

## Oral History Interview: Marnie Warner

Interviewee: Marnie Warner

Interviewer: Susan Echo

Date: June 26, 2012

Susan E. This is June 26<sup>th</sup>, a Tuesday, 2012, at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois. My name is Susan Echo, and I'll be interviewing...

Marnie W. Marnie Warner, from Boston, Mass.

Susan E. Marnie Warner, from Boston, Massachusetts. Marnie was very instrumental in the development and passage of the Open and Affirming Resolution in the United Church of Christ at the 1985 General Synod in Ames, Iowa. But let's start closer to the beginning. Okay, Marnie, hi.

Marnie W. Hi.

Susan E. Where did you grow up?

Marnie W. I grew up in Bethel, Connecticut in a town that was probably about 12,000 people at the time, and attended the First Congregational Church. And I even remember the discussions about whether or not the First Congregational Church should join the United Church of Christ.

Susan E. You already answered part of my second question. So you grew up Congregational?

Marnie W. Mm-hmm.

Susan E. Let's see, then the Congregational Church merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church around 1955, I believe.

Marnie W. I was going to say '56, but '55 might be...

Susan E. It could have been '56. Could have been '54. It was one of those three years.

Marnie W. Right.

Susan E. So when you were young, I don't know when that was. How old were you?

Marnie W. I'm a 1950 baby, so I was six years old, or five or six.

Susan E. Five or six, okay. And they did join the UCC eventually?

Marnie W. Yes, they did.

Susan E. Where did you go to college?

Marnie W. I went to Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin, which also has a Congregational basis in terms of its own history. But by the time I got there, it was an ecumenical college. But I came to the Midwest from Connecticut to go to college.

Susan E. Well, Beloit and Elmhurst were both historically related to the United Church of Christ.

Marnie W. Right.

Susan E. And Elmhurst still is. I'm not sure about this...

Marnie W. Beloit is, but again, we're in a more ecumenical society, so I think that – I think the faith values and core values are still taught, but it's not directly related to the UCC.

Susan E. Did you attend graduate school anywhere?

Marnie W. Yes. I went back to the East Coast in Boston to attend Simmons College, and I became a librarian, got a master's in library science.

Susan E. Oh, really?

Marnie W. Yeah.

Susan E. Did you specialize in any particular area of the library?

Marnie W. No, I didn't specialize, but I fell into basically law librarianship. My first job was at a law firm as a law firm librarian. Then I went on to work for the state agency called the Mass Board of Library Commissioners that does statewide development work, but I worked with prison libraries. And then in 1980 I became the first law library coordinator for the Massachusetts Trial Court, and I oversee now 17 law libraries that service the state.

Susan E. Oh, my goodness. I would say even if your training wasn't in law libraries...

Marnie W. Right, I ended up there.

Susan E. That's where you ended up. Well, great. And you got your MLS. How and when did you get hooked up with the United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian Gay Concerns?

Marnie W. Basically, it wasn't until I was at General Synod. I was a General Synod delegate in 1983, so I was not involved with the Coalition prior to that. I was aware of their work, but it wasn't until I went to General Synod in 1983 and started working on the resolution that I got more involved.

Susan E. You were a delegate from the Massachusetts Conference?

Marnie W. Correct.

Susan E. And was there a particular association that you were...?

Marnie W. You know, I think I was just a general delegate from the conference. I came out of the Boston Area Association, but we're more picked as just delegates. I had served on the Committee on Ministry, and I think that that was one of the reasons I got picked to be a delegate.

Susan E. Were you an under 30 delegate at that time or an over 30 delegate?

Marnie W. In '85, no, I wasn't. I was just younger.

Susan E. Just a lay delegate.

Marnie W. A lay delegate, yes. Yes, I was not a youth delegate.

Susan E. But younger than you are now.

Marnie W. Right.

Susan E. So you were not involved with the Coalition until you were a delegate. Sometimes that works the other way around. Tell me about those early days of your activity with the Coalition.

Marnie W. Well, I think what I should actually go back to answer that question is I was involved at Church of the Covenant in Boston, and at that point, they had already become a More Light church, which is the Presbyterian route to welcoming gay and lesbian people, and there became a core group there of gay and lesbians, many of whom were in seminary.

So I think one of the reasons I didn't get as involved in the Coalition is that Church of the Covenant actually had a fairly good support group for gay and lesbian people and working through some of the issues that the Coalition was working at at a national level. But because you had a local way of working on the issues, we didn't get as involved nationally. But I was aware of the Coalition's work, what they were doing at the various synods and the resolutions that were being passed, but I just wasn't intimately involved.

Susan E. Now, which denominations was the Church of the Covenant affiliated with at that early time?

Marnie W. Presbyterian [USA] and United Church of Christ, so it was a federated church.

Susan E. Okay, just those two denominations?

Marnie W. Just the two.

Susan E. Okay. So it was one of the early More Light churches, if I remember correctly.

Marnie W. Correct.

Susan E. To backtrack a little bit, tell me some about your faith journey.

Marnie W. I've always had a faith life because I came out of a faith family. I had an aunt who served 40 years as a missionary in Inanda, South Africa – Inanda Seminary in South Africa, so somebody who sort of dedicated her life, although she was a teacher, to her own ministry at the time. My parents both went to Northland College, which was also sort of United Church of Christ or affiliated with the Congregational Church, so I've always had a faith life in terms of that.

I was part of Pilgrim Fellowship growing up, you know, the youth group within a Congregational Church, went to youth camp, so I've never really not had a strong faith journey. I think the funny story is I can remember, as a teenager, thinking that I should marry a minister because I did feel like faith was part of my life, and it was at a time where kids were deciding whether or not they were going to go to church and all of that kind of stuff. And of course the twist of fate is I think God forgot or

didn't hear the prayer correctly, because who would believe that I would end up marrying a minister, except she happened to be female.

Susan E. [Laughs.] Was she a PK?

Marnie W. No, she was not. She grew up Methodist.

Susan E. I've thought it somewhat remarkable, just to interject, that in the UCC we don't necessarily go through the same faith journeys that other people do because often, when we grow up in the UCC, we like it so much we stick with it.

Marnie W. Right, right.

Susan E. I may be wrong. I'm sure there are exceptions to that. And I wouldn't even call it a rule. So working with the Massachusetts – I'm still not clear. So Massachusetts Conference, Synod delegate, Church of the Covenant – how did the ONA resolution come into the picture in your life?

Marnie W. I was, as I said, a delegate in 1983, and Raymond Bradley had written a resolution that Bill Johnson had asked him to write on basically welcoming gay and lesbians into the United Church of Christ, and it was called a More Light resolution, calling on the United Church of Christ congregations to declare themselves More Light churches. And when that resolution came up, there was a lot of discussion about it in terms of whether or not the United Church of Christ should adopt the title of More Light, given that the Presbyterian Church was already using that title. And

also the resolution was an aspiration of what we would want to do, but it didn't ask what should be done by a local church to become a More Light church. There was discussion about that.

Eventually – and I spoke on the Synod floor saying that from my experience, it would be better for the United Church of Christ to at least name it something else so that we had our own identity in the process of how are we going to welcome gay and lesbians into the local church and make a national statement on that, and so I spoke against it. Eventually, Bill Johnson and other people who had worked on the resolution asked to withdraw it, until we could do more work on it. So at the end of the General Synod in 1983, we left with no resolution being passed. I was a delegate then also to the 1985 General Synod, so I had a commitment to come back with a resolution that solved the issues that had been raised with the 1983 resolution.

Susan E. So I take it one of the big issues with that first attempt at an Open and Affirming resolution in the UCC was terminology and the fact that it was of Presbyterian origin rather than something more homegrown and indigenous to the UCC terminology—

Marnie W. Correct.

Susan E. —that was yet to be developed. I guess at that time it wasn't ONA.

Marnie W. No, there was no ONA at that time.



Susan E. So tell me about the General Synod in 1985 that you were a delegate to in Ames, Iowa. Well, before that, by the time you got to Synod in Ames, there was already a resolution that I assume the Massachusetts Conference or some church in the Massachusetts Conference had already submitted to the national bodies of the UCC prior to Synod to meet a deadline. Can you tell me what went into that resolution? I guess it was maybe passed by the Massachusetts Conference before it was sent to Synod.

Marnie W. Correct. What happened after leaving Synod is that in the winter of 1984, four of us, all involved at Church of the Covenant – and that would be Margarita Suarez, Susan Harlow, rev. rosi olmstead and myself, sat, to be honest, at my dining room table and wrote the Open and Affirming Resolution. We used Ray Bradley's original, and we changed it the way we wanted it.

And we talked about the title and said that part of More Light sounded like yes, we wanted more light on the issue, we wanted to have God's understanding of where do gay and lesbians fit in and that, but that More Light sounded like it was too much study and not enough activism. And so I think that's where we came up with nondiscrimination isn't enough. We really wanted churches to open their doors. But we also wanted them to say you need to affirm who the people are.

In other words, nondiscrimination wasn't enough. You've really got to put out a welcome mat and affirm gay and lesbians into the fullness of

your life, whether as just a parishioner, ordination, being a deacon, whatever, the whole package. And so we wrote the resolution in terms of that.

And at the time, rosi submitted it to the Mass Conference because she could submit resolutions as one person, and so it went there, with the endorsement of Church of the Covenant, but rosi was the person who actually did it. So it goes to the Mass Conference. On its way, it had to be vetted by a group to say that it should go forward, and that group was the Mass Conference Committee on Church Life and Leadership. At the time it was headed by Rev. Maren Tirabassi.

And one of the interesting sort of faith stories in the whole ONA process is on the committee, Maren was aware that she did not have the votes to say let's move this forward to the actual Conference annual meeting, so one of the things that she did brilliantly was that she tabled the motion because she knew she didn't have the votes. And in between the meeting that she tabled the motion and when it comes up again, two of the ministers on the committee received phone calls from gay and lesbian people asking them, we really would like to come to your church, but we need to know that we're really going to be welcome, and sort of [hear] our story. So two of the ministers on that committee changed their votes, basically, so that when Maren comes back to the next committee meeting, it's affirmed that the resolution can move from a committee level to the conference level. So that was one hurdle.

So it would be at the June, 1984 conference the resolution comes up. There was also a hearing at that time. And again, one of the picture images of this whole process is that we were in a lecture hall where the seats are on risers and the professor is down in the bottom, and we had invited someone from UUA church, because they were farther ahead of us in the process in that they had sort of welcomed gay and lesbians before we did – “we” is the United Church of Christ – so they were on the panel. rev. rosi olmstead was the person who took on the biblical material. And I have to say probably for 45 minutes to an hour people brought up biblical passages that were sort of not supportive of gay and lesbians, and rosi brilliantly responds with other Bible passages. It was just sort of an amazing thing. She did not have the Bible in front of her. They came out of her mouth. And I think to this day she feels like there was a spirit in the room that allowed her to do the biblical work that needed to be done for people in the room who were still questioning, you know, the Bible says this, why are you asking us to do that, and really did do that.

Susan E. Maybe they were quoting Leviticus and Romans?

Marnie W. Right, right. And then you come back with, well, do you eat shellfish, or do you eat flounder? Those were the same rules that are in that same Leviticus passage, and we’ve moved on on some of them, and not on others.

Susan E. [Laughs.]

Marnie W. And what does Jesus have to say about homosexuality? Nothing. So, you know. I don't know. We shouldn't...I don't want to make light of it. I think it's a discussion people have to have. And we have to have it because people, unless they've been educated or have been able to look at the Bible in multiple ways, sometimes can get stuck there and can't see that God is still speaking, that there are different interpretations, or if we even had the right interpretation from the beginning. Church gets to write its own history, too. So eventually the resolution does come before the floor. I think another—

Susan E. Of the Massachusetts Conference?

Marnie W. The Mass Conference, thank you. And I think another key thing was we had Reuben Sheares, who was sort of the minister for the Conference, sort of guiding people on how do we get along with each other, what are faith experiences and whatever. And I think he was very good, and that he set the stage that in every vote there are winners and losers. But his quote is the measure of the church was how we treat each other during that process and after. And he did ask that when the vote was taken that there would be no applause and no groans, basically.

And we did take the vote, and it was two-thirds in favor and one-third opposed, and there basically was silence. But I think he was right, you know. This was a joyful journey for many of us and a painful journey for some of us, and I think to recognize that in the whole ONA movement,

both of those feelings are true. And some of us, to stay as a church, need to recognize both the joy, but also the pain as people move through a process.

Susan E. And after all, “us” is all of us.

Marnie W. Right, it is, yes.

Susan E. As the church, as the UCC.

Marnie W. Right. And you have to remember, in 1984, not many people were out. I mean, people didn’t know gay people. They were voting on a... Margarita Suarez announced herself as a lesbian Christian in front of the conference, but she was sort of like the only face that people knew at that point, so people were... I guess in terms of looking at things historically, it wasn’t that people were voting for somebody they knew next door, or their niece or their nephew. I mean, people still were pretty closeted in terms of how many gay and lesbian people they actually knew who they had conversations with.

Susan E. So Margarita was really out there?

Marnie W. She was.

Susan E. Was she at Harvard Div at that time?

Marnie W. Yes. But also going to Church of the Covenant. A lot of the political behind-the-scenes maneuvering – and I shouldn’t call it maneuvering – but

advocacy was done by people who were involved in Church of the Covenant at one time or another. And we'd lived More Light now probably – I should go back and look – but I bet you for at least five or six years, so this wasn't new to us. We were sort of trying to live out the More Light statement at the time.

Susan E. Just to backtrack a little bit, you mentioned Ray Bradley a couple of times. Was he from Massachusetts or Rhode Island?

Marnie W. Rhode Island. He was from the Rhode Island Conference.

Susan E. Okay. So it still needed to travel from the Massachusetts Conference to General Synod, and then General Synod in Ames, Iowa is quite a bit of the story, too, that we haven't gotten to yet. So what would you like to talk about next?

Marnie W. Well, I think why don't you say a little bit about the energy level at Ames, Iowa, just to sort of lay... We had Bishop Tutu speak. Who else was speaking?

Susan E. Jesse James was running for president, and he spoke.

Marnie W. Jesse Jackson.

Susan E. Jesse Jackson was running for president, and he spoke. And if I remember correctly, he brought up the Rainbow Coalition and gave a laundry list of

people who were often not included and who were discriminated against, and he did not mention gay and lesbian people.

Marnie W. Right. But there was a lot of energy at the time. It was a great General Synod. I think there's a story to be told, though, before we get to General Synod, in that just before General Synod, we had learned that the Resolution Committee was not accepting resolutions that had been discussed before at other previous General Synods. And of course if I'd known that rule, I don't know that I would have turned down the More Light resolution two years ago, because it was a good resolution, it just needed tweaking, I felt – a new name and that kind of thing.

So Ann Day and I had to put together talking points to go to the Executive Committee overlooking the resolutions, and Ann Day and the Coalition people basically stood in the room and said that you can't put this rule in at the last minute. We tabled something the last time with the idea of bringing back a better resolution, and that is what we are doing, so it needs to come to the floor. And there was discussion, but there had to be pressure to get it out of the committee. But the good news is we got it out of the committee.

So the way General Synod works is that every resolution is assigned to its own committee for vetting and doing that. And one of the things that was wonderful at General Synod is that the Rocky Mountain Conference had also come in with a resolution, which I understand wasn't actually going

to go before Synod, but there was another written resolution that a conference had passed. And so both of those resolutions end up with the committee, and to be honest, I don't know the official name of the committee that we went to.

Susan E. I think it may have been Committee No. 22. [Laughs.]

Marnie W. That's why I don't remember the name. It was like Committee No. 22. And the head of that committee – and I think it's unique in the telling of the story – is Olivia White, who, I've learned, was working at the UCC level, and she was an Indian woman who dressed in her purple sari and came from Texas, and was a biogenetic engineer by background. And so when I walked in the room and said, "Oh my gosh, this is who I'm going to be working with," I thought how many cultural differences can we possibly have? She's from Texas, I'm from Boston; she's American, but dresses differently than I do and that.

But she was just wonderful. I mean, she, I think, looked at both the Rocky Mountain and the Mass Conference resolutions, was very diplomatic about what did we need to do, what other committees did we need to work with, how should we work on the hearings and that, so really gave some good guidance. So that committee holds hearings.

So there was a hearing that was held where we agreed – as I had said before, people weren't out – we agreed in the room that people could use their names or not use their names, but people told their stories, including



ministers who were serving churches who were gay or lesbian. And why did we need this resolution was really what the hearing was all about. As it turns out, somebody did record the session, which we did not know about, and it was played at a church off-site.

I don't remember how we actually found out what had happened, but the reason I bring it up is that I think as the trust level was broken about we need to really work together, we need to have honest discussions with us, people who were middle-of-the-road and not sure whether or not they would want to do this began to see sort of how difficult it was for gay and lesbians to even be true to who they were, you know, that they'd thought they had a safe space; it was taken away from them. The issue began to resonate on a much more personal level.

And remember, I said a lot of people still weren't out, so I think it was one of those conversations that people were able to have about why can't people be truly who they are even in a church setting. So in the end, even though I'm sorry it unfolded the way it did, I believe, in some ways, it helped us move the discussion forward about why aren't we sort of just more out and open, why can't we just tell our story. So in the end, I think it helped, even though it was painful at the time, and I think some people were very concerned that, you know, what would my church think if they know that I'm gay. But it moved the discussion along.

The resolution itself – I’ve got to try to paint a picture – but again, we’re all sitting at tables at floor level, and at that point the stage was higher.

The people who were presenting were like ten feet above us. And there is, again, Olivia White in her sari, presenting and recommending, from the committee, that the Open and Affirming Resolution be passed. And then there becomes discussion on the floor back and forth. You know, I can’t remember. I would say at least we had a half an hour of discussion. You know, you don’t discuss forever.

And the key part to me was that Al Williams, who was the conference minister from Massachusetts, was in line to speak, and he looked at me and he said, “What am I going to say?” It had been interesting because he’d watched me for two years on this resolution. As a conference minister, he had to shepherd people both wanting the resolution and those who were having problems with it, so he had never really spoken publicly on where he came down on it.

Now, I never felt any resistance from him, so I did feel support. But at the same time, he’d never really been public. But I do remember looking at him and saying, “You’ve got to explain that nondiscrimination isn’t enough.” And I have to say he goes on to make a brilliant speech on how local churches need to welcome gay and lesbians, but they need to fully welcome them into the life of the church, be it as a member, ordination, deacon, council member, whatever.

Susan E. So did he make that speech from the floor?

Marnie W. From the floor.

Susan E. From the microphones in the plenary session in General Synod?

Marnie W. Correct, yes. And interestingly enough, he made such a strong statement that somebody called the question and the vote was over 90% in favor of the resolution. It was even higher than it was at the Mass Conference in terms of that, so it was very exciting. I will say it happened, I think, the last day or just before the end. It was a very grueling time because every day you were doing behind-the-scenes lobbying or getting to a group to talk to them about the resolution and that, so I will say I was pretty exhausted. I was excited and I was totally exhausted after there.

Susan E. Well, you mentioned Ann B. Day. Now, you didn't mention her as being around the kitchen table writing the resolution—

Marnie W. She wasn't.

Susan E. —with Margarita and rosi and you and...

Marnie W. Susan Harlow.

Susan E. Susan Harlow. How does Ann B. Day come into the picture?

Marnie W. Ann B. Day picks up the baton. I mean, I think those of us who worked on the resolution were so exhausted by then. It had been two years of sort of working on this. She's the person, I have to say—

Susan E. I have to turn the tape over. We were talking about Ann B. Day.

Marnie W. Ann B. Day starts the work of the Coalition to really make ONA real, and starts working with churches to help develop resources, and becomes the person who, for 20 years, worked with lots of churches throughout the country to make ONA churches...help people through the process. I mean, Church of the Covenant, to be honest, because we had the More Light statement, is No. 6 in terms of the churches to pass an ONA statement. I think Riverside is first, but you can see the list of churches now on our website, about how they came.

Susan E. And how many churches are there now, in 2012?

Marnie W. Well, we just heard there are just over a thousand. We're just over the thousand mark, which is amazing, and I'm hoping that there are more as people go through it. And the thousand, I think we should be clear, are those who have made an ONA statement. There are many more churches who are still in process.

And part of what I think we need to think about ONA is that it is a process. Some churches can do it quicker than others. So I don't want to discount churches who are in the process, and it may take them a while. But I think we can still dream that eventually more churches will become ONA.

Susan E. I think I've heard it referred to as a discerning process.

Marnie W. Right.

Susan E. Do you remember the name that the ONA program adopted? There was some discussion, if I remember, of whether it should O, ampersand, A [O&A] or O, N, as in the letter N, A [ONA]. Do you remember any of that?

Marnie W. I remember it, but I don't remember. I remember the discussions, but I don't, to be honest, I don't remember... We ended up with ONA. And I don't even have the resolution to know exactly.

Susan E. I think it's Open and Affirming.

Marnie W. It's Open and Affirming, yes.

Susan E. With everything spelled out completely. In the resolution itself I don't think it says O-N-A.

Marnie W. No, it's Open and Affirming. And people have talked about that in terms of you can open your doors as a church, but you need the affirming part to really welcome people in.

Susan E. So open really came from open the doors?

Marnie W. Right. Open your doors. And basically to out gay and lesbian people, but that doesn't mean that they had to be out to come in, but be willing to say if you say you're gay, you're welcome. You're welcome just as a

Christian, come and join us, and tell us your life story. I mean, you know, help us through.

Susan E. Looking back on the whole thing, what were your biggest frustrations, from the ill-fated More Light resolution through the kitchen table writing of the – how long did you sit around the kitchen table carving out the “whereases” and the “therefore be it resolveds?”

Marnie W. I don't think it was that long. I think we only sat around two or three sessions and worked on it. I have to say rosi olmstead is a very good writer. So are Margarita and Susan. And we had the Raymond Bradley one to start with, so it was more tweaking. We took what we had, people worked on it individually, we came back and looked at it and massaged it and that, so it wasn't that hard. And there's a structure to resolutions, so it's not like, you know, the whereases and the therefores, so you already had a structure that you needed to work within.

Susan E. Did you use any other resolutions besides the Church of the Covenant More Light statement?

Marnie W. I don't think we looked at many of them. And for people who are younger than us, there wasn't the Internet. It wasn't like you could go on and say what are other churches doing. I do think we did look at what other churches like the Methodists were doing in terms of their own process. But when it came down to it, even when we left General Synod in 1983, it wasn't that it was a bad resolution, it was one that we wanted to just

improve upon, so we didn't want to rewrite it. I mean, we wanted to improve what had already been submitted.

Susan E. So the groundwork was already laid before you sat around the kitchen table?

Marnie W. Yeah, yeah.

Susan E. Okay, that clarifies something. So what were the biggest frustrations, or the biggest roadblocks? Or maybe you've already talked about them, but...

Marnie W. I think I have talked about them. I think not having enough gay and lesbian people out there to pull on in terms of their stories, which is even true of the Open and Affirming movement today. For a church that does not have a lot of people who are out gay and lesbian, it's still like, "Who are these people? I don't know who they are." So even today that story continues in terms of we need more gay people to just be able to tell their stories and have a safe place to do that.

The bureaucracy, at the time, was frustrating. But I worked for a court system, so I worked for a huge bureaucracy. I worked for government, so that didn't daunt me as much. I think the frustration comes in in that, you know, if we're a welcoming church, if we're to live out the gospel, why was this such a problem? And we can still say that today: why is it such a problem that we can't just welcome everybody and who they are?

Susan E. So one of the points, then, was to put a human face on it?

Marnie W. Correct.

Susan E. And when you ran into that new rule that the Executive Council had adopted, you saw that as a surmountable roadblock because of your experience working in law libraries?

Marnie W. Well, working in government. And I feel like, since I worked in the courts, there was an appeal process. I mean, we had been very clear, in 1983, why we tabled the resolution. So I feel like we laid the appeal for having it come back in [‘85]. I didn’t think they could deny us that. It wasn’t like we said...first of all, it had never been voted on, it had been tabled, and that we had said this is why we’re turning it down. So I feel like they didn’t have a right to say it can’t come forward in terms of that.

Susan E. Is there anything I’m missing, some question I’m not asking?

Marnie W. I should just tell you the rest of the story a little bit more.

Susan E. Okay.

Marnie W. I will say that ten years later, we did write down our story, so that there is another publication that you can look at to see the ten year anniversary. All four of us were given the Pioneer Award at the 2005 National Gathering, at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is a great time to have gotten back together.



Susan E. Which was where?

Marnie W. Atlanta. We were in Atlanta, Georgia. And that was great. I will say John Thomas, who was president of the UCC at the time, came and spoke to us, and that was the General Synod where the resolution on allowing same sex couples to marry was being presented. And I will say he was brilliant in talking about if the UCC doesn't affirm this, then who will, and if it's not done now, when will it be done, and that General Synod does actually pass a resolution on encouraging churches to go ahead and perform same sex marriages.

We also were fundraising at that time for the Coalition, and it was an evening in which many people told their stories, from teenagers who had thought of suicide to older couples who had been together for years. And I have to say there was a palpable presence of the Holy Spirit in the room as people told their stories. And for the four of us who had written the resolution, I think it was a real affirmation that what we had done was in the Spirit of God moving in the world today. And I think also we were able to forgive the people who gave us a hard time, because we had seen sort of what ONA meant.

ONA is only words on a piece of paper. Yes, it takes a process to get to that piece of paper, for a community or a church to agree to this, and to covenant to it, and there's another whole process at the other side to live out those words. But I think that that night helped us to see that passing

ONA and putting something in words did help the church to move forward, and it was a really wonderful time to see that actually happening.

Susan E. Do you know, offhand, the name of the publication where your stories are written?

Marnie W. It's actually an ONA publication, and I'd have to... It's called "The ONA Report: the ONA Survey Responses, Reflections and Resources about Open and Affirming Churches," and it was written for the tenth anniversary.

Susan E. Of the ONA program?

Marnie W. Yes, of the ONA program.

Susan E. So you have had recognition as a pioneer in the ONA movement of the United Church of Christ.

Marnie W. Right. And one thing I'll read into the record just to have it is that after that, one of the last printed UCC newspapers, I wrote a letter to the editor. Can I just read that? Would that be helpful?

Susan E. Sure.

Marnie W. I wrote, "In the past year I've been twice honored for my work in writing and passage of the Open and Affirming Resolution at the 1984 Mass Conference and the 15<sup>th</sup> General Synod." And this was basically to the delegates of 1985. "I do not know you by name. However, I want to

thank you for the courage of your positive votes that opened a path for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered folks to become who they are. I now live in a state where same sex marriage is legal, I go to restaurants where same sex families are having dinner, and people at work get to tell their weekend plans without having to leave out their partner's name. I grieve the pain of the people who do not feel that justice is unfolding. I hope that as time and more dialogues happen, we can work together, respecting each other's points of view, even when they're different, and at the same time, allow all of us to live as whole people. Thank you, delegates to 1985 General Synod."

Susan E. Wow. That spirit was moving then in 1985 in Ames, Iowa and is still moving.

Marnie W. It is still moving.

Susan E. So any last words? To be continued?

Marnie W. To be continued. I should just say that a lot of people did a lot of work coming up to 1983, and a lot of people have done a lot of work afterwards. And I have to say I think we should thank the national level people. I think John Thomas and other people have been terrific at helping ONA move forward. I think Ron Buford, who did the Still Speaking campaign, helped build on the movement and help us all, so we should thank them, too.

Susan E.        Okay. That concludes our interview with Marnie Warner at Elmhurst College. The reason why we're here is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns. It's meeting on the college campus this week, and it's an occasion to take some oral histories, see some old friends, make some new ones, and to celebrate some of the pioneers. So signing off.

*[End of recording.]*