a UVA faculty member, to Tony [both laugh], who is not.

VH: My guys--my guys from facilities management.

WS: Facilities management.

CP: Right, right.

WS: It was quite a cross-section. But one wonderful--

VH: It was a great party.

WS: It was a great party. And another wonderful part about that weekend: so that weekend, Alanna, Ella, and Shayna were here. And Vicki didn't know that Ella was coming.

VH: Right.

WS: And Alanna's in DC, so not hard. And Shayna--

VH: Told me she was pregnant.

WS: Told us she was--yeah. But we knew she was coming. And so I'm supposedly off getting the chicken for dinner. And whoever else is there in our house is in our house to have dinner that night [phone rings] with sort of a small group. And--she's very popular. Her phone goes off all time. And Vicki's like, "Where is Wynne?" And Shayna's deflecting, like, "Well, she's picking up a surprise--chicken and a surprise. She's picking up--" Ella's plane was late [CP laughs]. At Charlottesville airport. And there was traffic. But eventually, Vicki was going to--about to--and we were in a different house. I do this because it was two blocks away. We downsized two blocks. And so I come up the stairs. It was a split foyer. And I come up the stairs, and Ella's ahead of me, and Vicki comes around the corner and--now and Shayna says, "She's here!" And Vicki's in the bathroom and she comes out of the hall bathroom and she's going to launch into, "Where have you been?" And she sees Ella and stops in her tracks. And you forgave me for being late [phone rings].

VH: I did. [WS and CP laugh]

WS: But--so that was a wonderful moment. I don't--we'll see when I retire if we have that big a bash or not.

CP: I don't know that they're going to let you retire without a party. It feels like it's--

WS: Well, this was private. This was not UVA.

CP: Oh, okay. Okay. I see.

VH: Yeah, I had a UVA party. That was--it was okay. It wasn't as good as ours.

WS: No.

CP: Well--yeah, yeah, yeah.

VH: I was in control of my guest list.

WS: My party would be a--my party would be a lot more. My UVA party would be a lot more fun than yours.

VH: Yeah.

WS: If we are spending the money that way. That would be the question, are we spending the money that way [CP laughs].

CP: Yeah.

WS: Because I will not decline--because I've loved our retirement--our Provost's office retirement parties for other people. We've had a great time. And the Provost's office folks, for the moment, just as the last ten or fifteen years, we like each other. And we all do our jobs, and people try to do end runs. Because, "Oh, I didn't get money out of this person or they didn't say what I wanted, I'm going to go over here, and--" And you just--you hear this and you wonder, "Well, gee, did you talk to so-and-so?" "Oh yeah, I talked to them and they said to come to you." Well, You is going to go talk to them, because, you know, that's what we do. And--yeah.

VH: She's been saying three years for the last three years, so we'll see.

CP: Yeah.

VH: Okay!

CP: All right, well thanks so much--

WS: Sorry to talk your ears off.

CP: No, I loved it.

END OF RECORDING