

Oral History Interview: Mel Wheatley

Interviewee: Mel & Lucile Wheatley

Interviewer: Mark Bowman

Date: October 10, 1994

Mark B. This is an interview recorded with Mel and Lucile Wheatley on Monday, October 10, 1994, in their home in Laguna Hills, California. Let me just – I'm going to turn the machine on and we're going to start talking. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. That Lucile's and my involvement with gay issues, personally and professionally, both occurred at about the same time, which is around 1972. The UM, its denomination obviously began dealing with it seriously for the first time. Prior to that we had...we were at American University together, and I remember our one encounter with gayness there was whispering around about a lesbian couple who were going to be...they weren't sure whether they were going to let them stay in college or not. This would have been about 1935, 1936.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mel W. And then when we moved to Westwood in '54, friends from somewhere put us in touch with a favorite doctor of theirs who became a favorite doctor of ours who was a gay man in a relationship with a church organist who had also been John Charles Thomas' accompanist on all of his tours, and they became very, very close friends, though they were sort of of the generation, though the partner particularly, even made up, you know, you'd almost know he was gay to look at

him, but they never discussed it the way a gay couple might these days. And then, of course, our son came out to us just within the year immediately following the 1972 General Conference.

Mark B. So 1973.

Mel W. Yeah, 1973. It was right after we had moved to Denver.

Mark B. You were elected bishop in 1972?

Mel W. In '72, correct. But I remember the '72 General Conference in Atlanta, and I was a voting delegate at that time. I had not yet been elected, you see, coming before.

Mark B. You were from the Peninsula Conference?

Mel W. From – no, from the Southern California.

Mark B. Oh, that's right.

Mel W. I'd moved out here by then and had been in Westwood since '54.

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. And I think it was Mel Talbert who explained to me later. I think it was a committee he was on that introduced the original resolution.

Mark B. The Social Principles, right?

Mel W. The Social Principles that was intended to mention the rights of homosexuals as well as the rights of heterosexuals in a positive way, period. But...and we were

sitting – I don't know what delegation it was, but I remember two particular things about the debate. It was almost ready to go through when somebody from one of the Southern delegations stood up, and with that typical kind of speech – you know, it's either losing pledges or losing members – if you think we've been losing members to the Southern Baptists before now, you just let the word go out that we are saying that... And in those days we were still talking about the "gay lifestyle" and that the "gay lifestyle" is just as legitimate a lifestyle as a heterosexual lifestyle, and so that boomed the debate, it kept on going then.

And one of the things I remember most about that, and she should be in your history, is that Dr. Louise Branscomb – and the reason it's so important, who is a gynecologist, she's still living, she must be past 90 by now – but that's a very sacred name down in the south. Their president of Vanderbilt, a former bishop. If you look in your hymnal you'll see a Bishop Branscomb. And she's...I think the daughter, maybe, of the bishop and she's the sister of the former president of Vanderbilt and a New Testament scholar, I think, down there, fairly well recognized. But at any rate, we visited her at her home in Birmingham—

Mark B. She's in Birmingham?

Mel W. —and we've exchanged correspondence recently. I got to know her real well when both of us were on the Commission on the Status and Role of Women in '76. But she became – *[laughs]* – a heretic as far as the Council of Bishops was concerned because she's the one who led the movement to get term episcopacy enacted about 1976 or 1980, I think it was, you know. *[Laughs.]*

Mark B. Oh, okay, uh-huh.

Mel W. I don't know whether you were tuned in to United Methodist politics at that time, but it got to be – the Council discussed it very seriously because it got to be a major movement there for a while, you know, for term episcopacy.

Mark B. She was from the Methodist and not E.U.B.? She was a Methodist?

Mel W. She was a former Southern Methodist.

Mark B. But a Methodist, okay.

Mel W. Right, right, right. But she...as a gynecologist, whether she was lesbian or not, I don't know, but she was always way out front in leading the debate.

Mark B. Was she at General Conference in '72?

Mel W. She was at General Conference. She was a delegate to General Conference, which was something in those days for a woman – *[laughs]* – to be elected as one of the General Conference delegates.

Then, my own notes, I wasn't aware personally of much spin-off in the Denver area, my first quadrennium there, in terms of local congregations. I have two or three letters I received in those days, and I used to send them materials. But one of the things I did receive in that time that should be part of your history is a copy of a letter that a Paul Huslander sent me of Georgia Harkness. Do you have that?

Mark B. I don't know. He sent this to me at some point, yeah.

Mel W. Okay, well, yeah. Well, it's a significant document. You know, she all but comes out herself in there, you know. But if you have it, fine. I think somewhere I have an extra copy of it.

Mark B. I may try to get it because he sent it to me. I'm not sure that I could get my hands on it.

Mel W. Well, here's an extra copy right here.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mel W. Would you want to take it?

Mark B. That would be great.

Mel W. Well, you might as well take this one. This other thing there had her date of her birth and so forth. And also a letter that's not quite as...he may have sent you from Rosemary Radford Ruether too, you know. But anyway, I think it's a very significant letter and her caution there still, and I'm sure she would apologize for it almost, is it's...she encourages, in a sense, gays to be out unless they're interested in being ordained. And then she's essentially saying you better keep quiet if, you know, don't tell, don't... [*Laughs.*]

All right, so...but in the quadrennium also, and you'd have to check with Mel Talbert or somebody on the exact – there's some committee and the board, and I think it was probably his Board of Discipleship, or maybe the Family Life Committee, I think it was, that sponsored a retreat in Boston, a 50-50 gay, 50-50

heterosexual retreat somewhere out of Boston. I...and several memories of that are vivid with me.

It was the first time I came out. Our son by then had come out to us, but I didn't...I think I identified a member of the family. He was a Montessori school teacher, so those days you were still having to be careful. But I identified myself as "I'm a political gay" – [*laughs*] – you know. And at that – well, at that retreat, Ed Carroll was there, the bishop, and he had just – he had barely hit the ground, remember, when he had two really tough things. One were the race riots there in Boston. This was '72, '73. And then he had a gay couple who had a service or something, a public service. And so, you know, he just—

Mark B. And charges were brought against the pastor then, right, wasn't it?

Mel W. I think so, yeah, who officiated.

Mark B. There was a trial.

Mel W. And so Ed, and I – anybody would have sympathized with him. You know, you've just hit the ground and the office is so new to anybody, even a – he'd been a district superintendent, and that helped a little bit. At any rate, I remember we played doubles tennis, each of us with the member of a lesbian couple, he with one of them and me with the other. And I still remember, I thought I was fairly fast, being a little bit surprised that lesbians played tennis just like anybody else would play tennis.

Mark B. You did this at the retreat? This is where you played tennis?

Mel W. This is at the retreat, part of the socializing. And I still remember at the beginning they did the interesting thing, and it's been done several groups we did it, of okay, now half of us are straight and half of us are gay – who wants to volunteer to pick out, you know? [Laughs.] And of course nobody did because most of us were there because we had shown some interest in getting at the realities of this whole business.

Mark B. Do you remember any of the folks who were there?

Mel W. I'm not even – Ed Carroll's the one I remember for sure, and I'm not even – I think Mel Talbert was there. I'm not positive. But I do remember very vividly one of the presentations, and you'll understand why. John Boswell was there and presented, read from the then unpublished manuscript, chapters of his *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, so that was a real scoop. And of course ever after, whenever we knew he was going to be anywhere around, we went to hear him in Hollywood Church and, you know, that sort of thing as well as, of course, getting his book, and appreciated it. Oh, yeah, okay, that's the Iliff librarian Paul [Millette].

Mark B. I'm in Denver next month. I'll check in with him.

Mel W. Yeah, yeah. Right, right. And during that time I was beginning to get letters, you know, that I would answer, and usually send them – I don't know when this came out, but it was one of the first things. And now that was the old Social Action...what did they call it?

Mark B. Engage/Social Action? Was that E/SA then?

Mel W. Yeah, yeah. And they had that one on the...and I would send copies of that, and then there was somebody...they ran one on ordination. And I forget...one of the professors had written it, and I couldn't come up with a copy of it. But it would have been about the same time. But that was *way* out ahead and, you know, it's very useful, to this day, dealing with scripture. That was a professor at Wesley.

Mark B. I knew John, yeah.

Mel W. Yeah.

Mark B. I've heard many people say this is the first thing they ever read.

Mel W. Right, right.

Mark B. I've heard many people say that.

Mel W. Right, right. It was a – [*laughs*] – man in the right place for a lot—

Mark B. When you said you got letters, were they, like, from local churches, individuals, gay folk, or all kinds of...?

Mel W. From, yeah, individuals. Well, I don't know...I got a lot that were – there were a number from gay people, but the ones that I answered most extensively were the ones who were having a hard time with it. And there was a couple from the National Division, missionaries Leonard and Marie Stewart, I think, who were at the Red Bird Hospital, who wrote...“Care enough to help these people, but they, in discussing the topic in this letter with other United Methodists, they usually

gasp with amazement at the very idea that it could happen. I'm talking about the possibility that homosexuals would be allowed to become ordained ministers in the United Methodist Church.”

And as you well know, and I don't know any of us who's wise enough to make...and it doesn't help to make a judgment after the fact anyhow, that many people in the movement have felt it was – now, in retrospect – feel it was costly that we talked so much about the ordination issue before we had really forced people to deal with, well, yeah, but first there's human beings, you know. And so I was responding to them, but as far as my own history, I was a little disappointed to see that still, by 1975, I was using the word “choice.” [*Laughs.*]

“Apart from their choice of sexual lifestyle, a few young men of my acquaintance who are self-identified homosexuals are among the top ministers of Jesus Christ in every other dimension of Christian lifestyle I know. At this stage they most certainly could minister much more effectively” – I was talking about we admitted that we ought to be ministering to them, and who and what congregations are going to minister to them?

And “at this stage they most certainly could minister much more effectively to other homosexuals than their heterosexual colleagues. Should they be permitted to? We are under obligation to ask whether or not these two young men, who are superior in nine out of ten categories of ministry to many of their colleagues, are to have those nine superiorities canceled by the fact that in one

other area, that of choice of sexual lifestyle, they choose a way that is other than and considered by most to be inferior to their colleagues.”

“Does the choice of sexual lifestyle take precedence over all other qualities and competencies combined? It may well be that the General Conference of 1976 will say yes, but if we’re going to be honest, we at least have to ask the question as bluntly as I have just put it.” And then, of course, still the penalty on honesty: “There’s another factor that contributes to the complexity of the situation. Every discussion I have ever heard in any group on the subject has always included the comment by somebody, of course we know that every conference in United Methodism has some ministers who are homosexuals, but they have never identified themselves as such, and so no question has been raised about their continuing as ordained ministers. To the degree this is the case, and I have no guess what the facts are, the issue is shifted from whether or not homosexuals should be permitted to be ordained ministers to the issue of whether or not honest self-identification on the part of homosexuals is to put a penalty on honesty.” But at least saying it’s good that we were finally getting around to dealing with the issue. And then a letter, nothing that distinctive, I think, about that one.

Mark B. At that point were there some ministers who were willing to confide in you? In that, you know, early ‘70s within your conference, were pretty much people weren't willing to...?

Mel W. No, I don't remember that any of the ones...and in some ways it was just as well—

Mark B. Right.

Mel W. —because I have a long letter there written to me by a retired general, or retired something, who was taking me to task for ordaining, or continuing Julian in ministry after he had come out to me, you know, and the fact was that he had been very careful to talk about "he was dealing with the possibility," you know, but never... So I was very aware of that. But he had not, until after the blowup there at the Boulder church, identified as fact that he was gay. So...most of them are talking about the biblical, you know. And that's when I would send them that and the other one on ordination.

Mark B. Mm-hmm, okay, good.

Mel W. But then at the '76 General Conference, and that's where Lucile's materials were coming in, Jesse DeWitt and Lucile and I participated in that worship service that she was telling about, and then the reception afterwards. But the '76 General Conference also is memorable in my mind and historically because to my recollection, it was the only General Conference that ever raised the question on the floor of the General Conference for debate about membership, church membership for gays. And it would be fascinating to probe the dynamics of why that has never been raised again. But it was raised there.

But it was dealt with like a hot potato, and only the *Journal* would reveal to what extent. But my recollection is that somebody raised it and practically immediately somebody else said, oh, no, oh, no, of course they're qualified to be members, you know. But it really came up as a question on the floor. And then...that was the '76 General Conference, and right after that, in '77, I had a letter from Paul Abels about the, to my knowledge, the...what he called Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church, a conference on homosexuality in the United Methodist Church.

Mark B. At Washington Square.

Mel W. Washington Square. And I had long before – this was '77, so early in my episcopacy, I made it a rule that if I had had a calendar commitment to Podunk, Wyoming, and I got invited to Park Hill Church in Denver, I kept my commitment to Podunk, Wyoming. You either had to do that or you were constantly canceling commitments. And so I had something to Podunk, Wyoming or somewhere. And so I was writing Paul. He came out, but it was after this. Yeah, it was before the '80 General Conference he came out for a conference on homosexuality that we had there in Denver. But I knew him, had visited with him personally on other connections.

But...“Sorry I couldn't come. We have persisted in our end on the ___ to do with the issue of homosexuality from decisions traditionally taken long after those positions traditionally taken have themselves become the issue to be dealt with. It is patently clear that Christians equally sincere that have come to Christ,

equally competent in their biblical and historical scholarship, equally brilliant in their theological or philosophical perceptions nonetheless take various stances towards homosexuality. It is high time we affirm this fact and use it as a base from which to carry on our conversations with one another. Deeper understanding can result among us even when honest differences remain. A few of the questions I am concerned since the conference wrestled with are...”

And I am proud that I, you know, I was insisting all this back in '77. “Why are the persisting myths and stereotypes applied to gay and lesbian lifestyles which are presently either being annihilated or seriously called into question by objective data?” Oh, “what *are* the persisting myths and stereotypes that are being called into question? What are some of the biblical and theological interpretations presently being offered by competent scholars which either challenge, significantly change, or properly replace earlier biblical and theological interpretations which hitherto have been the unchallenged bases for traditional Christian positions on homosexuality. What are the ethical implications spun out by an exclusion of declared homosexuals from the professional ordained ministry in which profession undeclared homosexuals have long since established their capacity for effective ministries comparable to the best offered by heterosexuals?”

“Who is ready to declare, as the inscrutable judgment of the Christlike God, that however outstanding a male or female ordained minister may be in all of the or most of the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – all excellence in those qualities

is automatically voided when that same female or male minister identifies her/his sexual lifestyle as homosexual rather than heterosexual.”

And then this one that still, it has to be in the forefront. “According to our denominational stance, a declared homosexual must be vigorously defended in her or his claims on *secular* employment without prejudice because of sexual preference, but is automatically limited from any claim on employment as an ordained minister simply because of that same sexual preference.” You know, the civil rights. And I’ve been expecting some court case sometime on the basis of the civil issue, civil rights issue. How come? And also "what theology of vocation is to be read from any such stance as that?" And then "congratulations that they were going ahead and having that big thing."

Oh, then moving on, and let’s see, how is our time going? One of the real crossroads, of course, in my experience was when we were – we hosted the spring – no, the fall meeting of the 1978 Council of Bishops in Colorado Springs, so I was in the position of being the host, Lucile and I, and was having a good time doing it until right in the middle. And I wasn’t able to sit in on all the sessions, but happened to be in there when somebody, the secretary, I guess, read the letter that came regularly, about mid-quadrennium, from Good News, because they’d already discovered homosexuality was a great fundraiser, you know. All they had to do was say that a big push this next General Conference, you know, to remove some of the restrictions.

So the secretary had received that usual mid-quadrennium letter from Good News on what...is the Council of Bishops continuing to support the wording in The Discipline? And they were beginning to debate it – [laughs] – and I, I listened and I thought, gosh, you know, ‘cause I seldom, even at annual conference, ever spoke, took the floor, and in fact I would never do that or did that in the Council of Bishops, but I thought, *gosh*. And there wasn’t anybody speaking, even qualifying, trying to qualify the traditional stand. I remember...who was the guy from Michigan, now retired? I should be able to...but to introduce, suggest that all of us should, before we debate this once more, James Nelson’s *Embodiment*, you know, which was a brand new book at that time.

Mark B. Oh, okay. A new book, yeah.

Mel W. But after a while, and I was scribbling my rough notes – [laughs] – and finally came out with my declaration to the Council of Bishops which put them on notice that, you know, that I was totally opposed to the direction we were going. I don’t know whether you want to read it, or get a copy of it.

Mark B. Oh, I’d love to get a copy. You wrote that later or you said that to them then?

Mel W. This is – no, this is a transcript of this. I wrote it from here, but—

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. “A part of the inescapable loneliness of life is that I cannot and do not know your story very well, and you cannot and do not know mine. I therefore reluctantly

share a most intimate part of my story with you at this time, not primarily as an argument in debate to affect the way you vote, but rather as a sincere effort toward helping you understand the way I vote. Because my story is what it is, I cannot approach any statement on homosexuality as basically a position on an academic, though highly emotionalized subject to be identified as an 'it.' I approach any statement on homosexuality as basically an intentional stance toward intimately personal relations involving 'thous.'"

"Whenever I am asked to permit my name to be attached to any public pronouncement on homosexual persons, for that is what any such statement always is, a pronouncement on real and particular persons, not a pronouncement on a subject without a face, I do not hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the editorialized columns of any of our publications." And I think Good News is in that. "I hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the eyes and ears" – and at this point I named four important and cherished persons in Lucile's and my life, ending with our son John, you know, but my medical doctor friend and his companion, Rhea Miller, a lesbian student at Iliff while we were there, and I forget who the third one was. Let's see...well, one was Bill Byer, my doctor, Roy Urson, the organist, his partner, and Rhea Miller, and then John, right.

"Why do I hear the meanings of any public pronouncement on homosexual persons through the eyes and ears of these persons? For one reason, because all four have in common same sex rather than other sex orientation. That same sex orientation is perceived by all of them not as something that they have

learned in practice, like piano playing, but is something they are, something they recognize and affirm like thumbprints and skin color.”

“But for a second reason that is substantive for me, I hear the pronouncement, support for the 1976 Discipline wording on homosexuality, through their eyes and ears. Because all four of them and many of the millions they symbolize would read from our statement one clearly intended meaning, that in the judgment of the Council of Bishops, they, as homosexual persons, are automatically eliminated from eligibility as authentic Christians.”

“But for a third reason I see in here through their eyes and ears, because in my judgment, and in Lucile’s, not necessarily their own, but the total life of each one of the four set against the criteria of the gifts and graces of the fruits of the spirit delineated in our New Testament, indeed, against the criterion of a life motivated and pervaded by agape love, each one of them appears to me and to Lucile to be as close to authentic Christian living as we perceive ourselves to be.”

“This part of my story, experientially received and recorded, radically affects the way I hear the proposal before us. Its words sound brave and strong and all but believable when addressed to a highly emotional and crassly exploited subject, yet the same words strike me as naive, harsh, and categorically false when addressed to the four persons named earlier of my day-by-day experience. Therefore, not only is it impossible for me to consent to add my name to any such public pronouncement as here proposed, but also it is an imperative for me, out of my own sense of integrity, to insist that any such public pronouncement carry the

unmistakable message that the vote that launched it was not unanimous.” And I read that because it becomes very important in what followed, which really was what triggered the—

Mark B. Mm-hmm. Do you remember the response when you read that in the meeting?

Mel W. There was rather a sympathetic hearing of it, and the interesting thing was that Lucile could tell, once we’d adjourned that particular session, that the wives had all heard about it immediately. But – in fact, it may have been after that that this colleague mentioned Nelson’s book. I think that might have been. But the real test of the response is they tabled, never – tabled, saying that we’re not obligated to respond to Good News, and so they tabled the request of Good News. But that got me ready, of course, for the next challenge, which was the episcopal, Mack Stokes making the episcopal address.

Mark B. This is when I got on board and got involved, so this is a point I remember more stuff.

Mel W. Okay. You may or may not have known, you see, that...the reason I...all these factors undoubtedly had to have been in the picture for me to have had the nerve, because I’m not a brave person at all. [*Laughs.*] We hear the episcopal address read, you know, several times. They try it out on – because somebody’s chosen, but it is the property of the Council, you know, and is presented as having been heard by the Council, and having their imprimatur upon it is essentially the case.

But on March 1st, and this is before our General Conference in May in Indianapolis, “Carefully rereading your Episcopal address heightened my enthusiasm for both its substance and its style. I was completely impressed. It includes numerous sections in which the language is much more lyrical than your necessarily hasty reading of it revealed. I write, however, to let you know that my support for the address will have to be qualified if the references to homosexuality remain as they are. You are obliged, of course, to state your feelings and convictions as they are. At the same time, if the address is released implying that it speaks for me at each and every point, it is obliged to represent my feelings and convictions, too.”

“More important than this highly subjective point, the address should accurately portray the reality of the situation as it is. I am convinced that ample evidence exists to suggest that your lines about and around the issue of homosexuality do not accurately represent the reality of the situation. You used a series of words explicitly, declaring them to be absolutes – infidelity, immoral, promiscuity, even sex act in marriage – but you supply no definition of the absolute static meanings of those words you require to be absolutes are supposed to have. The fact is that even the seemingly exact phrase ‘sex act in marriage’ has no equal exact moral meaning attached to it, according to all Christian tradition, scriptural interpretations, ___ and reason. So it’s not the official Roman Catholic position that still maintains that copulation is moral even within marriage only when it is engaged in for the purpose of procreation.”

“The most serious offense of your statement are the realities that both its tonal spirit and intended interpretation to be read to me that all sincere, authentic Christians, all competent biblical scholars, theologians, moralists, and ethicists are in unanimous agreement with the position you represent. Of my own sure knowledge, any lines written so as to convey that meaning grossly distort the facts of the present situation. To be factually accurate, therefore, much less reconcilingly inclusive in tone and intention, your statement should at some point acknowledge the reality that equally authentic Christian and competent scholars widely disagree on the moral and ethical issues surrounding same sex orientation. Such an identification of this as the reality of the situation would free me to support this part of the paper, as I already heartily support the rest of it.” Well, and he...I don't know whether...I don't have a copy of his response, except that it was that he wouldn't be able just to honor my position by itself.

And so by the time I saw his second one – this was March 1st, this was March 26th... “Let me carry two items in just this one letter. Jerry Camp, a fine young member” – that's the one who was transferring down to his conference. “Number two, I sincerely appreciate your response to my note in regard to the episcopal address with such reference to my comments on homosexuality. I hope that you more than suspect that I am neither naive nor presumptive enough to think the Council will accept” – and that's what he objected to, that my view didn't represent the Council – “will accept my interpretation of the reality of the situation as it relates to this issue of homosexuality. But neither am I intellectually passive nor morally dishonest enough to put it that the impression to

be given that the statement as it stands, even with its new juxtaposition of sentences, speaks for me.”

“The crunch issue, therefore, becomes the imprimatur under which the address is presented. If it is publicized as your address worked over with the Council, but not necessarily unanimously agreed to at every point by every member of the Council, I can be comfortable with such presentation. If, on the other hand, it is presented as speaking for the Council, and is publicized as having been unanimously agreed to by every member of the Council at every point, or anything reasonably close to such an implication, then in all honesty I would have to make verbal my negative vote. I sincerely hope there is a way for you to present the address and the Council to support you in that presentation without any such implication of unanimity determined by literal vote. Surely on several issues as controversial as this, we are much more authentically who we are when we present ourselves as having honest disagreements on critical issues and yet at the same time as being able, in the best spiritual tradition of our heritage, to disagree agreeably. Thanks for listening. Greetings to [Wiley]. Finally, God’s blessings on you.”

And you may remember the next part of the history. He presented the episcopal address, and the next day, as always, it was printed word for word in the *Daily Journal*, and a list of every bishop’s name was carried, including my name, but it also included Don, formerly in California – Tippett, who hadn’t even been there, I mean, you know. But it carried my name as sending it.

And I had – when this was before the Council, and I don't remember whether there was a literal vote taken on it or not, but there was applause, and so I made a point afterwards to go to the bishop who was then secretary of the Council to say, now, there was a lot of affirmation of Mack's speech, but I want you, as the secretary of the Council, to know that I am continuing the statement I made in Colorado Springs, that I refuse to let my name be attached as supporting this.

And so then when that came out in print the next day, I had to use more nerve than I usually have and insist that they call a meeting of the Council of Bishops. We usually have one just before the General Conference starts, but seldom during the General Conference unless something is referred to us. And so they called a meeting. I made my statement that I wanted my name, since it had appeared publicly supporting, it publicly deleted. And everybody, including the secretary of the Council, apologized personally to me, and before the group, saying it shouldn't have happened, they were all aware that I was against it.

Mack Stokes confirmed the fact that I'd written him personally. The secretary of the Conference confirmed that I had made a point to let him know that my name shouldn't be carried, and they were all at a loss how did it happen that it was carried. Well, "a breakdown in our system." It just sort of...and referring them to where the list of the bishops – *[laughs]* – some secretary of the Conference who'd never sat at a Council of Bishops meeting just carried the whole list. So that was...

Mark B. Jim Armstrong also dissented.

Mel W. Jim joined with – yes, and so then—

Mark B. How did that come about?

Mel W. Well, it was in the debate. He wanted to associate himself with my right to that position, and that's how he joined with me. He made it clear that he wasn't choosing one side or the other which to support, except that he was supporting my right to...and he was aware that I had taken that position and should be protected in taking it. But that was what turned loose, even before the Julian Rush affair... I was interviewed by a woman who's now a head of press relations, I don't think in our denomination, but who was in the *Christian Century* staff.

Mark B. Jean Caffey Lyles?

Mel W. Yeah, right, right. And she had an article, interviewed me about my position. And her article was semi-facetious, but it was what a struggle that General Conference has had in being inclusive. Then she listed – if you may remember, she listed all the categories. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. I don't remember that.

Mel W. Oh, it was when everybody was being careful about Hispanics, you know, blacks, and how far are the United Methodists going to take this thing, you know, this sort of thing? [*Laughs.*] Her *Christian Century* article stands on it. And so...but it was there. And then it was published in the local – well, this was the *Denver Post*, “Denver Bishop Opposes Methodist Statement on Gays.” This is from Indianapolis. “During an interview at the General Conference national session,

United Methodist Church, Wheatley said” – oh, this is Virginia Culver – “that he has made a protest against it, that was just given to the church by the bishop. He said he couldn’t accept the section that addressed homosexuality as incompatible with Christian teaching. ‘He just states as absolute fact what is an insufficiently documented opinion that gay persons can’t be Christians.’”

“The statement violates the law of logic that one positive exception destroys a negative absolute. I know not one, but 50 gay men and lesbians who are Christians according to everything in my understanding of Christianity. I take Jesus Christ very seriously about making judgments. The more seriously I take them, the stronger is my feeling that this statement is an inadequate representation of Christianity. I try sincerely to seek and know the will of God, but to believe such categorical classification as unchristian is not my definition of God’s will.”

That’s _____. And this was another...oh, this is the same. It’s a copy of that same article.

And so that let loose then a barrage of correspondence from liberal letters, but one of the ones that I enjoyed writing... There are two or three, but “you are quoted in the *Denver Post* article of May 16th saying you were” – oh, this is one of my mistakes. They asked me, because Culver, who wore this thing out, she’d call once or twice a week. She had called saying, well, what’s the response being, and I made the mistake and said, well, to date I have been supported ten to one.

[Laughs.]

Mark B. [Laughs.]

Mel W. “You’re quoted in a *Denver Post* article of May 16th saying you’re receiving a ten to one approval rating on your homosexual leanings. Unbelievable. There are not that many queers in your constituency, so if your statement is true, you’re hearing only from the fags.” These are Christian people writing. “This is to let you know that my wife and I, longtime Methodists, do not approve of what you are doing and saying. To the contrary, we feel that you are disgracing the Methodist Church in general, and this conference in particular. We did not approve of your sponsorship of the homosexual forum at our church several weeks ago.” That was the one where Paul Abels did come out. This was May 21, 1980. That was at University Church, right across the street from headquarters. “In fact, we were dismayed that our church facilities were provided for such a purpose that promotes the homosexuality. We wrote our pastor, Dick ____, at the time, expressing our utter displeasure. Frankly, we are hoping and praying that your term of office as our bishop will expire this year. We’ve had enough of this monkey business.” [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mel W. And, you know, “As for your hopes, the rest of my term of office as your bishop will expire this year. I’m sincerely sorry to have kicked the switch on such negative feelings with you. As most people, I prefer and like...”

[*End Side 1A; Start Side 1B.*]

Mel W. ... I’ll refer to, but a women’s Sunday School class at Trinity Church, downtown Denver, wrote me. “Upon reading your withdrawal of support of the

statement made by the bishops at General Conference concerning the homosexual, we are writing to you as a group of Methodist women. We understand no person is beyond the grace of God and so far we truly feel that you do not represent many of your constituents in the stand you have taken, nor is your interpretation, which is a reinterpretation of scripture, accurate, if we understand your feelings correctly.”

The scripture. That’s the reason for my response. And when I got this, I told my secretary, and she made a note on it to call her earliest and say, one, and let her know that I wanted to meet with the class. And this is my secretary’s – “I have talked with Clara Barton. She was very agreeable to talk with her group and let you know if they wish to meet with you re homosexuality.” I wanted to meet with them. “She said she had not wanted to give her name at first as she did not want to identify it with a particular church, and I told her you would respect the group’s rights to be just a group and not representatives of any church if that is what they wished.” That was my secretary’s response to me.

But then we waited and didn’t hear. That was June 5th. Then she had called. Her note was dated...when she had called right away, and that was the response. And so I wrote her on June 30th, saying, “Dear Ms. Barton, et al, I am deeply disappointed by your June 5th letter. Not only do you fail positively to respond to my offer to sit with you and discuss our differences, but also you offend elemental etiquette in your failure to extend the courtesy even to acknowledge that such an offer had been made.”

“When you first sent word to me that you did not like and therefore wanted an explanation of the stance I was taking in regard to the way equally sincere Christians with different sexual orientations should relate, I replied that no simple statement would suffice. The highly emotional, but terribly important matter involves, one, the authority of scriptures and the principle of biblical interpretation, the Christian understanding of human sexuality, doctrines of moral responsibility, and thus of sin and salvation, and ultimately the nature of the Christlike God of love. Who can begin to discuss such substantive matters in three short paragraphs on a page?”

“So I suggested that instead of writing, that I would like to sit down with as many of you as were willing to meet with me to talk over the many and complex issues involved. My secretary relayed that message to you. Her typewritten note of your response reads, ‘Clara Baron was very agreeable to talk with her group and let you know if they wished to meet with you re homosexuality.’ I had every reason to assume that the next communication from you would be your response to my offer. Instead you sent a long repetition of your spiritually presumptuous and practically inaccurate fragments of my treatment of scriptures and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Indeed it is because I take the Bible and the mind and spirit of my master with utmost seriousness that I made my offer to you in the first place.”

“Jesus leaves no doubt in Matthew 5:23 what we are to do when ‘we remember that our brothers and sisters have a grievance against us.’ We are to leave our gift at the altar and first go and make peace with our brothers and sisters

and only then come back and offer our gift. You served notice on me that you had a grievance against me. My response was to offer to come and make peace with you. Incredibly, you left my right hand for Christian fellowship suspended in mid air.” [Laughs.] “Now I am serving notice on all of you who signed the June 5th letter after knowing of my eagerness to sit down with you for a genuine visit I have a grievance against you. As Bible believers” – they’d emphasized that—

Mark B. [Laughs.]

Mel W. — “and disciples of Jesus Christ, it is now up to you to take Matthew 5:23 as seriously as Jesus meant you to take it, that is, it is your turn to notify me of your willingness to meet with me that we might make our peace together. I shall be available for such assimilation following jurisdictional conference and eagerly look forward to our time together.”

Lucile W. You are a third of the way through, and I made the dinner thing for 12.

Mel W. All right.

Lucile W. And so I, there – no, I mean—

Mel W. Yeah.

Lucile W. —maybe this is more important, although I think there’s, you know, a lot of details.

Mel W. Well, we can do a little bit when we come back.

Mark B. Yeah, we can talk and do it...can we come back and do a little more?

Lucile W. You can – oh, yeah.

Mel W. Yeah.

Lucile W. I think he could boil it down.

Mel W. Can give you – yeah, I can give you a copy.

Mark B. Well, the papers we should talk about, because it would be good to get those at some point, and so... But I'm not sure that I want to do all that now. But you've got all your papers, right?

Mel W. Yeah, right. Well, it's – there are various times I spelled out the things that are quoted the most. This letter – of course one of the other landmarks is when Good News got into the act, you see. And they got in because of this letter that I wrote about continuing Julian under appointment. I think one of the clergy staff members, one of the staff members at First Church Boulder, sent them a copy. And so then began their letter to me, and, you know.

Mark B. Why don't you go back and start telling that story? Just different stuff, meeting with Julian and what happened there.

Mel W. Well, actually, I'd been to the World Council of Methodism meeting in Honolulu in the fall of '81, and I was on the way back home, and we had not had a vacation. We were vacationing up in Idlewild, and I got a phone call from Don [Eitus], the district superintendent, that Julian had come out to the congregation, and so said

that we would need to be meeting with them as soon as possible. I got home and we got in touch with the pastor and tried to get together on a mutually agreeable schedule, gave him a date. He came back that he couldn't meet that day, that he was going to be in San Francisco. So we finally had a time together, and as we went back and forth on it, the administrative board was really very—

Mark B. You weren't meeting just with the pastor, you met with the whole administrative board?

Mel W. The whole administrative board, right, and it was an open meeting.

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. And they were very equivocal about what they wanted, and after that first meeting, as a matter of fact, the administrative board voted to continue Julian. But then I think after the word got out that they had voted to continue him, it was in the fall I remember, it was October, and I remember canvass time was coming up. And I really, I couldn't prove it, but think that some of the negative ones began saying, if you think we've been losing members or if you think this isn't going to cost us seriously. And now remember, a budget campaign, you just don't know how many people are talking out there, and so that hassle got going.

The strong point that was convincing to them was that the people who came seeing Julian, who worked mostly with the youth and Christian education, and with the community as well there, and always with his musical talents, but on major musical productions. And I reminded the administrative board, when I met

just with them, that if anybody, given the feelings that were going around this subject, if anybody could come up with a whisper of offense on Julian's part, you know, any parent, any child, any youth, you know, and the opposition, Julian's opposition, almost were almost at pains to get somebody, well, just – he must have made a pass at you sometime, you know.

But they were the ones who came before the administrative board talking about what a great guy this Julian Rush was, what a superb minister and families counsel with him. And so that's what first had the administrative board back off and say let's continue. Then late in the fall, and also the hassle had so, made Julian feel so...sort of distressed in his own continuing there, that he asked for another appointment. And happily, we were able to find that, and so he was appointed to St. Paul's Church and he's been continued in an appointment ever since.

Mark B. Shall I stop?

Lucile W. No. Another alternative is I can make a tuna sandwich if you'd rather keep on, and that would be fine. Or hard boiled eggs, or whatever. I'm going to be on tape talking—

Mark B. That's fine.

Lucile W. Would that be better for you?

Mark B. I would love to have you keep talking, but I don't want to spoil your day's schedule or whatever. How are you feeling?

Lucile W. No, that's fine.

Mark B. That's fine?

Lucile W. I'll be glad to do that, yeah. I mean, do you eat tuna fish?

Mark B. Oh, I am very simple. Just something – that would be great. That would be fine.

Lucile W. What we usually do at noon is just have some yogurt, too, but that's too simple, and we – and, you know, that gets broken too, so... So shall I just do that?

Mark B. Is that okay with you, Mel?

Mel W. Yeah, sure.

Lucile W. Okay. I'll call the restaurant then. You were going to tell about Marge, for sure, apropos of the...Julian Rush. Marge Matthews.

Mel W. Yeah, by all means. I had it coming up.

Lucile W. Okay.

Mel W. Right, right.

Lucile W. Because she was just a... I'll turn it off. Okay.

Mark B. Is it okay?

Lucile W. Yes.

Mark B. Be great.

Lucile W. And I'll go call them.

Mark B. Yeah, and also if you want to take a break and stretch, you know, say so, Mel.

Lucile W. And another thing, too, then, if you get through at 2:00, then come back and have supper or something.

Mark B. Actually, I'm in Malibu tonight.

Lucile W. In Malibu?

Mark B. I'm meeting with the Malibu church tonight.

Lucile W. Well, then you'll see oceans around.

Mark B. Mm-hmm. Yes, that's true. Did you meet with Julian much during this time?

Mel W. No, we talked back and forth about the appointment that we were talking about, and I had heard – I think we probably were trying to protect the objectivity, you know, and so one of the things that I'll identify sharing with you is the letter with, as I said, with this – *[laughs]* – army or military, high-ranking military person who thought I had violated my episcopal office by continuing him in ministry after I knew he was gay, you know, and so forth. But...

Mark B. So what led to that letter to you? So you found the appointment at St. Paul, so what led to the letter to the Conference?

Mel W. Actually, I make a point of first giving the clergy colleagues of the Rocky Mountain Conference. "This letter's to update you on the latest developments

pertaining to Julian Rush's appointment" and so forth. He's going to St. Paul's Church and invited to come there. "To the questions raised as to the Disciplinary basis for this appointment if a pastor has identified his sexual orientation as same sex I offer only interpretations and understandings in response. The sentences in the 1980 Discipline on homosexuality" and so forth, that they, "no less than a heterosexual persons and so forth, they are entitled to have their human and civil rights insured."

"It is after these substantive affirmations that negative reference to homosexual occurs. The wording of that negative partial sentence needs to be read carefully for the simple reason that it was written carefully. I was present personally in '72 when these sentences were first introduced, and I heard the entire debate. The original statement stuck with the affirmations. Then there began to develop a concern that those statements left by themselves might be interpreted. So the partial sentence that has the negative reference was originally entered in '72 and has been continued in '76 and '80. It came as a long belabored compromise. Following 'entitled to have their civil rights insured' came the words 'though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.'"

"Those most intent on making a negative amendment to the three substantive affirmations wanted to end the paragraph so as to make it read 'though we contend homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.' Three significant amendments were made to such wording. 'We condemn' was changed to read 'we do not condone,' 'homosexuality' was changed to read 'the

practice of homosexuality,’ and ‘we contend homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching’ to read ‘we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.’ The one negative reference carried in our Discipline on the subject was intentionally and explicitly limited to the practice of homosexuality, not homosexuality as an orientation.”

“But even this negative reference does not state the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. It is carefully worded away from a statement of fact to the language of admitted interpretation. ‘We *consider* this practice incompatible.’” You know, that’s a nice argumentation that they haven’t even...do vocally, but in writing you do. “In the interpretation ministers are not mentioned.” The footnotes running through and then the rest of my legal reason for doing it...

“Why then is there not some clear, unequivocal statement in the Discipline, especially in this footnote, that juxtaposes the references to homosexuality and ordination, declaring homosexual persons ineligible for ordination? Because the 1980 General Conference explicitly voted down not one, but two resolutions that tried to do exactly that. The 1980 General Conference is on official record as having decisively rejected two specific pieces of legislation that would have denied ordination to homosexuals.”

And what about a bishop appointing known gays? “When a bishop in the New York Conference recommended placing a known gay on leave of absence, the annual conference of the pastor involved overrode the cabinet’s and bishop’s

recommendation.” That was Paul Abels. “The Judicial Council of our United Methodist Church was asked to rule on this action of an annual conference as it related to a declared gay. The Judicial Council decision No. 46E re eligibility for a member of an annual conference appointment to a charge rendered October ’79, declared by virtue of Paragraph 420 and 451 of the Discipline, every member of an annual conference is eligible for appointment to a charge as long as his or her annual conference continues him or her in good standing and in the affected relation.”

“It is upon this combination of actions by the Judicial Council in October and the General Conference in 1980 that I based my appointment of Julian Rush to the ministerial staff of St. Paul’s Church in Denver. But I also choose” – and this is...I should have stopped right there – “to share with you two personal perspectives that may help you further understand my official response to this letter. Beyond the technical and judicial issues involved, what about the sinfulness of homosexuality and the appointability to a parish appointment of a person of same sex orientation? Do I believe that homosexuality is a sin?”

[Laughs.] And that’s where I wrote...I had shared it earlier. This was a letter, just one letter. This was November in ’81. In September 1980, and I – did I give you – I had a second copy of this right here, but I think I gave you it. It went out there. At any rate, I do have an extra copy.

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. “Do you believe that an avowed homosexual person should be appointed as a pastor of a church? Do you believe that homosexuality is sin? Do you believe that two persons of the same sex should have the privilege of being married? Did you wear a gay caucus badge on your bishop at General Conference this year as the article stated in the *Methodist Reporter* dated May 9th?”

And, you know, when you’re really in a pressure cooker situation – I don’t know how you find it – but there is guidance that comes from somewhere, and you can write things that you couldn’t have thought of other times. But some of these almost wrote themselves. “Do you believe that an avowed person should be appointed as a pastor of a church?” I do not think an avowed heterosexual should be appointed as a pastor of a church if that’s all I know about him or her. For the fact of heterosexuality tells me nothing whatsoever about the person’s character, temper, behavior, honesty, morality, and much less about the clarity of a person’s calling of God, commitment to Jesus Christ as savior and Lord, and endowment with sufficient supplied gifts and graces and fruits of the Holy Spirit to function as a representative in the church.

Just so if all I know about a person is that person’s sexual orientation is same sex, but is not other sex, that tells me absolutely nothing,” and so forth and so forth. “In other words, the biblical, traditional, and ecclesiastic trinity of criteria to test qualification of appointment as a pastor – authentic call of God, unequivocal commitment to Jesus Christ, gifts, graces and fruits of the Holy Spirit – have nothing to do with sexual orientation. Some homosexuals, just as there are many heterosexuals, obviously do not pass the trinitarian test.

Some homosexuals just as obviously do pass those tests. Those homosexuals who do pass the test should be appointed to the parishes subject to exactly the same dual tests of living under God's sovereignty and the beneficial love and charity of neighbors as heterosexuals are subject to. Do you believe that homosexuality is a sin?" And this was a year before I had put it in the pastoral letter, but "I am an enthusiastically heterosexual male." I don't know whether you've seen that or not, but it's quoted in a number... "And is my heterosexuality a virtuous sign of righteousness?"

Mark B. Wonderful.

Mel W. "My behavior, therefore, may be very sinful, brutal, exploitive, selfish, promiscuous, my behavior as a heterosexual male may be beautiful, tender, considerate," so precisely the same distinction for...

Mark B. So you sort of lifted from that when you wrote to the—

Mel W. When I wrote – yeah, right, right.

Mark B. When you wrote to the colleagues.

Mel W. I repeated. Yeah. "Do you believe that a homosexual should be appointed to a church? Do I believe that homosexuality is sin?" That's that first part. And then the other part I just read you. "Do you believe that two persons of the same sex should have the privilege of being married?" This was pretty early in that, you know, 1980.

Mark B. Yeah, it was.

Mel W. And the one I wrote for PFLAG is slightly different that's in their handbook on this, but "I suspect the word 'marriage' is too inseparably related to our acculturation to heterosexual commitment to relationship of ultimate intimacy, intentional continuity and respected privacy as to be useful and acceptable when applied to same sex covenants, but by whatever name that is appropriate, same sex couples who choose to covenant in a relationship of ultimate intimacy, intentional continuity and responsible privacy should be free to make that choice and to ceremonialize it in whatever form that maximizes the distinctive qualities of all such partnership relations of mutual love and covenant."

"Did you wear a gay caucus badge on your bishop's badge at General Conference as the article in the *United Methodist Reporter* stated in May, 1980? In the final edition" – I might have responded – "final edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate* published at General Conference, but received by all the delegates after they returned home from General Conference." That was what the Council of Bishops instructed them to do, you know.

Mark B. Right, right. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. "Some would receive it as much as two weeks later. The Council of Bishops published a public apology to me for having violated my ecclesiastical civil rights as a colleague in printing a statement with the episcopal address which said that all the undersigned bishops were in total agreement with the address. The truth was that I had never signed anything, but my name was carried with all the rest.

In written protest, in hand-raised vote, and explicit word vote to the presenter of the episcopal address, and the president of the Council of Bishops, I had, before the body, insisted that my name was not to be listed as supporting the address as it was worded. I was assured my name would not be carried. Against my protests and without my consent, my name was carried in the list published in the first day's *Daily Christian Advocate*. I was thus politically disenfranchised and personally violated."

"I take my signature very seriously. I do not want anyone forging my name to anything, much less to a document of this consequence. Thus politically disenfranchised and personally violated by my episcopal colleagues, I identified the statement I wanted to make about homosexual persons with my role as a bishop. Until the public retraction by the Council of Bishops appeared in the final edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*, I did wear a gay caucus badge on my bishop's badge at General Conference. Sorry to belabor you with all this, but since the essence of both our life and our religion is the quality of our relationships – Jesus called it love – I wanted to be fair to your questions and to answer them enough to give you a chance to be fair with my answers. Thank you for your interest and your patience. God's grace" and so forth.

Mark B. Mm-hmm. So the letter went out to all the pastors in the conference?

Mel W. Right.

Mark B. What kind of immediate response did you get?

Mel W. Mostly – well, the ones who got in touch were supportive, and as I say, it was a providential kind of deliverance. I received a call from the pastor of St. Paul’s Church, George Christie. I don’t know whether—

Mark B. That’s right, George was there then.

Mel W. Yeah. Unrelated – he didn’t know, or he had no sense that it had anything to do with what was going on, but he told me that their church council had just met, and he was so high about it because he said they decided they really must be ministering to the community of which we’re a part, and we’ve done a research job, and we discovered that our clientele, our natural clientele are the elderly, singles, and homosexuals. And they’ve decided that we need for me to have an assistant to make sure that we can minister to our natural clientele. I said, George, thank you so much for calling. I think I may be calling you back. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] Uh-huh.

Mel W. And I couldn’t tell him why. But when...because Julian hadn’t...right...hadn’t absolutely decided he felt he wanted to leave. So when he came definitely to that conclusion and asked for another appointment—

Mark B. So you really were intending to leave Julian at Boulder if he wished to stay there? That was your intention?

Mel W. Yeah, right. And it had moved to the point that officially that was possible, but... But...

Mark B. So then someone sent the letter to Good News?

Mel W. Sent the letter to Good News. *The New Yorker*. Oh, oh, yeah, well, yeah, that's...but we'll take that as part of the first.

Mark B. Okay, go ahead.

Mel W. Well, *The New Yorker* sent Calvin Trillin out to write up the story, and so he came out and did a very thorough job. He spent two and a half hours with me in the office, and then spent a lot of time with Julian and with the lay people out in Boulder. And in the January 25, 1982 *New Yorker*, published as "U.S. Journal, Boulder, Colorado—Let Me Find a Place." And a long article about what went on. And his interview with me... And, let's see... "Lost a number of...oh, lost a number of his most active members because the view of the opponents to Julian's presence had left because of the delay in his departure. His supporters having left because of the decision that was finally made," you know. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. "The annual fund drive also was costly." But Julian's statement, "I felt positive about who I was that I didn't hide it anymore," and so... But at any rate, as a result of this Calvin Trillin article, I began to get letters from members from Westwood Church and one of the original gays who wrote the first...what was identified in the *L.A. Times* as the first openly gay novel, Forman Brown. It was *Turnabout House*. I had blocked that out in the days...

Lucile W. [*Inaudible.*]

Mel W. *Turnabout*...well, it has *House* up there, you know, but I think that's where he lives now.

Lucile W. Oh, okay.

Mel W. But he wrote me a very brief article. "I just was reading the article in Trenton, New York about the Julian Rush case and your sympathetic handling of it. During the '50s, with my mother, I was a regular attendant of your church in Westwood and the preacher made such a thing as a true fan. I probably would never have admitted to you my own homosexuality, but I must have felt instinctively that had an occasion arisen for me to do so, I would have had a warm and understanding reception. I have just celebrated my 81st birthday and my 55th year of living with the same friend, who is 78. I doubt whether many marriages have been happier. Congratulations on your understanding and your bravery," you know, so...

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. And since then there have been a number of articles by him and about him in the *L.A. Times* and in – this is *Modern Maturity* magazine. I don't know that he comes out as gay there, but the *L.A. Times* article was about his having, when they were together in Yale, and this theatre featured puppeteers, you know. *Turnabout Theatre* got the name. They had one stage where they'd have live performance and they had another stage where they had puppeteers, and they would, you know, you'd stand up and they'd reverse the seats. Richard Brandon, the youngest of the three Yale puppeteers who'd begun the first___ had died. This was 1985. It goes

back to that time. And since this article, it doesn't really identify by word the fact that these people were, you know, that the other two were in a committed relationship, but since the article came about, about his writing the first gay novel while he was at Yale.

So that and as I say, a number of positive letters came, and some negative ones as well. The *San Francisco Chronicle* picked it up and published it in toto, "Coming Out in Boulder." And that was the February 28, 1982 edition. But the combination of that much publicity, of course, most of all though, my letter to the clergy, Bishop Wheatley's interpretation challenge, the Good News people wrote to me as of February 2, 1982, and...telling me how wrong I was. And I wrote back a long letter to them. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. It was Jim Heidinger then, okay.

Mel W. Yeah, it was. He was already there.

Mark B. He's been there a long time.

Mel W. He's been there a long time. And again, I was...ended up being rather lengthy and laboriously written. I started out, "I was not surprised to receive a communication from you. I am painfully aware of the sharp disagreements among us, as the more nearly Christlike way for us, who are both committed Christians and heterosexual in our sexual orientation relate to other equally committed Christians who are homosexual in their sexual orientation. I was surprised that the one and only communication I received from you was not a

personal letter. Indeed, I was deeply disappointed that the communication, instead of being the kind of personal letter that might properly have been written by three colleagues” – it was signed by Jim Heidinger, Michael Walker – do you know him? John Greenfeld.

Mark B. Yeah, I’ve heard of him.

Mel W. He was chairman of the Section on Discipleship and Special Concerns, but whether that’s their section, the Good News section—

Mark B. Yeah, Good News.

Mel W. Yeah, but...and this is really what happened. It teed me off a little bit. “...might properly have been written from three colleagues in Christ to another colleague in Christ was, in fact, an open letter mailed not only to me, to my episcopal peers and to selected church leaders, but also to selected leaders of the media. The disappointment of your taking that approach was magnified into shock when I discovered that your open letter to the media ended with your charging me with a violation of the covenant community of United Methodist clergy. I have friends, Dr. Heidinger, who treat their secular service clubs and lodges more like covenant communities than you and your colleagues, through your open letter to the media, have treated the community of United Methodist clergy to which you and I belong, but to which the media most assuredly does not belong.”

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. “My second disappointment with your letter is the reason you have given for writing it is to supply sensitive and thoughtful feedback. You say to me we take note of your concern to defend your action in the open forum of the church. I say to you from what exactly and specifically do you take such note?” But I had never written openly as he was referring. I said that was an open letter to the clergy, you know. “My third disappointment is the thread that you present your premises as proof of your conclusions.” You had...premises aren’t conclusions, they’re premises, you know.

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. “In my past letter to my Rocky Mountain Conference colleagues I define my readings of the sections of the General Conference and of the intentions of the Discipline in so many words as my own interpretations and understandings.” And that’s what I had done, but they... And then “my fifth disappointment with your open letter is that this isn’t dealing with the issues pertaining to homosexuality from positions traditionally taken at a time when precisely those positions traditionally taken have themselves become the issues to be dealt with. Let me address just two of those issues, which may well be amongst the most controversial and the most crucial.”

“What the Bible really does and does not say about homosexuality and homosexual persons, and two, whether or not there are, in fact, persons whose sexual orientation is as authentically homosexual as the sexual orientation of other

persons is heterosexual. And if that authenticity is a fact, then how does one account for the origin of that orientation?"

And then the last quote, essentially all the new books that were coming out, beginning to deal with all that. "Represented among these scholars are Anglicans, Roman Catholics, United Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, and Evangelicals. I supply this bit of biography to lay to rest the myth that it is those liberal United Methodist colleagues of yours and mine who created, in the beginning, and are sustaining, to this time, all this furor about homosexuality." "Forum of Scriptural Christianity...You need to have this acquaintance in order to get beyond what either of us thinks the Bible says about homosexuality and beyond what either of us hopes the Bible says in order to get closer to what the Bible unequivocally does say or quite equivalently, it does not say on the subject."

"If you are thus thoroughly conversant with the aforementioned scholarly works, is there then not reason to wonder if you may be the ones, much more than I, guilty of ignoring what the Bible really does say about homosexuality?" And then of course Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith piece with the name of *Sexual Preference: its Development in Men and Women* had just come out, so you deal with that.

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. But of course we all wanted them to try to give it a different title, but... So that was the letter.

Mark B. Did you get a response to that letter?

Mel W. Never got a response. It was never published. They published their letter to me, you know, in their magazine, but I never had any kind of personal response to that.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. But sort of spinning out of that, of course, was the heresy trial.

Mark B. Right.

Mel W. And there were many interesting aspects of that.

Mark B. How did that start? Did you get a letter from someone? Do you remember how that sort of began?

Mel W. No. It started and – *[laughs]* – when we met, it was started by David Hendrix, H-E-N-D-R-I-X, of Waverly Hall, Georgia. Says “that appointment goes against Bible teaching, United Methodist doctrine...” that’s Julian Rush “....which he makes the statement that homosexuality is a sin. Hendrix is minister to three small congregations in Waverly Hall, Ellerslie, and Shiloh, South Georgia.”

Mark B. So he never communicated to you?

Mel W. Never communicated to me, and when Lucile and I – Lucile was with me at the time we first met him at the scene of the trial in...Westminster?

Lucile W. Westchester.

Mel W. Westchester, L.A., out toward the airport. He said, gosh, I didn't know when I put those things in writing that it had the—

Lucile W. That this was what was going to happen.

Mel W. This was what was going to happen.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mel W. [*Laughs.*] And we said, well, how did you get into the United Methodist Church, you know? But he was there with his whole family, and...

Lucile W. Some money raised by ____.

Mel W. Yeah, he got lots of money that came in, and there's a fascinating footnote to this about the money that came in and how they spent it. Brought the whole family, in-laws as well as...were his parents there? It was the in-laws I remember specifically. But he represented himself, partly because he knew that a church from Dallas, Texas, and one of the boards or a group of laymen from the Boulder church had joined in supporting the trial against me, and they sent a lawyer from Boulder who was there asking questions and trying to make their case against me. And a Rocky Mountain elder...and Lucile, I can't even remember who it was. I was trying to... Because we knew our lawyer's son Jim was going to be sitting with us, too, and our gay son and his partner.

Lucile W. You were trying to remember the name of the minister who helped defend you?

Mel W. Yeah.

Lucile W. I've got that.

Mel W. Well...

Mark B. So you were talking about the money and the in-laws of the Hendrix family?

Mel W. Yeah, well, the...

Lucile W. You guys can go out on the porch. I know you like to smoke. If you need a cigarette break—

Mark B. We'll take a break here.

Lucile W. —you could go out on the balcony.

Mark B. That's okay. I think it will work out okay.

Lucile W. But take a break when you're ready. This is yours.

Mel W. Well, to finish that...

Lucile W. And this is yours.

Mel W. The committee went out, when we'd all...they'd asked the questions they wanted to ask. And Harvey [Fodoff] was on it, and one of the early clergy women, who would have been the first clergy bishop, woman bishop, everybody, taught from the Berkeley area.

Mark B. Oh, Barbara Troxell?

Mel W. Barbara Troxell I think was on it. But they dismissed us and said don't go too far away, we don't know how long it'll take. But this was in the morning, a second day. They had the hearing one day and this was the morning the second day. Don't go away. But when they came back at lunch and said, well, we're not going to be able to...go on out and take a lunch break, but come back right after lunch, 'cause we think we're close enough that fairly promptly after lunch we'll be able to bring in our verdict and our statement.

And so we took a lunch break and came back, and we were in the church parlor. They were meeting in one of the assembly rooms. And so they took a little longer than they thought they would. It was at least an hour, I think. But by the end of an hour or so they came for us and said, why don't we go get the other, go get the Hendrix. And we waited in wherever the hearing had been. Nobody appeared. Then after a while they came and said we can't find the Hendrix' anywhere, but we've waited long enough, so we're just going to read our verdict.

And they read the verdict, which was...we better have a copy of that. But unanimous decision, the Western Jurisdiction, but they prepared a very careful statement of the responsibility of completing our investigation along with their actual firing with no grounds for these charges. And saying regret that the accuser is not here to hear this, but, you know, we've given fair time.

And so everybody had left, but the pastor of the church later told us that the Hendrix had showed up – this would have been sometime 2:00-ish that they had announced it – at 4:30, 5:00 sort of laughingly saying, gee, we got so

involved, we were over at Universal City. They were spending all this money –
[laughs] – doing Disneyland and... Huh?

Lucile W. Universal City is the same idea.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. Disneyland.

Lucile W. That was Universal City that day.

Mel W. I said that Unive—they had been, and they were at Universal City that day—

Lucile W. They were doing the whole...

Mel W. —yeah, but they were doing the whole schmeer.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. And then the...but the real sequel to all that, too, is that...where did I have that?
“Pastor behind heresy count leaves UMC.”

Mark B. Oh, I didn't – I never caught that. I never knew that happened.

Mel W. Yeah. Well, he first went into...what's that where you start your own church?
The Vineyard Movement.

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. But then, as I understand it, he eventually departed even from that.

Mark B. Uh-huh. Hm.

Mel W. But it's some sort of a commentary on our system where—

Mark B. Yeah. You never heard any more, like if he was set up by anyone, or there was never—

Mel W. No.

Mark B. —any evidence or anything?

Mel W. No. Huh-uh. No, I never had any idea. He had preached a sermon, and whether the word about that got out. And he did get encouragement. He certainly got financial support.

Mark B. Yeah, yeah. Actually, I have to go to the bathroom.

Mel W. Sure, sure. Right around the corner there, the first...

[*Break.*]

Mel W. This is the letter from the Tyler – I think it was the Tyler Street United Methodist Church. Paul [Norrell], and I think he's continued to be one of the...

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. All the harm I was doing. “Further disturbed that you expressed surprise and concern that Good News has given some distribution of your general pastoral letter. Your complaint of its use is only a smokescreen, leads many to suspect you're willing to be dishonest in support of your concerns. A general pastoral

letter is not a personal letter. It is not privileged.” See, that...apparently they made a mass distribution to all their known supporters, you see.

Mark B. Of your letter?

Mel W. Yeah. “I hope that your cause will be brought to trial that is fair to you, to your strongly advocated position. The actions of the General Conference see where the church is in this matter. The call for a trial is not an attack on the episcopacy. It is not an attack on you, it is necessary to clarify – purify the witness of the church, whatever that might be. Be careful of your position as a bishop. You have your right to your opinions and your advocacy, but not as a bishop. You should resign, in my opinion, if you pursue your kind of direction. God bless you in your decisions.” [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. What date was that letter?

Mel W. June 1982. Or his--April 28, 1982. And I answered him two months later, but... “I received your April 28th letter just a week before I...before word arrived that your congregation had joined the Georgia accusers. I therefore expected a chance to visit with you at the hearing in Los Angeles. Person to person sharing would have been much more satisfactory than a written exchange. To my knowledge, the only time we’ve been privileged to meet” – and that was after I had preached at the Highland Park Church, a series – “surely I do not know you well enough to...

[*End Tape 1, Side B; Start Tape 2, Side A.*]

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. But his was the church that joined the Boulder...and I forget who it was in the Boulder. But one of the spin-offs of all this, of course, was some of the...perhaps the best-known person I received a letter from was Leon Uris, the writer. "The last time I had occasion to write you was when Frank Harvey was contemplating his move and I recall getting a warm and humane letter from you that pleased me greatly. We have followed you recently in the papers. We are delighted that your peers dropped any action against you and feel that you and your church are to be commended for your position in the matter of the gay pastor. Kindest regards. Sincerely, Leon Uris."

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. A very close friend of ours was his not housekeeper in the cleaning up sense, but he was gone so much that she lived in the house. And it was about that time when I got acquainted with Evangelicals Concerned, and Dr. Ralph Blair, and so we cherish that as we...

Mark B. Did you hear from any of your colleagues, other bishops at that point, during that time? Do you remember in terms of other communications?

Mel W. No.

Mark B. You were just all alone?

Mel W. Really didn't. I'm sure there were some who were supportive. Marvin Stuart finally wrote a letter that ended up, or that was in the *Methodist Reporter* we call it, you know, but I don't know that that pertained to the trial, necessarily. But...

Mark B. Any negative response from any bishops who contacted you, do you remember?

Mel W. No, not at that time. Dick Looney has made his opposition to my point of view known about as much as any of them, you know. Was he actually on the Committee, or...? Yeah, before he was elected, wasn't he? Wasn't he or was he?

Mark B. He was put on...well, I'll have to go back and remember. Yeah, I think he was put on the Committee later.

Mel W. When somebody stepped off, right, right, right. By the way, we appeared before the Committee, incidentally, as representatives of PFLAG. That was an interesting experience. Then of course after the...because we got hundreds of letters.

Mark B. Just a bit overwhelmed, right?

Mel W. Yeah, right. So much so that we made up three forms, you know. One to the positively supportive and one to the still have questions about. And all of them, the ones to the ones who were attackingly negative, you know. And the secretary didn't have some of the ultra modern equipment that we have now, but she at least had one where she could just type in the address and it would then go automatically.

And “along with an impressive number of letters heartily supporting my attitudes and actions related to homosexual persons, I have received a significant number of other letters, including yours, strenuously objecting to my approach. Most of these critical letters have been so similar in substance that I find it useful to make the same response to each of them. I begin by thanking you for your concern. For much too long a time we have treated the problem related to differences in sexual orientation either as if they weren’t there at all or as if the old approaches to them were still adequate. Now that we’ve begun to try some new ways to deal with those problems, we have become painfully aware of the disagreements among us.”

“One of or all of four basic reference points seem to be at the heart of those differences. Questions concerning the Bible, the test of the authority over our lives, and what the Bible does say...oh, the sinfulness of homosexuality or its authenticity for a certain percentage of the population. What the 1980 General Conference did about homosexual persons and what the Discipline says about what help or hurt may be experienced by our covenant community of United Methodist Christians as a result of my attitudes and actions,” and so forth.

“In spite of your interest in the Bible, you may not be aware that for over a quarter of a century now a number of outstanding scholars who are thoroughly committed Christians have been showing, one, that the Bible does not in fact say what you assume it says about homosexual persons, and two, that what it does say needs to be appropriately applied in very different ways than you think.” And that was Derrick Sherwin Bailey’s *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition, Is*

the Homosexual my Neighbor?, Boswell, James Nelson, Joe Webber, Edward –
Ed Bauman was still in good graces then, and the “Reflections on the Gay Life.”
That was a good thing that he first put out, you know. I don’t know whether he
ever retracted it or not.

Mark B. He sort of, actually, for people who talk with them, he never retracted it publicly. Privately to the people of the church he said he would not have written the same sermon ten years later. He changed his mind a little bit more conservatively.

Mel W. Yeah, yes, I know. And I enclose two articles.

Mark B. Would there be...did all those letters get saved in conference archives?

Mel W. Yeah. I have a file in there with...

Mark B. Okay. So you have all those? You did keep all that?

Mel W. The secretary turned them over, and as I say, the Iliff School of Theology is to be the recipient of them.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. But we tried to answer every one that came, but in order to do that I had to stop...

Mark B. Doing them one by one?

Mel W. Doing them individually, right. But I had a wonderful secretary, and she stayed on it. All right, and now you had questions that you...

Mark B. So the trial was in, what was it, it was like in June of '82, May of '82?

Mel W. May of '82, uh-huh.

Mark B. It wasn't quite a trial, but sort of a trial.

Mel W. Yeah, yeah. Well, then following that, sort of disappointing. Even after my exoneration, a minority of members of First Church of Colorado Springs – it wasn't a majority of the total membership, but it was a majority of, I think, 400 who stayed after a service, you know. Called a meeting, voted to withhold paying their apportionments until I resigned or recanted. And to most of the rest of the Conference it was almost a joke because there wasn't a church in the Conference that had a poorer record of paying its apportionments.

Mark B. [Laughs.]

Mel W. Particularly – well, even during the days of Larry...he's been at Oral Roberts University ever since, but when he was pastor there. In fact our farewell dinner was held there.

Mark B. At First Church Colorado Springs?

Mel W. First Church Colorado Springs. And Lucile wrote a statement that she ought to have to read it herself. Oh, here's one of the things. Marge Matthews—

Mark B. Oh, yeah. You wanted to talk about that, uh-huh.

Mel W. She and her cabinet were trying to do exactly what we did, but they got hung up. They couldn't find an opening. Otherwise they would have...

Mark B. Uh-huh. So she had written to you asking for your help?

Mel W. No, I – it was some of her cabinet had visited with me. No, she did that all on her own. She – no, it was really, she was way out front, and...

Mark B. Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah, this is in January of '82. Actually, I know Kevin. Kevin's a pastor. He's living in Chicago now.

Mel W. Oh, really? I want to read you that note of Lucile's. She...when she got word that... Well, I've got it in here, but let me... Help yourself to that fruit.

Mark B. Oh, I'm eating some. How are you doing? Do you want to stop and eat a little bit?

Mel W. Yeah, I will when I get back.

Mark B. Okay, go ahead.

[*Break.*]

Mel W. ...is '80 into '81.

Mark B. Yeah, I knew you were traveling a lot, weren't you? And spoke at a lot of churches?

Mel W. Yeah.

Mark B. And Eleanor Lewallen went with you sometimes?

Mel W. She went, right, but learned not to accept invitations to go unless they would permit us to bring at least one gay person, and preferably two gay, two, a gay man and a lesbian with us. Carol White was the lesbian who most often went with us. Carol's story is all too typical of what was happening then and is still happening to members of the UMC who identify themselves as authentically gay. Do you know her story?

Mark B. I sort of do, but I – I mean, I knew she was in a church in Texas, right?

Mel W. She was in a church in Texas and had graduated. [*Laughs.*] I found out when – I was invited to go down to Perkins just...gosh, was it since I've been here, or maybe while I was still there. No, I think I was here. I think I'd retired. To talk on this subject. And I wrote or phoned the person that invited me and said, well, you know, I'm delighted to come, but...and then I told them about my principle of never wanting to go anywhere unless I could be accompanied by a gay man and a gay woman, and I said because one of my absolutes is that we heterosexuals are no more competent to describe and tell what it means, how it feels in varying and fulfillment lives to be homosexual than we are white people talking about what it means to be black or than we who are male are competent to talk about what it means to be female. And so I said and particularly because two of the people who helped us, helped Lucile and me most times, whenever we've been invited anywhere—

Lucile W. ___ item, wipe that dust off.

Mark B. Oh, I'm sorry.

Lucile W. No, listen, that's fine. I have two root beers in the freezer, and one Coors beer that we keep for our [Raleigh].

Mark B. Actually, water is—

Lucile W. Is that fine?

Mark B. Yeah.

Lucile W. Do you need more?

Mark B. Nope. I've got some more water. I'm doing okay.

Lucile W. Did you get it out of here so it's cold?

Mark B. I got it out of the tap. No, I'm okay. I'm really fine.

Mel W. So I said particularly since two of the ones who have helped us the most are...all everything, the All-American male and the All-American female from your graduating classes at Perkins. And Carol took degrees from Perkins as well as from Southern Methodist. And so they agreed. And so—

Mark B. You referred to All-American male from—

Mel W. Well, I mean, they...she was queen of this and queen of that, and Julian—

Mark B. Oh, Julian came from Perkins also?

Mel W. Oh, yeah, I'm sorry I didn't make that clear.

Mark B. Oh, I didn't realize that, okay.

Mel W. So Julian and Carol both agreed to meet me there, and so I just had an opening statement. It was a luncheon meeting that lasted for two hours, so they had lunch together but stayed on for an hour. And the room was full. You know, it wasn't an auditorium, but it was a sizable meeting room. And they made the major presentations, and it was great because then they were having, you know, to deal with people they really knew.

Mark B. Yeah.

Mel W. And Carol, of course, told part of her story there. But she had graduated with honors from both schools, had gotten a staff position, and I never can remember for sure – I think it was in a Houston, large Methodist church in Houston. And when she finally decided, and she had done all the things...her story she tells, spent lots of her dad's money in trying to be something other than who she was, decided that it was absolutely futile and the only way she could be authentic was to recognize she was lesbian. Came out to her senior pastor. It was a collegial matter. She sort of felt it, you know, he almost booted her out of his office, you know.

 And so it was such a destructive experience for her that instead of trying to apply elsewhere, she went back to be – and I don't know how much interval, Lucile, whether you remember how much interval it was, but pulling herself together, she went back to the East Coast, took a professional court reporter's course to become a court reporter. And had been doing that for about 12 years, I think, when she and Lucile and Ellen Lewallen met Carol and talked Carol into going to a meeting at PFLAG. And it was meeting, as it almost always does everywhere, in a church, and Carol was saying, well, it'll be the first time I've been at church since whatever.

 And she was really alienated, and Lucile was recalling this yesterday or the day before, talking about these things. She and Judy, her companion, now it's a number of years, both, and Carol had mentioned it the most, had taken a real

beating from other lesbians for fooling around with churches even anymore,
which is quite a phenomenon, I'm sure.

Mark B. Yeah, it's true.

Mel W. But—

Lucile W. And Jim Scurlock mentioned that in ____.

Mel W. She's been a powerhouse. In fact I have a letter in there that I used to quote often
that—

Lucile W. This is when we first came out.

Mel W. Now going around to these different congregations. Usually we were invited in to
beat us up, you know, really, in those days. But the...I forget where I was going
now on that track. Oh, yeah. It was one of the churches, a woman, elderly
woman, she identified herself, I think, in her 80s maybe, said I've been having
trouble with the subject, and when I heard that Bishop Wheatley was going to be
there, was going to meet with us after church to talk about it, I decided I wanted
to go and listen. And she said I was helped by what he had to say, but I didn't
really catch on to what homosexuality is all about and how we should be changing
our attitudes and feelings until Carol White started to speak.

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. Then she said, I really knew that I had to change my feelings and actions radically
because this person was as authentically Christian as I was and so forth. And she

had written that to Bill [Cutler], who was pastor there at the time, and said this is helpful and all, I just wanted to write you to tell you and thank you for having them come, but if it's helpful and you want to publish it, go ahead. And he had published it in his church paper, and that's where I picked it up.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. But she has been a powerhouse. And then of course getting her feeling a little freer, because to this day we're not sure that she feels totally comfortable when her directing of the chorus appears on public television, because she wasn't out to her boss and she thought any time she might lose her...and he was verbally anti-gay. But she continues to be a real powerhouse.

Mark B. Were there any other folks who traveled on the speaking? You said Julian and Karen and Eleanor and – Carol, excuse me. Eleanor Lewallen.

Mel W. There were gay men, but they weren't necessarily Methodist.

Mark B. Oh, okay. How did you first connect with PFLAG, do you remember that?

Mel W. Well, there – this one, just a minute – one who came out to Denver hoping for some kind of a position. Bob Moore, have you heard...?

Mark B. That is weird. He was from the same church I was from in Washington, D.C.

Mel W. Okay, all right. That's...

Mark B. That's right.

Mel W. All right. He came out and we tried to help connect him. The only opening—

Lucile W. When you say he came out—

Mel W. Came out to the—

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mel W. Came out to Denver. And of course we related immediately, not only because of the gay issue, but he taught at American University, which was our alma mater.

Lucile W. We met him in Washington.

Mark B. Ahh.

Mel W. We met him, yeah, and so there was an opening, but we knew it was a very long shot, as director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Wyoming. He went up and interviewed, but never heard anything from that. But then was able to pay his living expenses for a while because he got a musician job. He played the organ, you know, he was an organist.

And then he was the originator of the Gay Men's Chorus of Denver. But as so often happens, groups sort of outgrow their originator, you know, and it's sort of sad to see it happen. In fact, even by the time we went back there in '84 for the third meeting of the national PFLAG, he was accompanying the Gay Men's Chorus rather than directing. But he and Carol, for a while, were the directors of the two choruses. Now then there are three choruses. Carol has one,

there's a mixed chorus, an excellent group, and I don't know whether Bob's related at all to that, but...

Mark B. Yeah, I don't think he is. But he's still living in Denver.

Mel W. He's teaching at the Catholic college there.

Lucile W. And he probably knows more about it.

Mel W. Yeah, you probably know more about it than we do. But yeah, well, that was one of the other connections we had. During the last quadrennium we had become very active in PFLAG. At the same time we—

Lucile W. It was '82. I went to a first meeting.

Mark B. I was going to ask you. You went to a PFLAG meeting?

Lucile W. With Eleanor.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Lucile W. Because she was coming out in the group with having a lesbian daughter. And I wasn't able – I had called on her and I had told her we had a gay son, but she still needed more, so I – we had said we didn't need to attend PFLAG because we felt okay about John and didn't have time to go. But we ____, I went then and Mel went the next time, and then we went every single time.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] You got hooked, huh?

Lucile W. From then till now.

Mark B. Uh-huh. It's amazing how it's a small world because I've met – Dean, Tom and Eleanor's son is partners with a friend of mine in New York City.

Mel W. Really?

Mark B. So last time I was in New York about a year ago, I had dinner with Dean and – and I didn't know Dean at all. I mean, I knew Price Jepsen, is who I knew, and he had met Dean. And we were having dinner and he said who his parents were, and I thought that was amazing, it's a small world, how those connections become—

Mel W. At first, that's right, and Eleanor started as president of national PFLAG. She used her maiden name for a while.

Mark B. Oh, she did?

Mel W. Because...I don't know whether...I think it was the one in New York who wasn't quite ready to have her use the ____.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mel W. But then they negotiated, and so by the time she...she never quite finished her term. She is excellent and does – but gets so consumed by the involvement that she almost has a breakdown, and so she asked to be excused, didn't finish her term, and she's gone through that again in recent months. She's sort of gone off the speakers' list and the leadership of the local chapter. But she does a superb job. One of the top-notch people. They did one of the first coming out to a whole congregation that ____, the Park Hill congregation.

Mark B. I'm curious to have you think and talk a bit, you were talking way earlier on about you didn't really consider yourself a very brave person and you were sort of surprised around the episcopal address. Have you thought more about sort of what was personally driving your motivation, or why you felt, or how that sort of change happened and you felt you needed to become more outspoken in terms of lesbian/gay issues and how that felt for you?

Mel W Well, I think you begin to experience some of the...in a very minimal way, what those who are gay experience every day of your lives with much more emphasis. In fact, in the course I'm using I identify the fact that the...the meeting of the Council of Bishops, after insisting on the 1980 General Conference – no, it was a meeting of the Council between the one in Colorado Springs where I came out to them, put them on notice that I didn't want my name carried anymore, because the next Council meeting that was in Lake Junaluska, and we were so uncertain about what the reaction would be because we didn't get feedback from any of them, that Lucile just didn't want to go, so she stayed home.

I went and I remember very vividly, and I call it in this present—in the course, because they know Dan Tower here. He's a black, African-American clergyman in this conference. But he's served most of his time as chaplain of a student work at Cal State L.A. But he and I used to have lunch together at annual conference sometimes and we went out east of Redlands to have lunch. And we went in the restaurant that I'd gone to several times before. I'm not sure if he'd ever been in it. I don't think he'd been in there.

But at any rate, we walked in and instantly the receptionist took us over to the table right next to the swinging doors where the waiters and waitresses came in and out, and then we sat down. Dan leaned over to me and said, “Mel, it’s natural for you to assume that we were put at this table because it was the only one available, but it’s just as natural for me to assume that we were put at this table because I am black.”

And I’m making the point that...and Rod Sprott it was, he’s been sitting in on with the sessions at Westwood Church. And he’ll be – *[laughs]* – this kind of thing, I could call it the Rod Sprott Syndrome because he may want to, in his story, when the second session he shares it, but he’ll never know whether he was discontinued because they really had to cut back the budget or whether it was because he was gay. I have strong beliefs in the...believe that it was the latter. Dick Cain was the interim pastor, and it was an interim pastor who did it, you know, which made it even more questionable, because a new staff person should have that decision.

But I decided to go to the Lake Junaluska meeting, and the first morning there, of course obviously self-conscious, so I have to put that in in order to credit everything. I walked down to breakfast. It was open seating. We weren’t assigned seats. And all the tables were filled, and so I went to a table that was vacant, and I was there for 45 minutes, and a lot of people came down. It was a large dining room, but there were plenty of tables. So not a soul came over and sat – *[laughs]* – at the table where I was. And so it’s that syndrome of you never can be sure. It can be just coincidental or it can be very intentional, you know.

And that's still – [*laughs*] – the experience that we have that keeps us a little tuned in to what our son John and you and others have all the time.

We still can't believe it, but [Winston Trevor] – I don't know whether you know Winston or not. He was pastor of several of our big churches in this conference, and then ended up as pastor of the largest Methodist church in Pittsburgh, and had wonderful ministries. But he came by one day a few months ago and said Loma – oh, oh, and visited, and just before – and I used to do the same thing, I know, on calls where I had an unhappy message I was really there to deliver.

But he was about ready to get up. He said, “Now, what I really was asked to come by by Loma Haines, Harry Haines.” He's the big one from Australia, you know. He's on one of the national boards, but he's a very powerful speaker. But his wife, he said Loma Haines asked me to come by if you would be willing to teach the adult Sunday School class a few Sundays in October, November.

Mark B. This is at the one at Westwood?

Mel W. No, at Laguna Hills.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

Mel W. And I said, well, Winston, actually we are not accepting invitations. I'm not accepting invitations to preach at all. I even turned down Jim Stewart. He'd been an associate at Westwood when I was there and he was pastor, you know, and I turned him down when he would ask me, and he caught on to that. Because we

find that we need all the energy and time we have for that kind of thing to do our work in the gay related issues. That's what we're accepting. Oh, he said, okay. And that was it. Closed the conversation. And so not long afterwards we got this phone call from Loma to say, what in the world? That was exactly what I told him to ask you to do!

Mark B. [Laughs.]

Mel W. [Laughs.] I don't know whether he really forgot or totally blocked on being able to carry that message, you know. It's incredible how inhibiting the subject can be, let alone the reality. And so then we got together with Loma and she...and in her letter to me she explained that, you know, in most families, if they are careful enough to look – [laughs] – said we have a nephew who's gay and then Harry had somebody on his staff at one time who was gay, you know, and we're very close to all of them. So, she said, that's what I want you to do.

And so I visited with her, but she wanted me there four or five Sundays, or even six, the way I'm doing it at Westwood. But I met with the associate pastor there and could tell right away that he was the one on the staff who was supposed to deal with it, but he wouldn't be dealing with it if Loma hadn't put it in his lap. And so I'm going to be doing three, but it's entirely different there. The Westwood is the ideal. They're using the study materials, but they're also having people register, pay to register and register, pre-register and commit themselves, you know, really to hang in there with me.

Mark B. What did John think about all of your notoriety, the public stuff?

Mel W. The only scary part of it to me was, to any degree, he'd been a juvenile diabetic, and this happened in '82. And his diabetic specialist got worried about his...what do they call them? Glands, wanted to have it checked, and found out in the fall...I think about a year after he was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. And it followed fairly soon after this trial business, and I, you know, his partner for six and a half years, with whom we're still very close, but is a clinical psychologist. And I said, you know, I always worried, Jim, whether or not that in any way weakened his condition or what, because he sat in on the trial and heard all these things.

But Jim was sure that it didn't, because one of the most mellow moments we ever had was right after I had come out to the Council of Bishops, and so shared with him a copy of my statement. And he read it and he didn't show emotion much, but he obviously was very moved by it and said "I have to go down to the beach." And just walked out and on the beach. And this was a practice of his. You know, we'd be having a family reunion that we had, or about sunset time he'd always say, well – they lived at Venice.

At one time he had lived on the beach. This was, you know, Fourth Street, a couple blocks from the beach. But he'd say, "well, excuse me, but I want to go down to the beach now." And he loved the sunsets, and he was very, very artistic. And so after his death he had cremation and then – *[laughs]* – I tell it around here because now we learned it was illegal, but went down and Jim walked out as far as he could, you know, and scattered his ashes with the surf on this beach where he had gone so many times.

So he...we didn't talk a lot about it. But as I say, he did attend the trial, which was about as vivid an experience as we had. They didn't – the fact that it was in Denver meant that it wasn't as oppressive for him as it would have been here, 'cause Virginia Culver, with the *Denver Post*, just ad nauseam, at least 20 times, and it seemed like 50, she carried – and I was wearing horn-rimmed glasses in those days, so the picture just jumped at you, my picture at one end of the column and Julian's picture at the other end of the column. And whenever there was the slightest new twist that she could justify running another story about it, why... And so it would have slapped him in the face over and over again, or he would have been aware that his mom and dad were being called upon to defend their enthusiasm for him and his partner and so on.

But we have very much enjoyed continuing our relationship with Jim and with Jim's present partner. We're together frequently during the year and Jim called – he's a clinical psychologist on the counseling staff at UCLA, and he says “one of my claims to fame, I think I'm the only gay who's ever been able to keep his job by accentuating the fact of gayness,” because oh, four or five, maybe six or seven years ago now the budget, state budgets were tight, and they were cutting back staffs. And so he reminded whoever was in charge of budgets that he was the only gay counselor they had who was out as gay on the staff. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. So they wouldn't want to be accused of being guilty of cutting...

Mark B. Yes, cutting their...

Mel W. Because everybody will think it's because he's gay, you know, so that was one time it worked to his advantage.

Mark B. Yeah. It's always amazing to me to realize, and part of what I'm hearing you say is that the example of – Finis Crutchfield is just one example, but the large network of gay men, also lesbian, but of gay men within leadership positions with the United Methodist Church, that essentially that all stays in – what's your experience of that? That it's invisible, it's never talked about, never alluded to?

Mel W. Mm-hmm. Finis Crutchfield I think, is a perfect illustration. But I have never been asked, whenever any discussion has come up on the issue, I have never been asked by the Council or by anybody involved in the debate or whatever to comment. And as a retired person, I haven't felt free to. I made my statements when I was there. And they never talked in res—about it, so... It's incredible how much it still has some kind of a taboo attached to it. And the...as I said, Marvin Stuart wrote a letter that was in the...but most of the others just are very careful to not indicate any particular support for us, you know. Except now, of course, there's a new ingredient. The bishop and his wife lost two sons to AIDS.

Mark B. Fritz Mutti.

Mel W. Mutti. And she is quite a spokesperson now, Lucile says, on the AIDS issue and the related gay issue, too, so that that has opened up aspects of the thing.

Mark B. Yeah. Is that Lucile?

Lucile W. Yeah.

Mark B. Would you – I am ready to sort of wrap it up and just talking about some feelings and experiences. I'd love to have some of your thoughts, too, if you're...I mean, because we're just eating and talking here. We were just talking about the – is that sort of distance indicative of the Council of Bishops in general, or do you think it's more so around this issue?

Mel W. Well, I don't think we relate very much personally. Well, there are little clusters. In recent years the classes have been getting together, and we do that. In fact these that we have taken trips with lately to Norway, went out to New Zealand and Australia, were classes. But even then—

Lucile W. Yeah, but it was so big, because there were 18 or 19.

Mel W. Yeah, 18 or 19.

Lucile W. When we came in and there are now, and that was hard to get acquainted any more than that.

Mel W. But even in that more intimate circle, I don't remember that...

Lucile W. Well, and then there are ones, like, in the area that we see more often, like Cal McConnell's are good friends. Of course he was in Denver.

Mel W. Cal is one of the most supportive ones.

Lucile W. Yeah. Made a beautiful, beautiful obituary statement at the First Church Portland ministers ____.

Mark B. Oh, Bill Walker's?

Lucile W. No, not the Walkers.

Mark B. Oh, Larry [Hall].

Lucile W. Yeah.

Mark B. Mm-hmm. Did you ever – you know, Mel was just saying that none of the other bishops really said anything.

Mel W. Well, I should correct – we don't talk about it among ourselves as much, but Mel Talbert deserves lots of credit. Bob Moon reported to us what a beautiful presentation he made to Jeannie...

Lucile W. Barnett.

Mel W. Barnett. And she was clergy, she was laywoman of the year at that conference.

Lucile W. Mentioned her companion by name. .

Mel W. Mentioned her companion by name, and what a—

Lucile W. Said she's a giant among women.

Mel W. So, and Mel has been among the most supportive.

Mark B. Did you ever hear from any spouses, you know, in all the time of the trial and everything? Did any of them contact you? Well, this is just archives. That's okay. We're not publishing—

Lucile W. ____ has a gay son, so what I thought about her for actually, for her son was better than my son....

Mark B. Uh-huh. And did she respond?

Lucile W. Not to that particular letter, but we had a verbal conversation that made me furious because it was, he had, you know, he's never done anything, you know. I mean, come off it.

Mel W. There's so many of them dying.

Mark B. Uh-huh. But no other...no other even expressions of concern about how the trial was affecting you or that kind of stuff?

Lucile W. No, no, no.

Mark B. That was never talked about?

Lucile W. No. And I got angry at another one who had been doing some research on...who was the feminist at...?

Mel W. Georgia Harkness?

Lucile W. No, not Georgia Harkness, another one, and she found letters in the archives, and she ____, could be interpreted as being love letters. But she acted as if she would *never* let that be known because it would be so devastating. And I tried to say to her, so what's devastating? Why devastating?

Mel W. Well, they were letters about Georgia Harkness, weren't they?

Lucile W. No. It's this – no, it's—

Mark B. You recall it was another feminist?

Lucile W. Yes. It's somebody of a...from the WTU movement... [*Unintelligible.*]

Mark B. Well,

Mark B. Frances Willard? Was it Frances Willard? I mean, it's kind of back in their day.

Lucile W. It could have been.

Mel W. Oh, yeah. Yeah, right, right. I think it was. I think it was. It could have been
Frances Willard, right.

Mark B. Okay.

Mel W. But as you say, they...

[*End Tape 2, Side A; Start Tape 2, Side B.*]

Mark B. ...what were some of your observations of what you saw going on?

Lucile W. I knew it took a lot of courage for him to do that and I knew from the way people were just kind of slightly uncomfortable around us that, even at the dinner and everything, that all the men probably had gone home and told their wives immediately, when it was supposed to be assumed that it was a matter behind the closed doors of the bishops' room. But you knew right away that they knew. So then it took a little more courage, you know, to stand up at General Conference and doing the ring around the hall and that sort of thing.

Mel W. Oh, that – one of the letters that...

Lucile W. The more things you do, the more you're emboldened, you know, to take your stand. So no, there's never been big support from anybody. And as I say, and there are ones who have come out to us about grandchildren who are gay or in their...but then they back off again. There's never any...

Mark B. Mm-hmm. Who have been some of the supporters?

Lucile W. Oh, I think one of the best bishops right now is Grove. Bill Grove was presiding at the time we stood up. He would have been there. And his daughter was in the circle. And I've never known what personal thing and all, what prompted them to do—

Mel W. We, you know, started singing and some would have gaveled the whole thing down.

Lucile W. He was very good. And we were just – well, the other night at the dinner, something that he'd written that was really supportive. At his conference, they mentioned it at the dinner. So yeah, Affirmation the other night.

Mark B. You had something there?

Mel W. After the 1984, she – well, you keyed me to it talking about standing up. '84 in Baltimore and singing...

Mark B. "Jesus Loves Me."

Mel W. “Jesus Loves Me” and “We Shall Overcome” or whatever. And I got a letter... “I was present at sessions of the recent General Conference when delegates and bishops were asked to refrain from applause or vocal expression of their feelings while the homosexual issue was under discussion. I was favorably impressed by the calm manner in which the discussion proceeded, and particularly by the restraint evidenced in the galleries. After witnessing such restraint during the discussion, I was appalled to learn that a bishop of The United Methodist Church, together with his wife, joined in a demonstration in the balcony singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ I am grateful that persons representing the opposite point of view, and certainly representing the overwhelming majority of the people called United Methodists, did not stage a similar demonstration.”

And so, you know, he says I was appalled. So I wrote back, “Dear Reverend [Cockerell], one of the differences between us is that different things appall us. You were appalled that my wife and I joined in a demonstration, two lines of people holding hands in the balcony singing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ I am appalled that you take comfort in the fact that there was no such demonstration on the part of persons of the opposite point of view who supported legislation that was self-righteously judgmental at best, and punitively persecuting at worst. But, as both of us well know, the honest to God test for both of us is not which of my actions appall you or which of your actions appall me, but which of any and all of our actions incarnate the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. May God help both of us press on after that prize.” [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. I notice that Mel's just getting a little testier in these letters here. Was that a change that you saw in him?

Lucile W. Well, the letters were so vitriolic and vicious that it's very hard. I suppose you told him you had ones like that that you answered in a certain way and supporters—

Mel W. Yeah, right, right, right. Yeah, I did. But I got so, you're right.

Lucile W. But Finis, you know, could never let us know that he really appreciated our being supportive. But there was just something there in Baltimore.

Mel W. Well, he came up and stood in the ba—he stood sort of off the balcony.

Lucile W. When we were holding hands?

Mel W. He was – yeah, he was up in the balcony area.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Lucile W. But so and then he had—

Mel W. He was there to greet people as they—

Lucile W. And was it Morris Floyd that he had at dinner with him?

Mel W. Yeah.

Lucile W. So he was doing as much as he could do and still be who he was. But nobody ever thought of us in that.

Mark B. Yeah?

Mel W. As a matter of fact, one of the things, and I don't think I said it already, that Lucile and I both would have said, that during most of those years...we got involved with PFLAG in about...

Lucile W. It was '82.

Mel W. '82, so the two years while we were still active in the episcopacy, but in the years following as well, but particularly in those early years, '82 to '84, when the heat was on most intensely, PFLAG was, as we used to say, was our spiritual nurture system. Because there you could not only make your contribution of being open, but others were supportive. And we, as I said the other night, and you know, it's not just a quick crack, we really do enjoy most of all the, as Lucile reworded it after we got home, the settings in which nobody cares who's gay and who's straight. Everybody's relating as—

Lucile W. This is a first.

Mel W. —full orbed human beings.

Lucile W. And that is *really* something. I called her immediately, and I thought her line would be busy, but nobody's called her. This is our Thursday paper that just came out ____.

Mark B. Ohhh.

Lucile W. And she said, my friends, most of them think I'm absolutely *crazy*. I'm going to call her and ask her if she wants to go with us. We're doing a phone bank tomorrow at the gay and lesbian center. They're having an all day phone-in from eight to eight.

Mark B. Oh, okay. Oh, that's right, yeah.

Lucile W. And we're going to do it from four to six tomorrow, and I thought she might want to go with us. But she said, I'm trying to get my Episcopal church now to just learn to say the word.

Mel W. Well, and you told – she told you more about it, but she lost her...

Lucile W. She said, I was in a relationship for 40 years, and my companion died 12 years ago, so I'm alone now.

Mel W. And she also said I know a lot of couples here, but they think I'm crazy for...

Lucile W. They think I'm crazy, and I don't know if I'll get any calls.

Mel W. But of course that generation... We had—

Lucile W. Very hard.

Mel W. —two couples, a gay man that we are *very* close to, one of them always there.

Lucile W. In the '60s.

Mel W. In the '60s. Always invited us to a beautiful spot over on Corona del Mar to see the boat parade.

Lucile W. Christmas boat parade.

Mel W. The Christmas boat parade.

Mark B. How wonderful.

Mel W. And include us in a dinner they have, gorgeous dinner. And they have a house up where you look out over the bay. But they know of all our activities, and up until the latest concert by—

Lucile W. April, April concert.

Mel W. —April concert of the Gay Men's Chorus from L.A. that now is out here close at Irvine campus at the Barkley Theatre, they had never...they never used the word gay about themselves, or they never talked specifically about what we're doing, but always appreciated what we were doing. And they—

Lucile W. They spoke to us at the concert. Said, oh, it was great, we loved it.

Mel W. They spoke to us at this concert, and... [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Wonderful.

Mel W. The other couple, I heard from one of them clear back even before the *New Yorker* article, but it was about the time that that came out. And one of the things I'll be saying in this couched language, as I must, not to identify him, but he's in his mid 60s, early 70s.

Lucile W. Yeah, and we see him at church all the time.

Mel W. And has a wonderful partner, and they've been together for 40 some years. But they're perfectly – he, the partner doesn't come there, but the perfect illustration of how people that we – you know, there's a chapter in the workbook, study book the committee put out on "we don't have them here," you know.

Mark B. Right.

Mel W. And... [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Right, every church has got them.

Mel W. You're sitting by them, and it's just you don't know it. And they're among your most admired members, too, you know, because this fellow is a real...

Mark B. Do you have any sense of, if you look back to ten to 15 years ago, what changes – have you seen significant changes in the church or is your experience the situation fairly much the same? Are things talked about differently, dealt with differently? What's your observation?

Mel W. Well, I think we'll be able to, you know, we'd be able to answer that more accurately after the two series we're going to do.

Lucile W. Depends on the clergyman. Jim Stewart, yes.

Mel W. Yes, I think the fact that the churches are even facing up to the possibility of having a study – [*laughs*]...

Lucile W. But we were with a former associates at Westwood who on Labor Day Sunday made an affirmative statement, supportive statement about gays and got such flak

and people are going to leave the church that he subsequently, in his church paper, wrote an apology. We know him really well. So I get totally—

Mel W. Yeah, well, it still happens—

Lucile W. —very depressed and cynical. At least I do. I do.

Mel W. But I, the...I think most of the progress that's been made, as so often has happened on issues like this, by the groups, sub-groups in our denominations. The Affirmations and the Reconciling Grace Movements, you know, and there are duplicates in all the different...

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Mel W. And the so-called secular organizations.

Lucile W. Well, our PFLAG thing has just exponentially exploded.

Mark B. PFLAG is just phenomenal, yeah.

Lucile W. I mean, there were a thousand at the banquet this year in San Francisco, 900 registered.

Mel W. And you see and one of the—

Lucile W. So it's just – and you're there and you think everybody's nice and supportive, and then you get back and...

Mel W. And as far as we know, the...you know ahead of time there aren't ten people there who are there on expense accounts.

Lucile W. Well, no, it's very ____.

Mel W. And even for those in California it costs \$1,000, you know, to be in attendance there. And we drove. So that when you get a thousand people, you know, now a lot of people—

Lucile W. And that they knew it was expensive.

Mel W. —like to go to San Francisco and so forth, but the energy that that spins off...

Lucile W. So that part's good.

Mel W. And I think—

Lucile W. And the gay chorus movement's good.

Mel W. The gay chorus movement is one that, in fact, when we were asked to do the worship service when Orange County chapter hosted the international convention, we were at Anaheim, we had asked John Bailey, who's a graduate of Drew Seminary, I don't know whether you know or not.

Mark B. I know John.

Mel W. Yeah, okay. If he...because you know him, he's *so* sensitive and articulate, if he and his choir would do our worship service. We knew that there were as many Jews as there were Christians, and so many times—

Lucile W. He was just ____.

Mel W. —the service acted as if all of our...are right from the Homer Rodeheaver's
[laughs song book, you know.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. And at one time we had somebody stand up and say, well, you're talking as if all
of us are religious. I'm not religious at all, and this panel isn't talking to my
needs at all. But the...

Lucile W. When were you talking about that? What panel wasn't?

Mel W. Chicago.

Lucile W. Oh.

Mel W. We had a Catholic priest. But the impact of it there was that he came out on that
panel.

Lucile W. Well, John just did a perfect job of being totally ecumenical.

Mel W. They did a superb job. He brought a hundred and—

Lucile W. Fifty, almost.

Mel W. Fifty, almost. And we...I think that year it was homosexuality as essentially a
family affair sort of... And I was saying there are two parts of this family that
we've been identified with that, we want to get better acquainted with each other.
And...because we've attended all their concerts since we've been here, and are
financially supportive, too. And so they had five speakers, the first of whom said,

well, I know that we belong together as family because I'm singing in this chorus and sitting out here as a member of the PFLAG group is my mother. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Mel W. And that was [Orange], Dick Orange from Denver. But then they had a fellow who read a letter that he had just written home to his family about having AIDS and knowing that he was in the terminal stages, so that really made it a close family affair, you know, sharing that sort of thing. So it worked out great. And the thing we liked most is that, with one exception, all of the services since, the so-called worship experiences, have been inclusive.

Lucile W. You know William Dannemeyer, the congressman, and Lou Sheldon, the minister?

Mark B. They're all down in this area, right?

Lucile W. Absolutely. So when I introduced the chorus, I said, you're in Dannemeyer country, but I want you to know there are a lot of us who think God created Adam and Steve as well as Adam and Eve.

[*Laughter.*]

Mark B. That's going to get applause.

Lucile W. Thank you.

Mark B. Yeah.

Lucile W. Because that's his big thing, Dannemeyer.

Mark B. Oh, yes.

Lucile W. Oh, to think you've come ___might wish he was back with us. _____. Have you read anything about him?

Mark B. I haven't seen too much about him. He must have just gone back.

Lucile W. *New Yorker*. The new *New Yorker*. The new *Time* magazine. Do you see *Time*? Everybody ought to read, anybody that lives in California should read those.

Mel W. Well, they—

Lucile W. We're being warned, but—

Mel W. No, the problem, the one better thing about him is he is, has been, I think, supportive of gays, but everything else about him—

Lucile W. Well. Oh, but he...well, anyway.

Mark B. Yeah. We've got to wrap up in a couple minutes. Just to wrap up, are there some — who were — someone you wanted to mention?

Mel W. Well, we men—no, we mentioned her and involvement with the choral movement, and we followed them around. We went to Minneapolis and then to Seattle.

Mark B. Denver.

Mel W. And to Denver, you know. And it's just a great movement.

Mark B. Yeah, it's fabulous.

Mel W. The two movements do need to be aware of each other. And then the parades, we've marched in three parades in Washington, D.C., one in Vancouver. We sang in the mixed chorus up there that Carol White, incidentally, organized.

Mark B. Oh, Gay Games.

Mel W. Yeah, 400 voices when the full L.A. chorus and the full Vancouver chorus were singing. That was a wonderful experience, really tremendous. And we marched once or twice in Denver, I wasn't able to remember, and four times in southern Los Angeles. Most recently we rode in the car that they had gotten for—

Lucile W. Bert.

Mel W. Bert All and...

Mark B. Yes.

Lucile W. [Cathy Marx].

Mel W. Cathy Marx there. She's very supportive. And Jim Stewart and his wife [Odette] came to the march. And we have gotten a close connection with MCC. They gave us an award several years ago. And with Evangelicals Concerned, Ralph Blair. And also the Mormon groups. In fact—

Mark B. Oh, really?

Mel W. Right. They – and you know they have a support group.

Mark B. They're called Affirmation also.

Mel W. Affirmation. And one of them, Larry Gates, who's been sort of the head of their group around here, is now the director of the choir over at a church, a Disciples church that we enjoy going to. It's very open and affirming. And we attended the first...I don't know whether they've had any more now, but the first two major conventions we've known of of Reconciling Congregations—

Lucile W. Chicago and San—

Mel W. —Chicago and San Francisco.

Mark B. San Francisco, mm-hmm.

Mel W. Right. And totally updating it now. We're teaching the courses on homosexuality.

Mark B. And that's going to be – you're going to be at Laguna Hills and Westwood?

Mel W. But Westwood's the substantial one.

Lucile W. Laguna Hills apparently doesn't know it yet. It's just been announced as a study.

Mel W. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Oh, you're going to surprise them when you show up, huh?

Mel W. [*Laughs.*]

Lucile W. It looks that way.

Mark B. I'm just thinking, just kind of wrapping up, who are some people from the last few years, people you always remember that's made it worthwhile because, you know, you've gotten to know this person or that person?

Lucile W. Have you ever met Fred Methered?

Mark B. Oh, yes.

Lucile W. He's just dear. I mean, we just really love Fred.

Mark B. Yeah, Fred's wonderful.

Mel W. Well, and another one that we had first heard about because she had made such a speech to the Presbyterians, Mitzi Henderson, who heads up the fight now.

Mark B. Yeah.

Lucile W. And then the Lewallens are very close.

Mel W. Yeah, he had mentioned the Lewallens, right. But Mitzi – we aren't close personal friends of Mitzi's, but she's a superb representative of the cause, right.

Lucile W. Just great, you know.

Mark B. Other folks who sort of touched your lives that you just think it's all...that helps make all this seem...

Lucile W. Well, Carol White and Judith are, they're like two daughters to us.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Lucile W. We keep close to them.

Mel W. Well, and I was telling him too that Jim [Babel] and Bob [Krumas].

Lucile W. Oh, yeah. They're like adopted kids.

Mel W. In fact, tell him about when...

Lucile W. Well, when his mother died he called and said, you're my mom now. That was just for at least...

Mel W. Yeah, right, right.

Lucile W. But we just love him so, and he and our son John were *so* much in love, and he was so wonderful to John...John's last year. So wonderful.

Mel W. Yeah, we've often said, you know, they entertained us at their home several times, and they were just a panel in between, and saying that they had a right to relating however they wanted to relate, when on the other side of that panel the same way that he had a right to relate to—

Lucile W. There was two bedrooms.

Mel W. Two bed—of course. Two separate bedrooms. But the other thing that John, of course, was terminally ill for a protracted period and knew it, and so would have terrible panic periods, you know, at night times particularly. And we always said that the most either one of us could ever hope for or expect would be the kind of

care of each other that Jim gave John in those very, very difficult, strenuous months.

Lucile W. It was just a year after it was diagnosed, but it seemed like an eternity.

Mark B. It seems like it goes on forever, yeah.

Mel W. But, you know, it's...in all the areas of relating...

Lucile W. Well, they're just close, close friends. The Steeles and the Garlands in Oregon, and Charlie Garland.

Mel W. Yeah.

Lucile W. And Jeanne Barnett and...

Mel W. Right, mm-hmm.

Lucile W. What's Jeanne's ___?

Mark B. Ellie. Ellie Charlton. Mm-hmm.

Lucile W. How do you – is that C-H-A-R?

Mark B. Just C-H-A-R-L-T-O-N.

Mel W. Like the dance, huh?

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Lucile W. Well, without an "S."

Mark B. Without an “S,” yes. It’s just C-H-A-R-L-T-O-N. I’m never sure if Ellie has an “E” on the end of it or not. I think it does. I always forget. There are a couple Ellies in Affirmation and one of them—

Lucile W. They may come down, just a special trip, to be part of the study.

Mark B. Oh, good.

Lucile W. Jean thought that Ellie wasn’t, that would say yes, and Jean had thought no way because they were just here.

Mark B. Yeah.

Lucile W. And that would be in just two weeks.

Mark B. Good, good.

Lucile W. Oh, they’re just – I just think there are so many people.

Mel W. Well, then we have the couple from Denver beside the Lewallens, and many, as a matter of fact, with whom we’re very close.

Lucile W. The Clarks.

Mel W. Yeah, Vickie Clark.

Lucile W. Do you know them?

Mark B. Tom and Vickie Clark have been on the mailing list.

Mel W. Right, right. They're a great couple. He's been a little busier. He's had some jobs. He's a pilot with Continental, you know, a captain with Continental. And Vickie phoned me and—

Lucile W. The Logans.

Mel W. Yeah, the Logans.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Lucile W. Yeah, we could just go for...

Mel W. But...and it made me think of the Bosserts. Phoned me when she first found out and said, gosh, I always thought I was a social activist and out front on justice—

Lucile W. You mean Vickie Clark?

Mel W. Vickie Clark.

Lucile W. You didn't mention Bosserts.

Mel W. On social issues, but I'm really strung up over this thing, and I just can't deal with it; I need help. And I said, well, I'd be glad to visit with you, you know, as long as it's helpful, but you're not close at hand. I'd like to refer you to people I'm sure you know, Don and Gay Bossert. And so we visited a while longer, and—

Lucile W. He had a beautiful letter from them.

Mel W. Then she did get in touch with them and whereas he had come out, was it before one Christmas in which they—

Lucile W. Next Christmas.

Mel W. —wouldn't think of mentioning it, the next Christmas it was the feature of their inclusiveness, the spirit of—

Lucile W. On purple, on lavender.

Mel W. On lavender.

Mark B. [*Laughs.*] Oh, that's wonderful, yes.

Mel W. They're a fine couple. And the Bosserts, of course, as you say. Yeah, there are a number of those couples. We were much more actively involved in the local chapter in Denver than we've ever been here. Or we were very active the first three or four years we were here, but—

Lucile W. Oh, but there are wonderful people here.

Mel W. Oh, yeah, we just went to a 50th wedding anniversary dinner dance, one of the couples there.

Lucile W. Whose son...

Mel W. Whose son was gay, and we commiserated with them when they grieved over the loss. Their son had entered a relationship with man who had children, and these children of the couple, of the new couple, had become grandchildren to this couple, and then the two gay men broke up, and really, they were grieving as much as—

Mark B. Sure.

Mel W. —it would grieve anybody, grandparents would have grieved over losing their grandchildren. So it's...what I was trying to say the other night, and I repeated it again, I think, to you in part, that we...we always enjoy ourselves and feel so nourished and nurtured. The groups in which we are where we know everybody's free to be—

Lucile W. You can be known and still be fine.

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

Lucile W. A lot of groups we just know that people don't_____.

Mark B. Yeah, mm-hmm.

Mel W. But we are with that kind of community so often these days that it still hits almost with the impact of the original rebuff when we get into a situation like I was telling you about Winston Trevor where...

Lucile W. Yeah, he can't tell us what ____.

Mel W. [*Laughs.*]

Mark B. Yeah.

Mel W. And you suddenly just think, my gosh, it's a taboo subject, let alone offensive reality.

Mark B. Mm-hmm.

[*Break.*]

Lucile W. You call tell I'm going to say something tonight, and I don't care if you want me to or not, I'm going to say it. So I just went up and typed it.

Mark B. Uh-huh.

Lucile W. He had no idea he had to sit there so I can...

Mark B. [*Laughs.*]

Mel W. But this was our, as I say, the Affirmation group, Mormons.

Mark B. Oh, okay.

[*End of recording.*]