

Interview – Gary Nimax

Interviewee: Gary Nimax

Interviewer: Cecelia Parks

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**START OF RECORDING**

Cecelia Parks (CP): All right. This is Cecelia Parks. I'm here with Gary Nimax. It is December 19th, 2022. We're here in Carruthers Hall at the University of Virginia, and we're going to get started. So Gary, what words do you use to refer to yourself? Do you say "gay"? Do you say "queer"? Do you say "LGBT"?

Gary Nimax (GN: Usually "gay." I was--I'm also fine with "queer." It took me a while to kind of embrace that term. I remember when the--the--it was the Gay Student Union, and then the Lesbian and Gay Student Union, but when they changed their name to the Queer Student Union, it felt kind of surprising to me. I--that it was still kind of early in the--the whole effort to kind of reclaim that word. And so it took me awhile to come along, but--but yeah, so for years I--it's--it's sometimes it's easier just to talk about queer film or whatever than to use the--the letters, so.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, so when you're thinking about like a group of people, do you usually say like "the queer community," "the LGBTQ community"?

GN: Yeah, more often in that instance I'd say "LGBTQ community."

CP: Yeah.

GN: Yeah.

CP: And then what pronouns do you use?

GN: He/him.

CP: So tell me about where you grew up.

GN: So I grew up in Staunton, which is about forty-five minutes from here, and so Charlottesville was the big city, sort of [laughs], growing up. So we'd come over here for shopping and stuff like that. And I always wanted to go to UVA, from the time I was a little kid. I was--fell off my bike when I was little and I was here in the hospital, and so I--when I was six years old, so I've come--you know, I've always come to UVA and come to Charlottesville and wanted to be--and wanted to go to UVA, so. And I did, as an undergrad.

CP: Yeah. So did you all live in Staunton proper, or were you all sort of out in Augusta County?

GN: No, we were in Staunton proper. Yeah.

CP: Got it. So you came to Charlottesville to go to UVA.

GN: Yes.

CP: And what year was that?

GN: That was 1983.

CP: Okay.

GN: So, good lord, that will be forty years next year [both laugh]. I was eleven when I started college [laughs].

CP: Yes. Obviously.

GN: Obviously.

CP: So at that point in time, what was it like being a student here at UVA?

GN: So, for me, I think the--the thing that I enjoyed most was--you know, growing up in a small town, I grew--I went to school with the same people from elementary school through--through high school [truck drives by window]. And although I had some good friends who had been friends the whole time, I wanted to go somewhere where everyone didn't know my entire life story and I'd get to meet some different people and people who were different than I was. And so--so I had a really good experience from that--from that standpoint. I--I lucked out and had a roommate that I really liked. We became good friends.

And--but as far as being gay and being a student, that felt a little different. So I was not out my first year. I had not come out to anybody. And it wasn't until my second year that I came out and I remember being in the dorms and there were a couple of people who were out and everybody knew who they were. People talked about them, people made fun of them, people--you know, they felt kind of "othered." And--and I didn't want that experience. So being--but I didn't--you know, I made friends first year and--and had a good experience.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. So you said you came out your second year? So did you--so how--how was that for you?

GN: Well, the thing that was--so I mentioned that I--I sort of wanted to meet different people. There were two people I'd been friends with actually since elementary school. We--we decided we wanted to live in the same dorm, but we didn't want to live together. So one was a girl and one was a guy. And so my best friend, the guy, we decided we didn't want to live together but we all requested the same dorm and got it. So

that sort of helped, that we had a lifeline, you know, but we made friends with each other's suitemates and that kind of stuff.

The...the thing that surprised me was my best friend came out to me first. And so that sort of helped. He had been dating this girl all through high school and we were friends, and she and I were friends as well. And I was so kind of panicked and not ready to come out myself that I didn't come out to him. And we're still friends, and he still gives me a hard time about that [laughs]. But it was--I think it's--it's an important part of my coming out story because it--it reminds me how much in denial I was and how afraid I was to come out, that if your best friend that you've known since you were little kids comes out to you and you say nothing, that's pretty--a pretty powerful statement about how closeted and--and afraid I was to come out.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

GN: And so I--you know, then I could meet his friends and sort of followed him on his coming out journey, and that helped.

CP: Yeah. So once you did come out, did you sort of do anything--I mean, were you out to your friends? Were you out to the point where other people would be like, "Oh, that's Gary, he's gay?" Like where were you at with that?

GN: Yeah, I--I--it was kind of a slow process. I started coming out to--to some of my closest friends. And fortunately had a really good experience. I was nervous coming out to my roommate. We weren't living together anymore; he--we were going to, but then ended up becoming an RA, so he--we didn't live together anymore. And when I told him, he actually had kind of an interesting reaction. It was just sort of, "Well, why didn't you tell me sooner?" And I think he seemed sort of like his feelings were hurt that I didn't tell

him. And I thought, "Well, that's weird."

And then he told me that his brother had just come out to him. And his brother didn't tell him, and--so I think he was looking at it through this "why aren't--why aren't gay people comfortable coming out to me?" [Laughs] And so I was kind of comforting him like, "No, it's okay." And you know, and I did have this moment where I was--where I thought, "Well, oh, wait a minute. Your cute brother is gay?" [Both laugh] So--so I did have that moment too. But--so I--I did you know, tell him that he was one of the first people both of us came out to, and I think that says a lot, because it's a very emotional and difficult experience. At least it was for me. And--but yeah, came out to other friends and had a good experience. And then met my--my friends' friends who--you know, so I met gay people that way. But yeah, it was kind of a slow thing.

And I think it was a--a mixture of--so when I first started telling people, though, I was telling people that I was bisexual. And I think it was a couple of things. I think it was sort of a--a more reflective of the time and it seemed more acceptable to be bi then. And especially early on, I remember thinking when I had had more sexual experiences with women than with men, am I sure that I'm gay? What is this? And--and I didn't really have a good word for it. And--but it--I think as I became more comfortable with it, I realized that no, I'm just gay. I was--I was--I tried having sexual experiences with women thinking that that would cure me. And it didn't work. But--so, yeah. It was sort of an evolution over--over my time here.

But I was not involved in the Queer Student Union, at the time called the Gay Student Union. And I wish I had been; I just wasn't ready to be that out. And even some of my friends who were very involved, and you know, had roles as being an officer,

planned events, or something, they said that when it came time to put together their resumes to look for jobs, they questioned whether they should say anything about it, because they thought it would hurt their chances of getting a job. And on the one hand, they thought, "Well, do I want to work somewhere that would not see that as a positive? My involvement in a student organization, whatever it may be." But--yeah, that was kind of a conversation we had was you know, what do you say about that? If anything?

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Do you--what kinds of stuff--like were there things that you remember they would do? Anything that really sticks out to you that you remember sort of seeing your friends plan?

GN: So one thing that the--that the then-Gay Student Union did was have dances. And they would even have them in--in Newcomb Hall, sort of where the game room is. So there was sort of this side entrance kind of thing and it would be very quietly through people you know--keep in mind, this was pre-email, text, anything else. It was all word-of-mouth because you didn't want big posters up, you know, "All the queers are getting together Saturday night" [CP laughs]. I mean it wasn't that kind of--it wasn't that kind of time frame in our history, where people were comfortable doing that. So it was all word of mouth. Calling people on their landline phones in their dorms, you know, that kind of stuff. So--so yeah, so they would have--they would have dances and then there was a--a local gay bar at the time called Muldowney's, later became the Silver Fox and had a couple of other different names. And so--and people would go there as well.

CP: Were you at that point in time going to those bars?

GN: I--eventually, yeah.

CP: Yeah.

GN: So my friend was going and I wasn't quite ready to go, so I always said I was like six months behind him [CP laughs] you know, and then he wanted to go to DC to go bars and I wasn't quite ready for that. So it took me a while to catch up with him.

CP: Yeah. Fair enough. So this was you know, sort of mid--mid--sort of late-ish '80s. Obviously the AIDS epidemic--HIV/AIDS epidemic was sort of reaching its peak at that point in time.

GN: Yeah.

CP: Do you remember hearing anything about that? Did that sort of play a factor in your thought process around coming out and being public?

GN: It did. And you know, it was sort of when it first was in the news it was sort of described as this "gay cancer." That only--that only gay men got, right? And so it took a while for--for us as a society to recognize it wasn't just a gay disease. It was--it was something that certainly impacted gay men very heavily, but you know, straight people could get it and children could get it through blood transfusions and as more of that came out, but you know it was interesting that there was--there was real hysteria about AIDS at the time. Or thinking that gay people could give it to you through touching or being in the room with them, and it you know--the only thing I've seen since then that's even close is when COVID first came out and how scared people were about how you could get it and how it was transmitted and that sort of thing.

But it--not even the same, because unlike COVID, at that time, it--most people who contracted AIDS or HIV at that time ended up dying. So many people did and there were no cures and it just seemed like a--a death sentence at the time. So there was definitely hysteria. And I kind of felt like people being more androgynous or people

being more open about their sexuality was just sort of--just starting to become more acceptable and then I think AIDS was a real step back in society's acceptance of the community.

CP: Yeah. Did you see that playing out in Charlottesville at all? Charlottesville or Staunton, when you'd go home?

GN: Yeah, certainly when--when there were people who were--were positive. It was something--news spread quickly, if--if they shared it with people. And I remember--I remember a couple of things. One especially was a mutual friend of ours who found out he was HIV-positive and someone said, "Well, I didn't think he slept around that much." Like it was just sort of we all had counters on us and when you--if you had so many sexual partners that that's how you got it and it was--and I said, "You know you get this from one sexual experience with one person." It's like getting pregnant. We don't run around calling pregnant women sluts because they're pregnant; it's--it's one time with one person, is all it takes to be infected. And so I kind of remember that locally.

And there was an article--I worked in an office where people passed around articles, and you know, everything was paper mail in those days, and so there was an article about...HIV coworkers and what sort of protections and precautions you needed to have. And they passed this around and I remember my boss at the time wrote on it, "I don't know why we got this, but I thought it was interesting." And it--it turned out that someone in a nearby department ended up becoming HIV-positive. And he was able to keep it pretty quiet. I heard about it and certainly didn't tell anybody, but. So yeah, I think it was--it was just seen as you know, people--I think for some straight people, it was seen as something they didn't need to worry about; it was just kind of seen as a joke. It was--it

was something they didn't need to worry about.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense. So you graduated from UVA in '87? [recorder is moved]

GN: Yeah, graduated from UVA in '87.

CP: Yeah. Sorry. Yeah. '87. And then where did you go after that?

GN: So I became a retail buyer. For Belk Leggett. And wanted to go somewhere else. Somewhere outside of--I remember telling--I got the job through on-Grounds recruiting. I wanted to be a retail buyer and I'd always worked in retail. And I remember telling the recruiter that I just--I didn't want to go too far away but I wanted to be anywhere but Staunton, Virginia, because I grew up there [laughs] and wanted to get away. And so then--so I got the job. I was in their management training program and you get assigned somewhere and they assigned me to Staunton. [Laughs] Because Fred Leggett III was the manager of the store and he wanted a management trainee and it was a great opportunity, I thought, to work for someone whose name was on the building. So I ended up in Staunton and then spent a year in Richmond after that. And--but then got the job at UVA. So by that--by that point I had met my now-husband. We started dating in--when I was in college. And so I was kind of commuting back and forth and I wanted to be closer and got the job at UVA in 1989.

CP: Okay. Okay. How did you meet your husband?

GN: So, I--we met when--again, I was working in retail all through high school and college, and one day he came walking in as a customer and... I remember being immediately attracted to him and just sort of gave him really good customer service. I was extra friendly, and he was looking at sweaters and we didn't have a sweater in his

size, so he was leaving and so trying to think quickly, I said, "Well, we're getting more sweaters in--" Which was a lie [truck drives past]. "So give me your name and your phone number and I'll call you when we get more sweater--more of these sweaters in."

And--but I just kind of chickened out and didn't call him. I found out where he worked and where he lived and what kind of car he drove and it turned out that he managed a local bar, so it was easy for me to drop in to see him. And then sort of over time figured out what his--he managed the bar, so he didn't work the bar that often, and--but every other Saturday, he was the bartender, so I happened to stop in every other Saturday, so. I was kind of lucky that he didn't work in an insurance company or something, so. Stop by with a cocktail and see him, you know.

CP: Yeah.

GN: So that's--but anyway, that's how we met.

CP: Okay. And so you all have been together since--I don't know, again, almost forty years now?

GN: Well so it's thirty-eight years this month. Yes.

CP: Wow.

GN: So we met--it took--it was a couple--there was a couple years before we started going out, but it was a slow thing [laughs].

CP: And when did you all get married?

GN: So we got married shortly after it became legal in Virginia, which was in 2014. It became legal in October of 2014. So we--Virginia was ahead of the rest of the--well, some of the rest of the country, but the Obergefell decision didn't happen until 2015. So yeah, December of 2014, so it'll be eight years next week.

CP: All right. Congratulations.

GN: Thanks.

CP: [Laughs] So at this point in time, you know, you're sort of out of UVA, in sort of the same general area, you met your husband, or the person who would become your husband. What were you doing, you know--were there--did you have other gay friends? Were you going to bars? Were you hanging out with them? Like what did that part of your life look like?

GN: Yeah, so we went to bars together. And there was not only the Silver Fox that became Triangles and Club 216 over the years, but also Eastern Standard, which was a very mixed bar. I know some straight people thought it was a gay bar because there were so many gay people there. I mean, it was a restaurant and it was--it was a bar that was very accepting of the LGBT community and--and it got kind of gayer as the night went on, you know, so.

And--and then I think another thing that was really big at the time--for us at the time as far as having a social life was just having--going to parties with friends and having--having friends have people over, even small groups, big parties, a little bit of dinner, whatever. And--and I--that's how I met other gay faculty and staff, too, so there were--there were people who were comfortable going out to bars and just seeing people that way, and then other people who would rather...I think either because they didn't really get into going to bars but enjoyed having--meeting people at their house or someone else's house. Or because they weren't out or didn't feel like they could be out at work.

So there was this whole thing about like who's out and who's not and trying to be

respectful of not outing people. I remember meeting...a faculty member at UVA, Bernard Mays, who was really instrumental in--in--in a lot of the early movements of trying to get sexual orientation added to the university's nondiscrimination policy. But Bernard was encouraging people to come out, just because there's strength in numbers and people need to understand how many of--of us there are. And we're working everywhere across the university and we should be--we should be open about it. But this was at a time when we--because it wasn't part of our nondiscrimination policy, you could be fired for being gay. And...so it was--it took a while for me to--to come out at work. But--but anyway, that's how--that's how we met each other, either through bars or parties and--

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. And so was this mostly in Charlottesville, sort of less so in Staunton, or would you sort of have--

GN: Some in Staunton. We--yeah, we certainly had gay friends in Staunton too.

CP: Yeah.

GN: And at that point, we were living--in my early years at UVA, we were living in Staunton full-time and I commuted every day. So we'd either come back here to you know, to go out on the weekends or--or--or do things with our friends in Staunton.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. So you started at UVA, working at UVA, in 1989 and the nondiscrimination--or that sexual orientation was added to the nondiscrimination policy in '91? Is that right?

GN: In '91. Yes.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. So did that change things for you like how you felt at work?

GN: It did. I--I [truck drives by] suddenly felt safer and while I wasn't--I never made up a girlfriend or a wife or anything crazy like that, but I--but I also didn't talk

about Allen, my husband, much at work. So I remember when we had a--a work picnic and they--families were invited, and it was like, "Okay. Come on, Allen. Get the dog. We're going to a picnic." And so we did and I think there was just--I felt like people were looking and maybe--I don't know if--if it was my own paranoia or if it was just sort of when people realized it. Certainly I think some people have good enough gaydar that they thought I was gay or suspected I was gay, but I just didn't really talk about it. And so--so I think that was sort of one of the first--one of the first things I did to come out.

But it was really I think the--the--the addition of the nondiscrimination policy really made me feel safe enough to start coming out and then I came out at work. And I had good experience with my boss when I--when I came out to him. He said he--that he really didn't care and that he just wanted me to show up to work on time and save money--I was a buyer, so he wanted me to save money on contracts and negotiate good deals for the university and that's what was important to him and as long as he did that then it was fine, and it was up to me to tell people or not tell people, and so I--I really respected that that was--was his reaction, so.

CP: Yeah.

GN: And I was promoted after that [CP laughs], so it was--it--it--I did have a good early experience when I finally came out.

CP: Right. It was--he wasn't sort of saying one thing and then, you know, firing you the next day.

GN: Yeah, exactly.

CP: Yeah, so I'm curious. So you--you mentioned sort of meeting other gay UVA staff and faculty at these parties. But some of them were out and some of them weren't.

GN: Right.

CP: So did you ever run into them just sort of through your--through your job, and how did--did you have to sort of--was there kind of a negotiation there of like pretend we don't know each other, like-- [laughs].

GN: Yeah. Most--you know, most people weren't that--weren't leading such double lives. It was okay to be like, "Oh hey, yeah, we've met."

CP: But not like, "We met at so-and-so's gay house party."

GN: Not "We met at a big gay party." Yeah. [CP laughs] No. And so I--I would--you'd try to navigate like, "Are you out at work or are you not?" And you know, it's--and I think the general rule, at least for me was I didn't say anything unless I knew they were out at work. I didn't have like--I didn't have this conversation with everybody I knew about like, "Are you out at work? Is it okay to tell?"

But one--one example that I remember that I just thought was so ridiculous at the time was we were with a friend who had gone out with this guy for the first time the night before or the weekend before or whatever and we were--and we went out with this friend and ran into this guy at a restaurant and he was with his family and he pretended that he didn't even know him. I mean--and I--I just thought, "Wow. You can't even acknowledge that you know this person, let alone that you went out with him." [Truck drives by] You know. So I--I didn't see a lot of that, but that--that was so ridiculous that it still sticks out in my mind.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. So were you part of the group that--the sort of early UVA Pride group, the sort of unofficial predecessor to the LGBT Committee? Were you involved with that at all?

GN: No. No. Not really. It was later that I--that I became more involved in that kind of thing. It was--it was interesting. I worked for the--the Vice President and Chief Financial Officer at the time, Yoke San Reynolds, who was a real ally to the community. And HR reported to her. And it was during that time that we were starting to look at domestic partner benefits and--and kind of respond to requests for domestic partner benefits.

CP: And this was in the '90s?

GN: This was in the 2000s.

CP: Okay. Early 2000s. Okay.

GN: So I think it was then that I became more active, but--but no. It was--I know you've talked to some people who were involved early on, and I went to a couple of meetings that they had but I wasn't a leader or anything.

CP: Got it. Got it.

GN: Yeah.

CP: That makes sense.

GN: That came later.

CP: [Laughs] Yeah. So... were--was domestic partner benefits the main thing that was sort of surfacing, you know, while you were sort of working with HR? Was that the main issue that was coming up?

GN: Yeah. You know, another one that if you haven't heard about this already that seems ridiculous now is gym membership? And so--yeah, so at the time, we had--we were requiring people--and I don't want anyone to be mad at Intramural Rec Sports; they were doing their job. But they were asking for marriage licenses before they let you bring

someone else to join the gym with you.

CP: Wow. This was--this was to keep random people from coming into the gym? Yeah.

GN: So--yeah. Yeah. And so it was, you know, so it kept--it kept every gay person from having their--their then-partner, since marriage wasn't around yet, from--from joining the gym. But even straight unmarried people, you know, couldn't bring their significant other. And it was ridiculous. So that was one of the early battles I think that--and it actually took the then-President Casteen asking the Attorney General whether we had the option of allowing this to happen and they--and so there's an Attorney General opinion that I have that I can share with you that says yes, UVA does have the right to do this. They saw it as largely a student benefit. And the way we approached it was by having one other person living in your household come with you. Or join the gym, as well. I mean, they had to pay. It's not like anybody was getting anything free. So--but you could bring your significant other, your child, if you lived with your brother, that's cool; if you lived with your parents, one of your parents could come, but it was an additional adult.

CP: So it shifted into like a proof of residence rather than like a proof of marriage.

GN: Relationship. Exactly.

CP: Got it. Okay. And--yeah, that makes sense. Do you have a sense of like when that--was that still that sort of early-2000s, early-mid-2000s time frame?

GN: That was in the mid-2000s, I'd guess like 2006-2007. I can get you the exact date, but yeah, it was that time frame.

CP: So then how did the LGBT Committee come about?

GN: So when it--it came about as an offshoot of the Diversity Council. So the Diversity Council was created in the late 2000s, the Aughts I guess as we refer to it. And my boss, again, Yoke San at the time, each vice president was asked to name somebody to serve on the Diversity Council, and she chose me and I was a little surprised. And she and I had this conversation at the time, so it was--the Diversity Council was created in response to some racial--racially motivated incidents. Yoke San was an Asian American woman, I was surprised that she would want to send me, and she said that she thought the committee would do a good job of--of discussing and trying to address racial kinds of issues, but she wanted to make sure that other communities weren't forgotten--like the LGBT community. Like the international community.

My--she's from Singapore; my parents are from Luxembourg, so I was born here but she knew that I had a strong affinity to the international community. We had talked about the fact that when I went here as an undergraduate, that I was the first person in my family to go to college. I received financial aid for part of--to cover part of my tuition. All things that, you know, at the time, caused me some degree of embarrassment. And now I'm proud of all of those things and I talk about them because they're--I think while none of them defines me, I think they all sort of contribute to--to who I am. And so she wanted to make sure that we were thinking about lower-income faculty and staff and international faculty and staff and--and the LGBT community. So I was really thrilled that she asked me to join, so.

And--and so as we were talking about some LGBT issues, it became apparent that it might be useful to have a subcommittee of the Diversity Council. And when I heard about it, I thought, "Oh yeah, I want to be part of it." And then the--the vice president at

the--of diversity at the time, Marcus Martin, asked me to chair it. And I had to kind of think about it a little bit and we talked about what the committee would do and what the approach would be to make sure we were sort of aligned and to--how this would work and what it should do. And I also remember thinking, even though I'd been out at work for years, I thought, "Well, now I'm going to be out at a different level, like out publicly. Out to the Board. Out to all of--if--the president knew I was gay but did all the vice presidents know I was gay?" I was working in Madison Hall at the time. And so--but I thought, "Well, this is important and I want to do it." And so that was in 2011.

CP: Got it.

GN: That that committee started.

CP: So how would describe the mission or the purpose of the--of the committee?

GN: It's always been that we should discuss and address items of interest to the LGBT community, that we should serve as a resource to senior leadership to talk about issues of importance to our community. Certainly advocacy is important. But one of the things that I--I talked about early on was that I thought the best way to get some movement in these areas would be to gather our information, have--have an understanding of what peer institutions were doing, and just sort of ask for things. I didn't want to see this as a group that planned protests or signed petitions or passed petitions around; I wanted it to be a "Look, we've got this nondiscrimination policy. Here's--here's an issue where the university is not treating the LGBT community the same as everyone else. Here's what our peers are doing. Here's some obstacles we think are going to be there. We'll help you implement this." That--that kind of approach.

And--and that approach has been successful. I never encountered any of our

presidents or vice presidents who--who were unwilling to meet with me. I think it helped that--that at the time I was working in Madison Hall so I was in meetings with them. They knew me. And so it--I think that sort of helped with the--with the safety that there wasn't someone coming in that was going to, you know, have a meeting with them and--and secretly record it and share it with everybody or...meet with them in an attacking way. But it's like how--how can we make this happen? What--what are your obstacles? What--what kinds of things are you facing? So that's been our--our kind of approach.

In addition to some early-on things I mentioned, like getting our nondiscrimination policy updated to include gender identity and gender expression, working on insurance issues, that kind of thing, we also wanted to do community-building and expand on the listserv that had been created to let people know about events, to plan events, and having the structure gave us a little bit of a budget for the first time. I know some of the early UVA Pride kinds of events happened because the people planning the events all brought something--all brought food and drinks to share with people, and that was--you know, because the university certainly wasn't recognizing the group or funding the group. And this committee was the first time that happened.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense. So what are some of the things that you think have been really successful that the committee's worked on?

GN: So I think the--getting the--the policies and insurance to be more reflective has been a really big one. I think where we--probably the one thing that we spent the most time talking about that never happened was domestic partner benefits, and that was disappointing. Unfortunately also in the 2007ish time frame, the--the state of Virginia--it went to the voters, a constitutional amendment was proposed that would define marriage

as being between one man and one woman. Virginia had a really terrible--terribly worded constitutional amendment in that it didn't stop there. It also banned civil unions and banned any kind of contractual relationship that purported to provide the same benefits of marriage to gay couples. So it was--it was pretty widespread and I'm not a lawyer and lawyers can debate this.

Unfortunately, the lawyers who were in charge at the time said that meant that we could--that the university could not offer domestic partner benefits. And the reason being that you know, the university pays a portion of insurance coverage, even for the--the dependents who are covered by the policy. So it was sort of the idea that no--no state dollars could go to benefit...a domestic partner. Gay or straight. So--so yeah. So that was disappointing. And I think we had--we had several ideas of ways that we could try to do this.

And then I think the same-sex marriage movement really started to happen and I remember meeting with President Sullivan, at the time, who said, "Well, you know, I think it's just a matter of time before same-sex marriage happens here. Let's make sure that we have the forms ready. HR's ready to--to provide insurance coverage to same-sex spouses when it--when it happens." And so we--we did. And so when...when marriage equality happened in Virginia, we were ready the next day. I mean, all the forms had been changed, you know, in advance, to just say "spouse one and spouse two" or "employee and spouse," whatever it was. So all of those things had been done and so everything had been updated so that it was ready to go and so that--that helped.

But I think in addition to the--to those kinds of sort of baseline changes, we wanted to make sure that there were more events for the community. And so we started a

welcome reception in the fall that was--that was funded by the university and Aramark donated food and so it was--it was--it was a helpful way to do that. Started inviting people and it was a way for more and more people to become aware of us. We did it in the fall, thinking that as we get new faculty and some new staff starting, it would be a good introduction to them. And so we--we'd get information that way. I think that--that has been a--another important accomplishment for the committee.

And then just sort of trying to get out there with training and outreach. Making sure that there were same-sex examples in our Title IX training. Thinking about a transition guide to help the--the trans community with issues they were facing. Kind of logistical issues of how do you change gender markers in systems? How do you get a new ID? How does all that work? Making sure that that's--that's out there. Having a mention in New Employee Orientation so that people know about not just this committee but all the affinity groups that are out there. I think it sends an important signal, not only to members of those various communities but to everyone that people in these communities are valued and welcomed at the university.

And then I think working with other existing organizations like the Virginia Film Festival, Festival of the Book to help promote queer content that they had and I think as we got more people to attend those events, it made them, you know, want to offer more. So it was really a win-win. I mean, we talked about things like, "Well, we should have a queer film festival." And I don't know how to do that. I'm sure it's [laughs] I know a film festival's a lot of work. And I--it just made more sense for us to partner with existing kinds of programs to do that, and the Film Festival and Festival of the Book have both been wonderful to work with.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, it seems like the Film Festival in particular has a pretty good slate of queer-related films, which is always nice. I'm curious about your work with UVA Health and how you've worked--especially around, I know you've done a ton of work around trans-inclusive care.

GN: Yes. So one thing that we did, and I really credit the Medical Center with doing this, the Human Rights Campaign, the national organization, came up with this...sort of best practices ranking system called the Healthcare Equality Index. And we kind of talked about it and the Medical Center agreed to participate knowing that we had some work to do there. And so the first time we--we went through this instrument--there are certain best practices listed and in some sections, there might be twenty things and if you do fifteen you get full credit and all the scores can add up to 100, even without you doing everything that's on the list. But the first time the Medical Center did this ranking, their score was 60 out of 100. And we all knew it wouldn't be great going into it, but I really applaud them for their willingness to do that, just so we had a baseline of, "Where are we?"

And so this committee was formed that the--the Transgender Advisory Committee, now the Transgender and LGBTQ Advisory Committee--to kind of look at the items on the list and to think about, "Well, what else can we do? And what--" And we were missing some pretty important pieces on it. And so over time, we've--we've added more and more things. The score--at one point, the score hit a hundred, but I--we have purposely not publicized that heavily because you can get a score of a hundred without doing everything on the list. And especially--there were still a couple of things that we weren't doing that we thought, "I don't think we deserve a hundred." I think it's just the

way that the instrument's worded, right? But we--but we did achieve this Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality ranking, which I think is important.

But we had--we had expanded the--the nondiscrimination policies, you know, when I talk about those, it's not only faculty and staff, but it's for students and it's for patients. And so the Medical Center's nondiscrimination policy includes the ability to--to receive care and--and have visitors come to see you regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. And--and--and that was a real issue in the early years, and I had some issues with that here and other places that I can separately tell you about. But--so that was an important kind of groundwork, I think.

But making sure that our medical record system was updated to include patient pronouns, to be able to identify--self-identify gender-identity, gender expression, sexual orientation in the system, to document sex assigned at birth, what affirmation steps people might have taken in a transition. None of that was in the system before, and it's--it's so important for--for your healthcare providers to understand everything about you. To be able to give you proper care. And especially transgender members of the community often, you know, they're really nervous about sharing this information and thinking they'll be--they'll be treated differently. They won't get good care.

And then you know, and--keeping in mind, trans people need to go to the eye doctor and get an appendectomy and all the health kind of prev--health care services like everybody else. And--and you know, if you're going to the eye doctor, maybe you can keep it a secret, but you need to--they need to know what drugs you're taking, and they need to know your, you know, full picture. And then we--with training, we developed training for the staff at the Medical Center about providing good care to the LGBT

community, about how to update--a separate training module for people who are updating that kind of information in the medical record system, Epic, to make sure they know how to do that.

And then I think probably my fav--and then I'll shut up about the Medical Center--but I think probably my favorite story with the Medical Center is that we wanted to make sure that we--we let people know about the services that were available to our community. And they started a trans clinic. And it was not like a full-blown, 24/7 clinic, but just identified a space where trans patients could go and see all of the kinds of healthcare providers they needed with people who were not only friendly and helpful, which we expect of everybody, but people who were knowledgeable about what it is to be transgender, and what kinds of questions and what vocabulary, you know, getting some extra training.

And so they started it a couple times a month, they'd have it, and word got out really quickly. And it started filling up. And it got to the point that people were waiting five months for an appointment. And so they added more and more times at this clinic to devote it to the trans community and what I love about that story is that it's an example of the Medical Center doing it at first because it was the right thing, and then after--after they did it and saw that there was this wait, it was like, "Well, not only is it the right thing, but we're meeting--we're providing services to an untapped market here." I mean, it's good for the Medical Center too, and that's great! That's what it should be. And so I think in--in--in more recent years they've hired more healthcare providers that are able to provide services to the transgender community. We're doing the full spectrum of surgeries for gender transformation or affirmation. That we weren't providing before.

And--and so it's--it's been I think one of the most positive experiences has been with the Medical Center.

CP: Yeah, I've talked with folks and they--yeah, UVA seems like the place to do it in this area.

GN: Yeah.

CP: Like if you're going to have that kind of care, it seems like--

GN: Absolutely.

CP: UVA's it.

GN: And you know, and I--and I say this when we talk about you know, there's a similar ranking we use for students, and we can talk about that too, but we just want to make sure we have all the right policies and training and procedures in place. That is not to say that I'm--I'm claiming that every transgender patient has a perfect experience here. None of us will. I mean, there--the Medical Center talks about how there--there are over a million patient encounters a year. They're not all going to go well. But that should be the exception rather than the rule, and--and you know, if--if you go to an eye--you know, if you go to see an endocrinologist, they're--they're skilled in transgender healthcare. If you go to an eye clinic, you might be the first trans person or even the first gay person somebody there has met. But now that we have at least some baseline training in place, I think it's helpful that they should have the vocabulary, they should--they should be thoughtful of you know, what experiences you're having, so--so yeah. Things are--things are definitely better and there's still--there's still work to be done.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, is there anything in particular that you all are sort of working on to improve, I don't know, looking in the next five years or whatever?

GN: Well one thing that was interesting, I mentioned students, I worked with a student group last year. So we--we offered the...at the--at one point in time, the insurance plan for both faculty and staff and for students only offered counseling services to people who were transgender. And we were successful in getting hormonal treatments and surgical options added. So like all insurance, you know, you pay a portion of it, it's not like everything's free, but--but prior to that nothing was covered other than counseling services. And so--but a group of students from the law school last year contacted me and they said that they were looking at the list of services that aren't included in our trans coverage, and there are some that they think really need to be, and that some of our peers are covering. [Phone rings]

So we--we looked at the--the students said that there were services that were excluded from our student health plan for the transgender population that our peers were adding. And so we looked at that and found that yeah, there were about a dozen things that over time have become more--more commonplace. More accepted--widely accepted as being a necessary component of gender affirmation. And we took it to the Student Health Insurance Committee, and it was approved. And so that's the way I think you do it. Is--you know, and it was funny, because they were saying, "Should we start a petition?" And I said, "Please don't start a petition." I mean, you can, and I think there's a time and a place for it, but I said, "We haven't even asked yet. Let's ask. Sometimes that's all you have to do, is ask that question."

And--and so I want to make sure that we are now that we look at the same kinds of things in our faculty and staff plan. Like how do they compare? And do they--are there more things that we need to add there. And I think also from the--the standpoint of

surrogacy and sort of family planning issues, those have--those have again gotten better but my understanding is that there's still some obstacles to--that we need to deal with there, so those are two things that I'd like to look at, and then--then I'd--you know, now that we're--we're finally out of the--not out, but the pandemic's not as intense as it was, certainly, people are getting together more.

We--we had our welcome reception in the fall again after not doing it for a couple of years. I think--worked with the Film Festival and they had a great turnout, but I'd like to see us do some more events, and the committee's really--is going to be meeting in the spring to sort of--at the start of 2023 to sort of think about, "Well, what's next? What's--let's strategize about what this committee should be." There're fewer of the benefits and policy kinds of things that need to be done. Should it be more about outreach and training? Should it be more about events and having an employee resource group? And so it's a good problem to have.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. I am curious--I mean it sounds like you have a pretty good sort of both personal and working relationship with a lot of sort of the administrators at UVA, senior leadership. I'm curious if you've encountered resistance. I mean it sounds like there was some resistance to the domestic partner benefits.

GN: Mm-hmm.

CP: And where that was coming from. You know, was that coming from the administration? Was it coming from the Board? Was it coming from the state legislature? From alumni? Like where--where do you sort of see the challenges there?

GN: Yeah. I think it was people saying, "Well, we don't think we can do that because of this law that's been passed." And--now, you know, whether they would have

done it before is--is--is anybody's guess, but--but I think--I think they--they would have. I think what helped is--is hearing from people who had--people they knew. People they worked with who said, "You know, my--my partner can't get on UVA's health plan." And I remember we would talk about insurance issues and a lot of my straight friends, even people who knew Allen, my husband, were shocked to find out that he wasn't on my health plan. That he wasn't on UVA insurance. And I said, "No. And he's--he's a Realtor. He doesn't have employer-provided health insurance." So it was really expensive. And you know, we were fortunate that we had the option to--to pay it. Employees who are in more entry-level positions or lower-paying jobs don't have the luxury of paying over \$1,000 a month for health insurance. So it--there were people going uninsured. Or people paying a lot of money for it. And so having--having that connection, I think, helped.

But you know, my advocacy really started more in 2011, and--and I have to say that I--I haven't encountered anybody who wasn't willing to sit down and talk to us and think about a way to make this work. They you know, people want to know, "Well, what are the obstacles? What does the law say? How much is this going to cost?" And let's--let's help them figure out those things so that we can help them answer the question and convince them, show them that this makes a lot of sense. And so--so we've been fortunate in that respect.

When I was thinking about the pandemic and how--how are we going to get the committee to meet? How are we going to get people interested? I asked former President Casteen to come to an LGBT Committee meeting, and he did. And he talked about adding sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination policy. Teresa Sullivan came to, and has still come, to our welcome reception. Jim Ryan comes to our welcome reception. He

attended the meeting. So even at that level, we've had at least that kind of an open door. And--and interest in supporting what we're doing, which has been really different than when I started at UVA.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense. Let's see. You mentioned something about you--you've had some issues with you know, sort of your personal experiences with healthcare, sort of having people--is that something you want to talk about more?

GN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean--in the early years, so my husband had--had a bad car accident and there's this sort of, "Well, who is this person? And we only want family to come in." And at that time, did I meet the definition of family? Also, over in the--in the Valley when Allen's mother was in the hospital, one time she was in intensive care and they--they were saying, "No, only--only family can come in." And I wasn't permitted to go in and I thought, "Well, they're just restricting it to her husband and her children, and if that's all that can go see her and she's really sick, I'll just--I'm not fighting this battle. I'll just sit there."

Well, then my--my husband's sister came in with her boyfriend at the time, and they were just sort of opening the door for the two of them to walk in. And she'd been dating him for, you know, less than a year, and at that point Allen and I had been together for decades, and I thought--I thought, "No. Hold on a minute. This is--this is not okay." And so I approached them about it and I said, "So when they leave, I'm going in, and that's it." And they let me come in. And so when my--my mother in law got better and we told her about that, and she was really upset that they wouldn't let me in and let in the--the sister's boyfriend, and so she said, "If I'm ever in the hospital again, I'm just going to tell them that you're my son. And they'll let--and they'll let you in."

So it was kind of a--kind of a heartwarming story, really, when she--another time she was in the hospital and she was really sick, and we weren't sure how she was--how she was doing, she--and they were--they were worried that she had oxygen cut off to her brain, and was she going to be okay and was she going to be with it when she woke up? But she told them that--that Allen was her son and that I was her other son. And so I thought--it was just sort of a funny way to--to describe it. But--but yeah it was sort of how--it was a signal that I knew she was okay enough to sort of be a little bit deceptive about who I was [both laugh] and so she wanted me to be there, and so that was nice that she did.

CP: Did you and Allen go through the I don't know, the whole legal process of like durable power of attorney and all that stuff before marriage?

GN: We did.

CP: Yeah.

GN: Yeah, so those experiences made us realize we really needed to do that. So we had wills drawn up, we had the power of attorney, we had...so that, you know, we knew that we could make decisions for each other, and we were fortunate that we both had supportive families so if we ever got into a situation like that, we didn't think it would be an issue, but people don't act right sometimes [laughs] when they're going through grief, and you never know. And it certainly was an issue for other gay couples, where their partner wasn't able to make--help with any end-of-life decisions or--or things like that.

And one--we were talking--so we talked to the family, both families, about the fact that we had documented this kind of information, and--and it--Allen's mother said--

we said we wanted to be cremated, and she said, "Well, just so you know, if I'm still alive, Allen will never be cremated." And [laughs] I said, "Oh really?" And she said, "No, I--I don't--I don't think it's right. I don't like--I don't like the idea of it. And if I'm still alive, he will not be cremated." So we documented that--and Allen signed something that said that he wanted to be cremated, and I thought, "Hopefully we won't have to deal with that." And we--we didn't. But...

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Shifting--well, sort of shifting tacts a little bit, but before we sort of move totally away from--move away a little bit from the LGBT Committee stuff, is there anything else that you wanted to say about working at UVA, about the LGBT Committee, anything like that before we--we shift tacts a little bit?

GN: I would say just that--that I've been fortunate to have a good experience. I mean, I've been out and promoted a number of times over the years, as have other people. But we're a big place. And not everybody has the same experience, and so if you--you know, if you work in the hospital or in Facilities or you're a professor at Darden, or you work in Carruthers Hall, it--it can feel like you're working for a different employer. Or the Library. I mean, it's a very different environment. It's going to come down to what the culture's like of your office. Who you report to. And so certainly not everybody's had a good experience.

But I think what's important is that we have the policy protections in place. We have offices to help people who run into issues. And--and that we have the kind of visibility to let people know that--that we're a welcome part of the community. And so I think that's generally the case. And--and that's very different from when I started here, where I didn't feel safe to be out at work. Knowing that I could be fired if--if I had the

wrong supervisor and that sort of thing. So definitely--definitely has improved. I think that the...when you think about my day-to-day life, it's really not that different from an old married straight couple. I mean, we work, we go home, we have the dog, we have the house, we--you know, it's that kind of--that kind of stuff.

And so I think coworkers are either not thinking about the fact that there was a long period of time where he couldn't be on my health plan, or we have a blood drive in the building and someone comes and says, "Have you signed up for the blood drive?" I make a point of saying, "No. You know, queers aren't allowed to give blood." And they're like, "Uh, what?" [Laughs] and so it's the sort of thing that people don't think about. So--but gay men are not allowed to--to give blood, so I--I try to make a point of making people aware of that.

And it's--I think the other thing that's been interesting is that when I first came out, I had a number of people say to me, "You're the first gay person I've met." And I said, "Well I promise you that I'm not. I--the first one who maybe has been comfortable enough to tell you that I'm gay, but you definitely have--there are other gay people working at UVA. You have gay people in your neighborhood, in your church, and probably in your family somewhere." But...you know, I never hear that anymore, so [laughs]. But our--our trans faculty and staff and students certainly do hear that. And--and that still may be true. If you're going, again, if you're going to--to have a healthcare procedure or you're a faculty member could be the first trans person that they've met. And the--the point is, that's okay. It's a learning opportunity. But everyone needs to be treated with dignity and respect, and that's what--that's what we're coming down to, and--and--and we have resources here to help you if we need that.

CP: Yeah.

GN: And I think for students, I mentioned the Healthcare Equality Index; there's-- there's similarly a Campus Pride Index that looks at resources you have available to students, and what I--one thing I like about both of those instruments is that not only do they look at programming and policies related to students and patients, but they want to make sure you're treating your faculty and staff well as--also. So they ask about insurance coverage; they ask about nondiscrimination policy for faculty and staff. At one point, we--when we submitted that we were--we were ranked much lower. Not even the best college or university in the state, for the LGBT community, and the last time I looked at it we were seventh in the country. As being the most welcoming place for LGBTQ students. So we've--we've made a lot of progress there, too, and you know. Still have work to do, but it's--it's certainly--I--I'm very proud of the university's accomplishments in those areas.

CP: Yeah. Absolutely. I am curious a little bit as somebody who's--you've spent time in Staunton, you've spent time in Charlottesville, as somebody who grew up in the Valley I know that sometimes those feel like--

GN: Yeah.

CP: Or they can feel very--like very different places. So I'm curious what your experience has been. Either recently or when you're growing up; did you see--did you feel like you know, like you--I don't know, felt safer in one place, more accepted in one place?

GN: Yeah.

CP: One community was a little more open?

GN: Yeah, I--I definitely felt safer here, in Charlottesville. I think because I--I-- again, because I didn't know everybody.

CP: And that was a good thing that you didn't know everybody.

GN: And that was a good thing that I didn't know everybody [CP laughs]. And-- and--the same with my husband, who grew up in--in Staunton as well. That was sort of a double-edged thing. I think that even--I think we--you know, we ran into examples of where maybe people weren't as open or accepting of the community, but they were like, "But we like Allen and Gary. Because we've known them for a hundred years." I mean, so maybe just sort of quietly being there helped plant that seed of like you know--even though I hate hearing this--this sort of like, "Well maybe they're one of the good ones," kind of you know mentality is not okay. It's a start. But it's not okay.

And--and I think what's interesting is that you know, growing up--and something I share with our students is that when--when I came out, it wasn't just about telling people you were gay. I think it was about accepting the fact that at the time, I knew I could never join the military. I could never get married. I couldn't have children. I wouldn't find a church that was accepting of me. That I'd have to keep it really secret at work because I might be fired. And to see all of those things improve to the point that you can do all of those things, some more easily than others, but that all of those things are now possible is pretty amazing. I would have never guessed it. And you know, we split our time now between Staunton and Charlottesville, and we have lots of friends. We have our families are--are very accepting. Our--we haven't had problems with our neighbors, so we've been very fortunate in that regard. So Staunton's evolved too.

CP: It has. [GN laughs] There's an LGBT center in Staunton but not in

Charlottesville.

GN: There is! There's an LGBT center in--in Staunton. Staunton's had Pride twice. So we went to Staunton Pride with our--with our nephew and his wife and our grand-nephew, like baby's first Pride! You know, he was [both laugh] he was very little when he went--and it was--it was a fun, family-friendly event and so yeah, it--this year it was in the park that I used to walk to as a kid. I would have never imagined that there would be Pride in Staunton.

CP: Yeah.

GN: Have had openly gay people on City Council in Staunton. It's--it's surprising that--that--that's happened, so I think--now I feel comfortable either place.

CP: Yeah. That's amazing.

GN: Which--which would not have been the case early on.

CP: Yeah. Have you been to anything that the LGBT center in Staunton has done?

GN: I haven't. They--they--they offer some good programming for--for queer youth and I haven't gotten involved in it. My--my involvement's been at UVA.

CP: Yeah.

GN: I mean, I kind of thought, "I can't--you know, I can't change the world but I can have some influence at UVA, and that's where I'm going to devote my time and effort."

CP: Yeah.

GN: And--but I applaud what they're doing and they're doing great work. We were--helped serve as a sponsor at Pride, my husband did, as a Realtor and but no, we haven't been super involved.

CP: Yeah. That makes sense.

GN: Yeah.

CP: Shifting to some kind of bigger-picture questions, you know race relations is something that--that comes up a lot when we're thinking about Charlottesville.

GN: Yeah.

CP: So in your experience, how have--do Black and white queer people in Charlottesville relate to each other? Again, either now or in your past experiences?

GN: Yeah. I think the early years it you know, at UVA, when it was the Gay Student Union, it was very male. There were--there were not many women involved and--and not many people of color. There were few people of color at UVA in general then, and I think adding the--the Lesbian and Gay Student Union certainly helped and helped signal that--that women in the community were welcome. And where I saw it more was in the local bars. Because there it was just the whole community, and I think it seemed a little bit more welcoming and safer to people of color.

And certainly the--the gay people I know who are in minority communities say that--that intersectionality was in a lot of ways, made it tougher for them to come out. They were afraid that they wouldn't be accepted as--as a person of color in the queer community and then would they be accepted as a queer person in--in the African American community or the Latina--Latinx community or whatever, but so that--that's certainly an issue. I think that when you're working at UVA, there's certainly a--a better--better mix of--of people attending events.

One thing we--we thought about early on was we didn't have--we didn't see as much representation from people of color, and so it was important to me that our LGBT

community or [CP coughs] it was important to me that our LGBT Committee include diversity as well, so it's always been important to me that we have people of color on the committee, that we have all of the letters represented, we have men and women, we have faculty and staff, we include the--we include UVA Health and the Health System representation in it to--to make sure that people see themselves on the committee. But yeah, I think--I think Charlottesville in general, it's...has work to do there, even in the straight community. And we see the same thing in--in the queer community, unfortunately.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Sort of on that note, I mean, as--as somebody who's been at UVA and involved at UVA for a long time, do you see there being a kind of a difference between or a separation between like UVA staff and faculty and the rest of Charlottesville? You know, especially when it comes to you know, do queer staff and faculty hang out together; they don't necessarily hang out with I don't know, people who are just in the community? Is that something that you see? Have you seen that kind of mixing throughout, or is it kept pretty separate?

GN: I think--it's interesting. I think there--there were definitely parties that faculty or staff would have, but other people were invited, so I think there was that sort of--it helped to know who other people were at the university, but we've--between that and the bars, I think we--we've--there's always been a decent mix. Where...where it's been interesting is that I think you know, we no longer--we no longer have a bar. And I know that--I think it's attributable to a couple of things. One is that my husband and I are comfortable going to any restaurant or bar in town now. I mean, and I--I think we would be accepted as a couple at most places. So there's not as much of a need to feel like we've

got to go somewhere that's a safe space to--to be--to be together and--and people are meeting each other through apps now, not by going out to the--to the local gay bar.

So in a way it's sort of nice that we're more part of society and more accepted--more accepted, but there's--there's less community in some ways as well as far as queer people getting together. Except for events like Cville Pride, which is wonderful, and you know, I mentioned the Film Festival and other things that sort of are designed for the community. But there are--there's--it just seems like there's less of that, which is kind of a mixed blessing. I don't know.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I agree. But--yeah. It's--it's just a sort of interesting conundrum, I think. So on that note, do you feel like you're part of a queer community here in Charlottesville? Or in Staunton? In your life in general, I guess?

GN: I mean, I do, because I certainly have friends and coworkers who are, but I also think that it's--it's a place where you can be integrated in the--in the community itself. And you know, you think about having events or sort of subgroups for the community, and if you wanted to be in a--in a book club or play basketball or go places with your--if you have young children, yeah, you could--you could have queer groups doing that, but I think that people are generally feeling accepted into the larger community groups that do that, and so there's less of a need to--to--to have a, I don't know, gay basketball league or gay book club or something when--and even people I know who are--who are proudly out at work, I talk to them about you know, would you want to be part of the committee or would you want to go to this event, some people do and some people don't. It's just--I don't--either they don't feel the need to do it. In the early days, I think it was because--it was fear of being outed. But today, it's sort of like I

can just go anywhere I want and be who I am and no one cares, so there's less of a need to--to pull together as a community in some ways.

CP: So what do you think people don't know about queer life in Charlottesville that they maybe should?

GN: I think that... I think that--approaching it from--from two different ways. I think one is something I mentioned that you know, in a lot of ways, now that I'm an--an older married guy, it's not that--it's really not as different as people think it is. But--but--

CP: It's not--being like in a sort of you know, a long-term committed relationship, that part is the same whether your married to--regardless of who you're married to?

GN: Yeah. Yeah. And I think it's--it's funny. I hear people talk about, "Well, you know, men and women disagreeing or looking at things differently." Well so do two women or two men, I mean, you're going to have one that likes to spend money more than the other or one that wants to have Thai food for dinner and one that doesn't, you know, kind of thing. So there's those--those kind of differences are just when two people get together. I think they're--you're not going to see eye to eye on every single thing.

But I--but I think that--that there are still--there are still obstacles that the community faces, and you know, especially working with students. I've had older gay friends especially say, "Well, why do you even need an LGBTQ center for students? Don't they all have a coming out party when they're in the eighth grade?" [Truck drives by] You know? And--and so some of them, you know, certainly do have that kind of experience, but--but we have students who have really negative experiences with their family. And--and when I've been asked to go to student groups or classes and talk about my coming out experience, a lot of which I've shared with you, my initial thought was,

"Would this even resonate with our students?" I mean, I'm older than their parents now, so would they care about my coming out story?

And what--what surprises me even, and what's a little bit sad, is that that fear of rejection is still very strong. Even growing up with--with queer people in the media and--and out actors and singers and--and athletes. There are people who really fear that rejection from their family. Even--even people who ended up having a good experience with their family had some degree of that--of that fear. And then there are others who have terrible experiences and get kicked out of their house or you know, they have family members who don't talk to them anymore. A student who didn't have certain family members come to his graduation after they found out that--that he was gay. So we still have that. And--and so yes, it--it can appear that everything's perfect and we've solved this problem but--but we haven't, and I'd say, you know, even if you look at the advances that we've made in--in kind of racial diversity you know, things aren't perfect there either. There's still work to be done.

CP: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Is there anything else you'd like to share for the historical record that you haven't yet?

GN: No. I think I've covered everything. Just that I--I think covering this history is--is important and I'm--and I'm glad that people are looking at it. I think you know, remembering how much anxiety there was about something like gym membership. When I mention it to students now, they laugh, and they think, "How could that have ever been a thing?" You know? In our--in our family housing, unmarried people were not allowed to live in--in family housing together, and the reason was that there was a law against lewd and lascivious cohabitation, which just meant people in a relationship living

together without being married, and so we weren't able to have--you know, thinking about hiring an RA or an area coordinator, if they had a significant other, that person couldn't live in that space with them. Thinking that we might have law students who are here together, gay or straight, but unmarried, they couldn't live in an apartment together at--at UVA. At one point. And that changed. And to--to see those changes--those things change over time; I think it's important to have a--a reflection there. If you haven't seen it, there's a--there's a--a history board in the--in Newcomb Hall that one of the students worked on and interviewed a number of us about that, and so--but created really museum-quality--

CP: Yeah. It's great.

GN: Yeah. Information about some of the things that happened, and so--but--but yeah, I appreciate that--that younger people have interest in this, and I think hearing--hearing things like that that seem so ridiculous today, I hope they--that all of this--the idea that there was a time in which we couldn't get married, I hope that seems equally ridiculous thirty or forty years from now.

CP: Yeah. I hope so too.

GN: And I hope we still can. [Both laugh] It sounds--I think--I think we'll be okay, but you never know.

CP: Yeah. Well, we have to get that--we have to get rid of that constitutional amendment in Virginia.

GN: Yes, we do. We do need to get rid of that.

CP: Yeah. Okay. Well, Gary, thanks so much for doing this.

GN: Okay.

CP: I really appreciate it.

GN: Thank you. I'm glad to do it.

**END OF RECORDING**