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**Title**

Brian McNaught Oral History Interview and Transcript

**Date**

May 5, 2021

**Extant**

2 hours 5 minutes interview and 1 transcript

**Abstract**

In this oral history, gay writer and activist Brian McNaught discusses his work advocating for LGBTQ rights in the Catholic Church, as well as in workplaces and government. McNaught describes being fired from his position at a Catholic newspaper after coming out and founding the Detroit chapter of Dignity and the subsequent protest. He later worked with the mayor of Boston to coordinate the city's response to the AIDS epidemic.

**Biographical**

Brian McNaught is a pioneering activist in the Roman Catholic Church, a certified sexuality educator, an award-winning writer, and an internationally-acclaimed corporate diversity trainer. His twelve books and seven ground-breaking educational DVDs on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues are used for training in schools, churches, corporations, and U.S. Government agencies. He has spoken on gay and transgender workplace issues to senior managers in Mumbai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney, Melbourne, London, and throughout North America.

Brian is the middle child of seven Irish Catholics, born in Detroit, and raised in Flint, Grand Blanc, and Birmingham, Michigan. He is the product of sixteen years of Catholic education, having graduated from Brother Rice High School in Birmingham and Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His degree is in journalism. Brian was an altar boy, patrol boy, and Boy Scout. He studied briefly as a postulant with the Christian Brothers of Ireland.

As a conscientious objector to the war in Vietnam, Brian began his alternative service in 1970 at The Michigan Catholic, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of Detroit. He worked there as a reporter, columnist, and as an occasional television talk show host. His popular, award-winning, youth-oriented column prompted speaking engagements at local Catholic high

schools and to senior citizens. When he came out in 1974 after founding the Detroit chapter of Dignity, the organization of LGBTQ Catholics, his column was immediately dropped by the newspaper. This resulted in a nationally-covered civil rights battle during which Brian engaged in a hunger fast to call attention to the plight of gay Catholics. The water fast ended after seventeen days when two bishops in Detroit publicly pledged to work to educate the clergy on gay issues. "...we have a serious obligation to root out those structures and attitudes that discriminate against the homosexual as a person," Bishops Thomas Gumbleton and Joseph Imesch wrote in a letter to Brian. He was nevertheless fired by the newspaper for his public protest.

Former Congressman Barney Frank said of Brian, "No one has done a better job of chronicling what it is like to be gay in America." A twelve-year syndicated column (1974-1986) in the gay press led to the publication by Dignity Inc. of Brian's first book, *A Disturbed Peace - Selected Writings of an Irish Catholic Homosexual*. This early primer on reconciling sexual orientation and spirituality became a popular coming out book, and evolved into *On Being Gay - Thoughts on Family, Faith and Love* (St. Martin's Press) which is available for free with his other books and DVDs at [www.brian-mcnaught.com](http://www.brian-mcnaught.com). Both titles contain the essay, "The Sad Dilemma of the Gay Catholic," which won "Best Magazine Article of the Year" from the Catholic Press Association. The newer edition includes "Dear Anita, Late Night Thoughts of an Irish Catholic Homosexual." This open letter to the well-known leader of the anti-gay movement in the late 1970s prompted a television debate between Brian and Anita Bryant Ministries in 1978, which is available on YouTube.

In 1976, Brian moved from Detroit to Boston where he joined the national office of Dignity and served as the organization's director of social action. In that capacity, he represented gay Catholics at the historic Call to Action Conference, a bicentennial hearing on social justice of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He successfully lobbied 1300 delegates there for a variety of pro-gay measures that were later dismissed by the bishops.

In 1982, Brian was hired as the Mayor of Boston's Liaison to the Gay and Lesbian Community. In that capacity, he initiated and coordinated the city's response to the AIDS epidemic, conducted a citywide study of LGBTQ citizens needs, and trained police, health, and other service providers. He served in that groundbreaking position for two years.

Named "The godfather of gay sensitivity training" by The New York Times, Brian is considered the world's leading corporate diversity consultant dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer issues in the workplace. He has spoken to hundreds of audiences, including those at the National Security Agency (NSA), the U.S. State Department, the Federal Reserve, and numerous Fortune 100 companies. His book, *Gay Issues in the Workplace* (St. Martin's Press) was selected for inclusion in the Library of Congress. He is certified as a sexuality educator by the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists. Brian speaking Brian is the author of twelve books, including *Now That I'm Out, What Do I Do?* (St. Martin's Press,) "Sex Camp," and *Are You Guys Brothers?*(Author House.) Through Amazon's KDP, he published Brian McNaught's *Guide to LGBTQ Issues in the Workplace*, *Two Guys and a Dog Make a Family*, *The Lincoln Chronicles 1 - Puppy Wisdom for Happy Living*, *The Lincoln Chronicles 2 - A Young Dog's View of Life*, and the children's books, *Professor Tuttle's Lesson on Friendship*, *Grogg is a Frog Without Polliwogs*, and "What's 'Gay'?" Asked Mae, which has been made into a three-minute animated movie by [www.sexsmartfilms.com](http://www.sexsmartfilms.com). His

upcoming book is *On Being Gay and Gray - Our Stories, Loves, Gifts, and the Meaning of our Lives*. Brian is featured in seven educational videos/DVDs, three of which have been aired regularly by public access stations nationally. His most recent training film is the award-winning *Anyone Can be an Ally - Speaking Up for an LGBT Inclusive Workplace*.

In 2012, *Out and Equal Workplace Advocates* gave Brian a lifetime achievement award for his pioneering work as an educator on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues. In 2019 the *Stonewall National Museum & Archives* gave him their *Legacy Award*. He's also been honored by the *Human Rights Campaign* and *Planned Parenthood*.

Brian and his spouse Ray Struble have been partners since 1976. They were married in Ottawa, Ontario on June 30, 2003.

Brian McNaught's papers are held by Cornell University's *Human Sexuality Archive*. Brian and Ray's *Collection of LGBTQ Historical Artifacts* is housed at the *Stonewall National Museum & Archives* in Ft. Lauderdale.

Currently, Brian has a column in *South Florida Gay News* and does a weekly podcast on spiritual issues, called, "Are You Happy Without the Movie," available on Facebook and YouTube.

### **Scope and Content**

In this oral history, gay writer and activist Brian McNaught discusses his work advocating for LGBTQ rights in the Catholic Church, as well as in workplaces and government. McNaught describes being fired from his position at a Catholic newspaper after coming out and founding the Detroit chapter of *Dignity* and the subsequent protest. He later worked with the mayor of Boston to coordinate the city's response to the AIDS epidemic.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of *LGBT-RAN*. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

### **Access**

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/brian-mcnaught>.

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### **Languages**

Collection material is in English

### **Cite as**

“Brian McNaught | Oral History”, LGBTQ Religious Archives Network  
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**Digital finding aid created by Sarah McCall, 2023**

**Tags**

Catholic (Roman)

Dignity

Activist (religious institutions)

Author/editor

McNaught, Brian

Bryant, Anita

EXHIBIT Rolling the Stone Away

Detroit

Michigan

AIDS