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Title

Manfred Hassemer-Tiedeken Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

July 3, 2019

Extant

1 hour 25 minutes (two files) and 2 transcripts

Abstract

In this oral history, Haassemer discusses meeting his partner, HaJo, and their work as a medical team in the global South. He discusses living in Germany when the Berlin wall came down, and coming out to his community. He started the local group for HuK, as well as forming a common living arrangement with other aging LGBT people.

Biographical

Manfred Hassemer-Tiedeken was born in 1950 to Gertrud and Fritz Tiedeken in Münster (Westfalia). He was the third of six children born into this Roman Catholic family. He enjoyed being outdoors and interacting with nature and animals in his childhood. As a teenager he would do some work for neighboring farmers. He went to a Catholic school in Münster and was server at Mass in his parish church.

As he approached adulthood, Manfred was drawn to the religious life, but given his feelings of sexual attraction to men, he believed he could not or should not do that. So he enlisted in the military into a program that would train him to be a nurse. He spent some time of his military training on the island of Sylt which was also a mecca for gay Germans at the time. There he had some of his first experiences of socializing with gay men. After four years of service he was credentialed as a nurse.

Manfred felt called to serve as a nurse in a developing country, possibly Africa. However, he didn't feel like he could do that alone. In July 1972 he saw a letter in a gay magazine from a doctor who was looking for a companion to work in a developing country with him.

So Manfred responded to this letter and the next month he met Hans-Joachim (HaJo) Hassemer for the first time. Manfred learned that HaJo was a number of years older and that they had quite different personalities and physical attractions. However, their common interests and pursuits led them to rather quickly grow closer and fall in love. They moved to a common home a few months later – thus they lived up to now.

They agreed to pursue their common interest in providing medical service in a country in the Global South. They both enrolled for training at the Tropical Medical Institute in Liverpool, England. Manfred started the program there a few weeks before HaJo and struggled to learn English as he studied and lived there.

After completing that training, Manfred and HaJo returned to Germany and applied to serve on a medical mission team somewhere in English-speaking Africa. While there were a large number of openings and positions available, none were seeking a doctor together with a male nurse. So they worked at a hospital in Germany for a number of months until they were finally accepted into a hospital in Ethiopia. They went there in spring 1975. Manfred thrived in the nursing work there as he had a lot of flexibility to interact with and treat patients.

However, the workload was much heavier and more intense for HaJo, especially because the civil war had grown more and more intense. After six months, he decided he could not continue there and so they returned to Germany.

Manfred thought he could not return to work in a German hospital with much stricter protocols and supervision. He learned of a new program to train in community nursing with a Catholic institution in the Rhine Valley near Koblenz. So he enrolled in that program. When he was not in training Manfred enjoyed walking and exploring the nearby fields and forests. He discovered a charming country house that he learned was available to rent. After showing it to HaJo, they agreed to live there. Manfred took a community nursing position nearby and HaJo became a doctor for the German postal and telecommunication service. Manfred's gifts in cooking and hospitality led them to open their home regularly to friends and family.

Manfred learned of the new ecumenical group Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) in the summer of 1977 at the annual German Christian festival "Kirchentag" in Berlin. Upon returning to Koblenz, Manfred and HaJo convened a HuK group in that area which met regularly in their home. They also welcomed other HuK members and friends to their home. They also participated in the semiannual meetings of HuK in different cities. During this time Manfred gradually came out to his family and parents and they eventually grew tolerant and supportive of him and HaJo.

After 8 years in Koblenz, HaJo was offered a promotion to a postal service position in Bremen. In 1983 they moved there, but looked for a more pastoral place to live outside the city but near the train. They found a small house in Teufelsmoor and gradually grew to be fully accepted as two men living together and caring for each other in this rural community. Manfred continued to

work as a nurse in night duty, but also was busy with gardening and animals and became very involved in community life. He was elected to the local parliament from the Green party. The local Catholic parish was very conservative, so they found another parish a bit further away that was more appealing to them. Manfred was actively engaged in the life of the parish. During this time Manfred started to breed and raise Galloway cows and came into prominence in the related national society and contests.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the ensuing changes in the life of the country, HaJo's mother sought to reclaim their family property in formerly Communist-ruled East. When that property became available to the family in 1995, Manfred thought it was appropriate to move there, to the town of Rüdersdorf (near Berlin) to help the redevelopment of the eastern part of the country. Manfred found a job working some nights at a nearby psychiatric hospital. However, they found the cultural and religious life in this community to be much more conservative. So they regularly traveled to Berlin for HuK meetings and for religious activities.

After registration of our partnership at the Mayer's office 21.08.2009 As it had been possible for HaJo to adopt Manfred as his "son" in 1987 (for financial reasons), they disengaged the adoption, when in 2001 it became possible in Germany to enter a Civil Partnership – this they did in 2009.

As Manfred and HaJo both grew older, they found the regular travel into Berlin to be difficult, so they began thinking of forming a retirement community in Berlin. They recruited and convened a group of seniors and retirees in 2003-2004 to look at options of securing a number of flats together in a single building. This group spent a lot of time planning together and looking for property but all the options they found were too expensive. Through his participation in LVSD, the national LGBT political organization, Manfred met someone who knew of a property that was more affordable, albeit in less desirable part of the city. After some visits, six persons in the group secured five flats in a building in June 2007 and started forming a community together.

Manfred has continued to be active in the Green party and in Catholic parish life, as well as with HuK. He learned of the formation of a global network of GLBT Catholics and participated in their early meeting in Munich in December 2017. He was impressed to meet so many persons from so many countries who were resolute in their lives as LGBT and Catholic.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Haassemer discusses his Catholic upbringing and gay identity. After meeting his partner, HaJo, they worked as a medical team in the Global South. He discusses living in Germany when the Berlin wall came down, and coming out to his community. He started the local group for HuK, and attended the global network of GLBT Catholics and participated in their early meeting in Munich in December 2017. Since then, he and his partner have formed a common living arrangement with other aging LGBT people.

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

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Languages

Collection material is in English

Cite as

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Digital finding aid created by Sarah McCall, 2023

Tags

Hassemer-Tiedeken, Manfred

Germany

Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK)