

Oral History Interview: Zachary Jones

Interviewee: Zachary Jones

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

Date: July 1, 2010 (and earlier phone interview)

Monique M. Well, then, what we'll plan to do, I will talk back to your secretary and make sure that that two hour frame works. I don't think we'll need the entire two hours. We can certainly take it, but I want to keep within the time frame of what they typically have up on the web site.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. And if you'd like, we could start today. If not, we could just do the whole thing then. It's completely up to you.

Zachary J. Oh. Well, I mean, we could start today. It doesn't matter. I mean, if you want to get some basics. I slotted us out for a good 45 minutes, so I'm good if you're good. I mean, there's no time like the present.

Monique M. Okay. Well, then I'll get us started. How they generally start is, again, at the beginning. This is supposed to be a historical look, so most of the folks we're looking at have made significant contributions in their religious lives and in the community lives, and so we want to see where that started from, what brought you to the work that you do. So tell me a little bit about, or as much about your childhood and your formation as you'd like.

Zachary J. My childhood and what else was the other part, I'm sorry?

Monique M. And your formation, spiritual and educational.

Zachary J. I was born in Los Angeles, California in 1958, probably at the tip of the Civil Rights Movement. I'm pretty much, I would consider myself a '60s child, '60s and '70s. Inner city Los Angeles. And grew up with both parents, Maggie and Frank Jones, southerners who came to or arrived in California in the '40s, and then basically moved out from there.

Monique M. Do you have siblings?

Zachary J. Yes. I'm number six out of seven.

Monique M. Wow.

Zachary J. Yeah, and all are still living, thank God, and most of them dwell there in Los Angeles. I attended L.A. public school, Los Angeles City College, El Camino City College. Out of city college, I then went to a small Bible training seminary which was in Palos Verdes called Palos Verdes Christian Bible Training Center. From there I went to Life Bible College, which is also part of the Foursquare Church in Los Angeles, graduating there in 1983 with a Master's degree in theology.

And I worked basically for the travel industry for something like 15 years, Delta Airlines, before going into full-time ministry. I went into full-time ministry in 1987, when I joined the Unity Fellowship Church movement. Back then we were a very small church in South Central Los Angeles, and I served there as the assistant pastor with the then Reverend Carl Bean.

Monique M. Wow, so you were there from the beginning.

Zachary J. Not the *beginning* beginning, but the beginnings. I was there...they started in '82. I came along about '87, about five years later.

Monique M. So what brought you to Unity? What were your other religious...or did you have any other religious background?

Zachary J. Yes. I was born Baptist, and my family was...are members of Morning Star Baptist Church, which is in Los Angeles. And I then went from Baptist, when I became a teenager, around 16, 17, to join the Pentecostal movement or church. I stayed there...I went back to Baptist in about '76 upon graduating from high school, and when I rejoined the Baptists I joined Mount Moriah Baptist Church, which...that's where I was initially licensed as a pulpit minister in 1978. Yeah, I kind of moved throughout the main African American church religions, between Baptist, Pentecostal and then Foursquare.

And after Foursquare, then I joined kind of what's known as the Word Churches – Crenshaw Christian Center, and that's how I got connected to Palos Verdes Training Center, which was run by the Palos Verdes Christian Center at the time.

Monique M. Now, you may want to explain to those who will be listening the Foursquare church tradition.

Zachary J. Okay, all right. What would I explain about Foursquare?

Monique M. Well, just, I guess, define it as different from the Pentecostal and from the Baptist.
What sent you there?

Zachary J. Okay, well, what sent me there, or their theology?

Monique M. No, your personal journey, so what made that a welcoming place?

Zachary J. All right, so joining the Foursquare church was also a part...I guess during those early formative years of ministry, I really was looking for a place that, you know, was very centered in Bible practice and instruction. Those were my early adult years. What I knew up to that point was, or I had been exposed to was mainly Baptist teachings, so once I became...got in my later teens and had the freedom to kind of move around, I did just to kind of say, well, you know, let's see what this group is doing and let's see what the Foursquare folks are doing, and let's see what the Word of churches are doing. All of those churches played a very major and central role in the religious communities in Los Angeles.

Monique M. Now, was the Foursquare you attended—

Zachary J. Foursquare was founded in Los Angeles.

Monique M. Yes. Was it then, at that time, predominantly white, as it currently is, or...?

Zachary J. It was predominantly white. It has always been predominantly white. West Adams Foursquare, which was one of the sole black churches of that particular denomination, who, Marvin and Juanita Smith were pastors at that time, and they really were making a name for themselves in many, many ways. They pretty

much crossed over from a very Pentecostal background into “Foursquaredom,” and had been established maybe about 20 years when I came along in the ‘80s.

They were a great group of folk. Their work in their church began to gain a little bit more attraction to black people as they pretty much were like the second generation of Foursquare, because I think Marvin’s mother, who was a female minister, was also Foursquare. And it tended to attract a lot...during my time it was attracting more women, because they ordained women, their founder being a woman. And so it was a great place for...at that time I was in a heterosexual marriage. It was a great place for my wife and I to worship.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. Along in the ‘80s, I remember sitting on my front porch...now, in terms of my sexuality, it always tended to play a role in my life from a very early age, or at least it was in the backdrop. And I didn’t really know how to reconcile it, even though it was a very present and somewhat active role of my teenage years. I can remember long discussions with my parents about it, and they offered support around psychotherapy and offered support around just kind of one-on-one discussions with them, because we basically saw it as...during those years we basically saw it as a problem that needed to be fixed.

Monique M. And was this addressed to them as you had questions about your sexuality, or at that time were you identifying?

Zachary J. Yes, I had questions about it. And there again, it pretty much was something that...it wasn't questions like, oh, you know, I wonder why I'm homosexual. It was questions more pertaining to I'm a homosexual and I need to figure out how we fix this.

Monique M. Mm-hmm.

Zachary J. Particularly with me being so involved at this point with mainstream Afro-American and black religion. Working with the Foursquare church kind of gave me a broader exposure, but it was still very much anti-homosexual and preached very strongly against it. So a lot of that work I was doing during that time of studying and trying to decide...I guess since 1976 I was pretty clear that ministry was going to play a major role in my life. But in setting it all out, I didn't know, really, how my sexuality and my vocation were going to work together. That was just a very clear mystery to me.

I never seemed to have problems bringing it up. I was in counseling with my pastors while I was at Foursquare. And probably every phase that I can think of throughout my life I was dealing with my sexuality on one level or the other. But again, not so much in the positive light.

The most positive entity in my life around my sexuality was the fact that my oldest brother is gay, and he had about ten years on me. And he, around age ten, he was beginning to kind of bud open, bud into the subculture of the gay lifestyle in Los Angeles. And I was amazed, at that time, how seemingly intelligent and organized they were. I really had never seen anything like that before.

My brother and I had a little pact. I would love going with him to visit his friends and whatnot, but we had an agreement that I was to go and be seen, not speak, so I did. I enjoyed going and just kind of observing, and fantasizing as well around what life would really be as an adult, particularly a young adult, who now worries about sexuality and could be free to live his life. So I kind of kept that torch simmering from age ten up.

Monique M. He was ten or you were ten?

Zachary J. He has ten years on me. He's ten years older than I am.

Monique M. Okay. So when you were ten, he was 20, and you were going with him places?

Zachary J. Right, exactly.

Monique M. Got you. And so did you find your parents more accepting because of your brother, or did they also send him to some of the reparative therapy type of things, counseling and such?

Zachary J. Well, actually, his sexuality was met with quite a lot of hostility. I should say an enormous amount of hostility. And when I came along, and was dealing with my sexuality, it was almost as though they had been broken in, because it was much easier for me. I was able to bring boyfriends home and introduce them to family and all of that, whereas even to this day I think he finds it awkward and enormously uncomfortable to even talk too much about what's going on in his life.

Monique M. Okay. And so during this time, did you find the church, either the Baptist church or when you started attending the Foursquare, did you find these churches as a means of helping you wrestle with these questions or were they lands of more confusion?

Zachary J. Yeah, they increased my confusion around it, totally, because my pastors were...they were really very much in...and liked me, and had begun to really nurture me to be kind of a second generation, or this generation behind them, and put a lot of stock into my training and developing me. And so when this whole thing around my sexuality came about, I think it was a great disappointment for them, and they then decided they would work with me and do whatever they could to try and fix me as well. So there was a lot of fixing going on during those years.

I eventually became extremely frustrated, and thought that it probably was best to not deal with my sexuality through religion, but to deal with it, construct it in a much more secular environment.

Monique M. So what do you mean by that? Like counseling or what, per se?

Zachary J. No, from a social aspect. Much more social. Much more okay, you know, there's no way I'm going to reconcile this, so let me just kind of back off from the church and let me just kind of see what I can make of my life.

Monique M. Okay. And so how long did that period last?

Zachary J. That period was probably from 1983 until about 1987, when I joined the Unity Fellowship Church movement. I remember when HIV and AIDS was first a part of the gay community in Los Angeles, and by this time I really was not...I was still – I'm jumping back and forth – at this time I'm married, and wondering to myself what kind of effect I could have on this community that I had been introduced to some five, six, seven years ago. And sort of left it on the shelf, but then really trying to deal with my own life and my own sexuality around being married, in a heterosexual marriage, having a stepson, trying to understand what all that meant. And then by late 1983 is when I decided, okay, I just really needed to walk away from my marriage and walk away from the church. I stayed in somewhat of a religious exile for five years.

It was in 1987 that my lover passed from AIDS. And I clearly wanted to do something to work through that pain and fear. And so I went and I got tested and discovered that I was HIV positive. And I thought, well, the best way to do this is probably to work with the Minority AIDS Project, which had just started. And I began to sort of make contributions as a volunteer and kind of got to know the founder a little bit more, and ended up joining on board with them. My initial intro into Unity Fellowship Church was, I actually was out on a date one time.

Monique M. Nice.

Zachary J. Yeah, and this young man says to me, "Well, you know, if you're going to see me, you're going to come and go to church with me." And I thought, oh, okay, all

right. I don't really want to do the church thing, but I said okay, what the hey.
I'm sure I can fake it for a minute.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Zachary J. And I remember going to the church. They were at the Ebony Showcase Theatre, a little small theatre there in L.A. And I was really amazed at Reverend Bean. He was extraordinarily strong in his being. His teachings, I pretty much categorize them as much more metaphysics. And it was quite intriguing that this strong group of people were proclaiming that they had a right to worship God and their sexuality together.

Prior to that I had been exposed to MCC, Hollywood Presbyterian, and those experiences were extremely white and foreign for me, and so I had a little struggle around adapting those church environments as my own. Not only because of the unfamiliarity or the race issue, but it seemed to be absent a particular warmth that I had become accustomed to in a church setting. So I decided to return to those churches and kind of make it happen, and then Unity came along. And I'll tell you, to this day I don't even know who that guy was.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Zachary J. That's probably the strangest thing about it all. I have no idea who this man was. He vanished just like into thin air.

Monique M. Write your narrative. He'll show up on your Facebook wall.

Zachary J. I'm telling you, I'm serious. He was there and then poof. I remember going to church with him that day. I was so enthralled by the whole service and experience. Everything after that is fog.

Monique M. And so from that day did you decide to keep attending, or was that a slow process back to the church?

Zachary J. It was a slow process back to the church, and at the same time I did make up my mind I was coming back. I said I'm definitely coming back here. And I did. I found my way back there weekly. And I was just basically...it was a very, very slow process because I would just go sit in the back and just watch. I didn't say a word. I wouldn't participate in anything or with anybody. And that went on for maybe about a year and a half, two years.

And I remember going out of the service one Sunday, and Reverend Bean looked at me and he said, "You know what? The Lord has shown me that you're going to play a major part in this movement." And it was kind of strange because I never associated church with movement. And so the use of that language was a little weird, and I thought it was somewhat self-serving, because I know that they needed a lot of help, and that he probably was influenced by more of their needs for help and this sense of desperation that I got from the church announcements than it was anything else.

So I'd made up my mind, well, you know, I never really had worked in small church environments. I tended to have been exposed to larger churches. And so

it was always my thinking that small churches really went out of their way to work you to death, burn you out quick.

Monique M. [*Phone rings.*] Hold on one second. I'm sorry.

Zachary J. All right.

Monique M. Hey, [Shaq], I'm doing an interview. Let me call you back. No problem. Bye. We'll edit that out. My apologies. I didn't turn my home ringer off.

Zachary J. No problem.

Monique M. So you were saying that you'd been a part of larger churches, and this smaller church seemed to have larger needs.

Zachary J. Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. It had larger needs, and I just was burned out already. I just was not about to sign up for kind of an indefinite volunteer role. So I just kind of, you know, just put it on a shelf and let it just kind of...I didn't say anything to him. I didn't give him a response.

Monique M. But obviously you kept attending.

Zachary J. Pardon me?

Monique M. I said obviously, though, you kept attending.

Zachary J. Yes. I kept coming back. But I was clear that I was not...I was only going to get but so involved, and I was not about to get up in the middle of it all. Because actually, they used to...you know, it was a small group, and they would go to

Jewel's room for an after fellowship dinner and then kind of break away and so, you know, I would go to the fellowship dinners. That was my first move inward. And still just kind of stayed in the background for a couple of years.

And then when we got our church location on Jefferson where they're currently located, I said to Reverend Bean, I said, "Listen, you don't have a car. I know how to drive. People are getting sick like crazy. If you need me to help you go to the hospital or whatnot, I'd be more than happy to help you."

Monique M. And this was how long after the death of your partner?

Zachary J. Yes. Yes.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. So he was kind of taken in by that, and once we relocated...the relocation seemed to have given me a boost and kind of a greater hope for the ministry itself. That accomplishment was big for then. And when we relocated I began to take them, I think, a little more serious. And that's when I offered my driving services to Reverend Bean.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. That led to my next volunteer role. As I came to him, I said, "Listen, you know, you don't have a Sunday school going here." I said, "I think it would be very important to have a Sunday school." I said, "I have some background." I still

hadn't told him all of what had...and that I had little enough background to pull off Sunday school. So he agreed.

Monique M. At this point you'd already attended the Bible colleges?

Zachary J. Pardon me?

Monique M. I said at this point you'd already attended the Bible colleges?

Zachary J. Yes, yes. By this time I'm finished, I'm done. We're into the mid '80s at this point, mid to late '80s. And so he seemed to have liked the feedback that people were giving. He never attended himself. But he seemed to like the feedback that he was getting from folk, to like what he was hearing. And I remember sitting in the service one Sunday, and he said, you know, he announced to the public this new assistant pastor.

And I said to myself, well, who on earth is that? Because I hadn't really been introduced to...I mean, Jewel, at that time, she was working very closely with him, and they seemed to be a perfect pair. Jewel seemed to be taking ministry a little bit more serious, but she was a club owner, so I didn't know, really, how that was going to work. So I just kind of observed that. And he then made this announcement that he wanted to introduce the new assistant pastor of the church, and he called my name out.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. Righty. I'm like, well, you know, we could have had a conversation about it.

Monique M. [Laughs.]

Zachary J. And so I'm standing there with my mouth wide open and everybody's cheering. Yeah, that's wonderful, great, great, great, great, great. And I'm thinking to myself, what on earth have I gotten myself into here? So we then later talked. He just said how he had a sense of confidence around this room. I didn't...I wasn't really negating it. I didn't know totally what that meant in terms of my role and responsibilities.

Monique M. Was that meant to be a full-time position?

Zachary J. No. The full-time position basically came through Minority AIDS Project because they needed more. The Outreach Department needed to be developed. And so I was able to bring that skill to the project, and that was the beginning of my full-time ministry.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. So I sort of hired on and we kind of ironed out just kind of where and how I would make contributions, and what of my skills and gifts I could bring to the ministry. We sort of stayed at that place for probably a good seven or eight years. And it was great because I was learning a lot. I basically had to do a lot of catch up around progressive thought and ideas, particularly around the sexuality piece. And so once I pretty much got a handle on that, I was in a much better place, because more information around theology. And just kind of as we shaped theology from the pulpit, he and I would spend hours in just kind of working

through it all, and breaking down theology and deciding what would work best for us as a movement.

And it was during those times that he was able to share a lot of insightful dreams that he had had and things that he had envisioned, just kind of his messages and what he felt was some of his critical ideas of the mainstream churches, and how he felt that Unity Fellowship could be different and could change some of that. And so I saw, as he would share these dreams with me, I saw my role sort of being etched out in ways that would help to realize those dreams that he was having.

Monique M. I think—

Zachary J. Pardon?

Monique M. I was going to say to you that I think that would be a perfect place, since you said you wanted to keep us within the 45 minute frame, I think this would be a perfect place to pause.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. Because when we start again, you could start with how you saw those dreams being fulfilled and you saw your role within that.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. And I think that would be a great starting point. I was happy to continue, but I also want to be respectful of your time.

Zachary J. Thank you.

Monique M. So thank you so much for what you've shared. What we'll do is I'll confirm again with Nakia for the 30th. I don't have a time, so I just need to confirm. She did give me a day, I just didn't get the time.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. And of course get directions. I'm going to be somewhere near Columbia. I'm not sure yet. I haven't looked at my itinerary. But I've been in New York a couple of times, so I don't think it'll be that hard.

Zachary J. All right, very good.

Monique M. All right, so thank you so much, again, for this time that you took. I look forward so much to being able to meet you in person and continue the conversation.

Zachary J. Excellent. Well, all the best in your work and what you're doing.

Monique M. Well, thank you. I will talk with you again in a month.

Zachary J. All right, very good.

Monique M. All right. Have a good afternoon.

Zachary J. Thank you.

[End Part 2; Start Part 2]

Oral History Interview: Zachary Jones

Interviewee: Zachary Jones

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

Date: July 1, 2010 (and earlier phone interview)

Monique M. Okay, so I'm going to set this up. Today is July 1, 2010. My name is Monique Moultrie, and I'm conducting an interview here with Senior Bishop Zachary Jones from Unity Fellowship Church. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of the LGBTRAN oral history project. We are very, very thrilled, and we hope that you will like what's presented. And again, as I spoke to you before, you have full veto power. If there is anything in the interview that you decide you don't want the public to know after all, you have that right to have that removed as well.

Zachary J. Okay. All right.

Monique M. We're going to send you a transcript to go over, the oral and the actual physical typed transcript, so that you can see it before it gets actually published on the web.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. So we've talked previously, and we talked earlier about your childhood growing up in a large family in L.A., and I'd like to revisit that and sort of start a little bit there and move us quickly forward—

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. —to fill in some of the gaps I had from the previous interview. So through just basic Googling, I found out you have Jamaican background.

Zachary J. No! That's incorrect.

Monique M. That is incorrect?

Zachary J. And I have no idea of how that got out there.

Monique M. Interesting.

Zachary J. Other than another interview that I did where some assumptions were made. To my knowledge, as much as I love the Caribbean Islands, and go frequently, sometimes twice a year, I have no—

Monique M. Interesting.

Zachary J. —knowledge of my Jamaican background. That got out there and I have no...I think it must have come from another interview that I did and there were some assumptions – [*laughs*] – made where I didn't have veto power.

Monique M. Ah. Well, I'm glad I started with that question. We can get out all of the false information early.

Zachary J. Yes, yes. [*Laughs.*] Someone came to me, "You have Jamaican background?" "No, where did that come from?" No, I don't.

Monique M. Interesting. Well, given that fact, let's start then with...I remember you said that your family moved to California in the '40s.

Zachary J. Yes.

Monique M. And so I wanted to start with just getting a bit of history about your family – where did they move from, were your grandparents involved, what’s the extended family like?

Zachary J. Okay. My grandmother, who was born in the 1880s, like along 1875, ’76, played a role in the more nuclear family. She’s from Jackson, Mississippi, and my family’s – on my mother’s side the roots are all on the Delta line of the Mississippi area. My dad was born in Louisiana, and his parents are also second and third generation Louisianans – Shreveport, Bossier City and that area.

My parents met in Los Angeles in the late ‘40s, early ‘50s. When my mom moved to L.A., she came as one of the number of five siblings that had migrated to Los Angeles earlier. Some older aunts and uncles had already moved to California and sort of staked the land. And they did a lot of house co-sharing and economical sharing of space, and whoever worked in the house would divide whatever income among those who were migrating or new to the terrain. They lived in South Central Los Angeles, around the Central Avenue, 41st Street, in the 40s, right outside of the Los Angeles downtown area.

My mother graduated from Jefferson High School. No, my mom graduated from high school in Mississippi and then attended nursing school at Los Angeles East College, became an LVN nurse and worked there for some 40 odd years, to retirement. My dad became a civil service worker in the early ‘40s picking up garbage, and stayed with them for about 45 years. And that’s kind of the long and

short of their migration story. Some of our relatives went further north to San Francisco. Others decided to stay in the south area of Los Angeles.

Monique M. Now, the neighborhood that you moved in, was that a working class neighborhood, predominantly black, white, Hispanic?

Zachary J. Working class neighborhood, yes. Predominantly black. Some Hispanic members of the community, but it was predominantly black working class folks.

Monique M. Excellent.

Zachary J. Yes.

Monique M. And so in the extended family that you had that was present, what family values were strong memories for you? What did every child have to learn in your household?

Zachary J. Certainly house share of chores, co-share of allowances and some of the strong religious principles that my family strived to live by. My dad's side of the family was very [correction: **MUCH**] partygoers, drinkers, whereas my mom's side of the family was almost the complete antithesis of my father's. It was very religious, very desiring of some of the better paid jobs, very strong emphasis – not so much for them, but certainly for each generation coming after them – around education and that kind of thing. A lot of that came from my mom's side of the family.

Monique M. So as a child, then, the religious influence, would you attribute that to your mother's side of the family?

Zachary J. Yes. Yes, definitely.

Monique M. And did she choose the church that you all attended?

Zachary J. Yes. My grandmother basically did. Morning Star Baptist Church in Los Angeles was the place of my child rearing, which was right in the neighborhood of where they initially found residence.

Monique M. So it's a neighborhood church?

Zachary J. Yes.

Monique M. Were they active as well?

Zachary J. Only my mom. My aunts were not. I had one aunt who was, but out of the six aunts that I had, only one was. My grandmother was. But they insisted that we were. They insisted that we sing in the choir and participate in the events. And a lot of that influence came from my grandmother, who lived in the house, but also went to church on a regular basis.

Monique M. So their influence as far as, I guess, sending you and going with you to church, is that a community that they still are a part of? Do they still participate in that congregation?

Zachary J. Yes. My mom is still a member of that. My grandmother has passed. She died in 1976. But yes, my mother is still a member of that church and my aunt is still an active member of that church. The church, I think, is 75 years old.

Monique M. Wow.

Zachary J. Yeah.

Monique M. I want to, I guess, make a quick leap from the early formation of your religious and social upbringing to get a sense of how you were an active youth. What did you do for fun? What other activities other than religious activities were you a part of?

Zachary J. Well, you know, I was sort of a recluse as a little boy. I loved my own company and my imaginary toys and cities that I would create. I loved to laugh, and I was a very happy kid and very jovial and energetic. With that energy...you know, my sister had a role in the family, Cassandra. She was sort of the in-house co-babysitter. My grandmother was the major, and her assistant, I would say, would basically be my sister.

And so when my sister had an opportunity – my mom worked, my dad worked – when my sister had an opportunity, particularly in the summer months...in fact, these days are very nostalgic for me because in the summer we had a routine where we would clean the house and we'd have to go to the library. So that became routine: you'd clean the house, and if you weren't in summer school, you went to the library. We hung out at the library, my sister and I. It would be three

of us: my sister, my older sister and myself, my younger and older sister
[correction: sisters]. I was sort of the sandwich kid of that group.

So we spent a lot of time, and it was great because our local library would have activities of reading aloud and storytelling and that kind of thing, so it was more than a library; it was a community center, is what it turned out to be—

Monique M. Nice.

Zachary J. —because there were other folks who would find this sort of common time, common place on a regular. So that was a lot of fun, and I found a lot of comfort and information in the library. And then I adapted this love for reading, which continues to this day. And so that was fun.

And after I got a little older, around maybe 12, 13, I maintained my relationship with my local library, [correction: I] would go there on a regular basis and hang out. In fact, when I was struggling with my sexuality, to try to understand it, after I had shared it with my parents and they did the best they could, then I would start reading about it. I would start investigating chronicles and books and literature about homosexuality. This would have been in the early '70s, late '60s. And so reading was just a wonderful outlet for me.

Cycling, which I still do to this day, was another great, fun thing. Because I was not the greatest ball thrower, catcher, or I could not, as hard as I tried, get the gist of sports. I really struggled. Now, of course, I'm a sports fan, but I struggled. I

struggled to the point where I felt like, you know, I've got to get this because every kid on the block participated, so if I was going to be...

Monique M. Right.

Zachary J. There would be times my mom would just run me out of my bedroom. She said, "Look, you're gonna lose your mind reading. You need to go and socialize." So I would run out and try to figure out okay, I've got to get this sports thing, a handle on this. And as I would try to do that, I would have just a failing attempt each time, just failed. So I thought, okay, well, Zach, you need to figure out what you're going to do here, because these summer days can be very long.

So there was a Chinese lady who lived next door to us. By this time we'd moved. We relocated to where my mom now lives out in the airport area of Los Angeles. There was a Chinese lady who lived next door. She always had this great interest in me, and any time I was doing anything on the house she would look and stare. So finally she invited me to come over and do some work for her. And she would then create these [correction: **little**] jobs [correction: **which included**] cleaning fixtures, working in the garden. She had such a beautiful garden that [correction: **which**] she spent a lot of time with [correction: **in**]. And so I took up an interest in gardening. And every day we would work in her garden.

And so of course I got envious of what she had, and I'd start applying some things that I would learn to our yard, because our yard was basically cut, a lot of attention wasn't paid to it. So I found myself spending a lot of time listening to baseball, because my dad was a sports fan, and I wanted to be able to relate to

him, listening to the baseball game on the radio, sorting it out, trying to figure it out, and working in the back yard gardening.

Monique M. Now, was this paid or you were just volunteering?

Zachary J. She would pay me. This woman would pay me. But then when I would work on our house, of course they were, pay? Yeah, right. It was just something to do and no one else did it, so it was like, have your way with it. So actually, I would take my little change that I would get from Miss Woo. She paid me something like, depending on the project, what I thought was reasonable, and certainly more money than I had ever had. So we would do it, and I would spend money that I made on the garden in our yard to buy seeds and plant them—

Monique M. Wow.

Zachary J. —experience them growing and learning how to till them. And she would give me little quick bits of how to do it. And so that's the way I spent, I would say, from 12 to 16, 17, my summers. That was my fun. I'd plan little bike trips and pack a lunch and just kind of get on my bike and ride till destination nowhere, and figure out where I'd end up.

And my brothers would say to me, "Oh my god, you can't go in that area. That's...no, black people don't go over there, da-da-da." I'm like, please. I'd get on my bike and wherever I'd go, I'd go, you know. So that was kind of what I did for fun. I played with my sister a lot in my younger years. I shared her dolls, her toys. She shared my toys, and that was kind of how it went.

Monique M. Now, as a child, who would you say you had as role models?

Zachary J. I had some beautiful women in my life. I had my incredible godmother. Rose Wright, who took me in as a single godchild. She sort of looked at my mother's litter and said, "You know what? I want him."

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Zachary J. She literally said that. And my mom says, "Oh, really?" She says, "Yeah." She says, "That's the one I want to be my godson."

Monique M. She was a family friend?

Zachary J. No, she was a member of the church.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. And her husband had recently died. And my mom said, "Okay, no problem." So she'd pick me up on the weekends and take me on little trips. She'd fix hamburgers in the back yard, have the other kids from the neighborhood come. I liked it because I had my own bedroom at her house any time I spent the night, so that was great being a sibling of seven. It was great to have your own bedroom and your own space.

Monique M. Were you the youngest boy?

Zachary J. Yes, I was. And that sort of kept...you know, I would leave things at her place. It wouldn't be touched by anyone. That was just wonderful to have that kind of life. So she was definitely a role model. She had a little prayer band every

Wednesday and she let me get up and expound on scripture and share my testimony, and that kind of thing.

She was concerned...she created this prayer group as a result of the violence that was in her community. She went up and down the street and would ask people, "Would you like to come and have prayer with me during the week?" And some people got on board and it took on a life of its own. And so that was my introduction to community organizing.

Monique M. Wow.

Zachary J. And I would go with her, and she would take me to the rest home. She had a rest home that she visited on a monthly basis. And these were old and what I would describe as sort of decrepit people that were just sort of broken. And they would wheel them in and my [correction: **godmother**] would have church service for them. And so that was sort of my introduction to pastoral care and kind of caring for those who were less fortunate. And she would, of course, have conversations with me about how, you know, through a kid's eyes, like, "Well, how did they get there like that," and "why are they," you know. And so she was always available and very patient to answer those questions for me. So that, I have to say, inspired me.

Pearline Cunningham, who was a friend of a friend. She was a mother of a friend. She was around my mother's age, and I had this great relationship with older people. Great dialogue, great conversations. She was an extremely religious woman. I admired that about her. And when I finished playing with my friend, I

would just have a conversation with her, very long, lengthy conversations, and my friend would get bored and he'd go back in his room. And she and I would talk about things of God and about religious things, and so I learned a lot that way.

And then, as a young adult, Juanita, who was the pastor of my Foursquare Church. Was a wonderful woman of God and just a very powerful woman, Juanita Smith. And I admired her because she had blazed the Foursquare trail and she was like one of the prominent black ministers there, and I admired her. And she and I spent a lot of time together. So I had these very strong, powerful women in my life who, I would say, were definitely my role models.

Monique M. Nice. I want to take us back a second. You were mentioning reading as a means of figuring out your sexuality as you were struggling and having questions, and had had conversations with your parents. Could you speak a little to how you felt they would be open to the conversation? How did you decide that it was okay to have that initial conversation?

Zachary J. I was so traumatized as a kid when I was not accepted or liked in the school system. I had come from a very cuddly community of people, neighborhood members who basically took care of each other, and just a wealth of sense of community. And so I can remember going to school and encountering kids that were not so friendly, and that traumatized me. I was just not...I couldn't believe it. I could not...I couldn't wrap my mind around it. And my way of dealing with it was I would cry. And I would cry...it would be unstoppable. I mean, I'd have

these uncontrollable crying spats. And the teachers would be concerned and would call my parents in.

And my mother and my dad, they would struggle to try to understand what is my pain, why am I crying, and sometimes I could explain it and sometimes I could not. I didn't have the vocabulary for it. Clearly I knew that I was an "other," and I struggled to try to fit in. And no matter what I did, every attempt was a failing attempt. So the conversations would continue about my difference, and why I was having such challenges socially.

And one conversation just kind of bled into the other, and I said, "Well, they don't like me." And my mom would say, "Why don't they like you?" And I would say, "Well, because they call me horrible names and I don't understand." And my mom would say, "Well, do you think that what they're calling you is true, because if it's that true, why is it affecting you?" And I would say, "Well, I don't know if they're true. I don't know if I am those things that they're calling me. There is something about what I'm hearing that I think is true."

And...well, I guess they expected me to say, "No, I don't think they're true," and they then had the answer, "Well, just ignore them." But when I would not deny that these things were not true and that that's how I identified myself, that's when they were sort of lost, like, okay. And I can remember my parents taking me to someone to talk to. I don't know if it was a therapist or what. But I knew that in those interviews or sessions, there would be a lot of questions and a lot of discussions about my life and what was going on, to this perfect stranger, who it

was clear that my mom didn't know on a familiar level, or my dad, and...but it was a woman and she was seeking to get some information, and at the end of the day, wasn't helping.

Monique M. Now, was she sharing that with your parents? Like would you talk to her and then come back and talk to your parents?

Zachary J. There would be time that my parents were present and there would be times they were not. So I just assume that there was a common discussion happening.

Monique M. Now, in that scope of self-discovery, and you mentioned sort of feeling difference first in your school system, were there allies that you felt were part of your school system, like persons who were like you?

Zachary J. There was always at least one. And I had never craved a slew of people around me. I would always have a very small number of friends, or I would seek out the person who also seemed to be teased out or bullied and I would befriend them. So there was always someone that eventually became known as my best friend.

But as siblings, we were all friends anyway, so when you come from a large family, you tend to...children attract children, so there was always kids around. You never was starving for friendship or for friends, and so the isolation that I created for myself was a little bit later in life when my older siblings moved out.

Monique M. Did that continue throughout all of your education as you went through high school and community college?

Zachary J. Pretty much, yes. Yes, yes. Yes.

Monique M. To go back a second, when they were taking you to whomever you were seeing to talk about your struggles, I think you used the language when we talked before about trying to fix something. Where did that sense come from, that this was something that needed to be talked about, needed to be worked through, needed to be dealt with? Or was it really a reaction to how unhappy you were?

Zachary J. Well, some of the things that, you know, having older siblings, there again, that were exposed, that were very social, that were many times the center of all the other kids, where they could come and hang out, you would hear things, and you were left to either sort them out or someone would answer those questions. So your sense of right and wrong, acceptance, group norms, all of that would come as a result of things you were exposed to by virtue of the youthful environment that I came out of – different slangs, languages, name callings, those kinds of things all sort of lived in this environment.

So it didn't take long to begin to organize acceptable behavior, trends, what kids were saying, what they were talking about, what was right, what was wrong, what was good, what was bad. So I would have to say that was so environmental that it would be hard to pinpoint any one specific activity or circumstance that sort of fed my right/wrong sense.

Monique M. In the initial discussions, did you find your parents open or confused?

Zachary J. Okay, okay, okay, as it related to my parents, the question was that. As it related to my parents, it was clear that they were trying to meet me where I was and then guide me to what they thought was best. Clearly my dad...my dad would even use some of those words when he got frustrated with me. I think that there were times that my dad wanted to, quote, unquote, “man” me up, and so his idea – I remember hearing my mom say, “You know what? I think you need to spend more time with him.”

And so my mom was always one that had us engaged in social events. So I was a Cub Scout, I was a Boy Scout. I mean, she had us busy. So I remember in Scouting, initially my mother would show up, and then she would influence him to show up. So he would come. He would come on certain trips.

And then, someplace along the line, in all of his attempts, when he saw me either gravitating towards more of my sister’s activities, or he would see me with dolls, or see me with things that he considered were anti-macho, he would then call me these names out of frustration. “You’re a sissy. You’re just no...you know, you’re gonna always be” – what they would say, my dad would say, like my oldest brother, which was clearly softer than my second oldest brother. And so my dad would use the term, “You’re gonna be just like your brother.” I always knew what that meant, because it was very clear about their opinion about him.

So there was like this two-sided personality of my dad. There would be times he would really try to engage me and try to bring me along. I certainly wanted to be engaged and very much a part of his life, and so I would work hard at it. Then

when I would fail, he would just use the worst words, I thought, of choice to say them about me. Now, in my mom's company, when she was present, he was a different – he would show up differently, and was very much having these discussions about, you know, girls and growing up, and he gave me a sexual education lesson, I remember, after he had walked in on me and this guy from the neighborhood fooling around. Then he had these long discussions.

And so the fixing part was definitely, I think, an ongoing circumstantial kind of thing. It depended on the circumstance and the situation what their response was. It wasn't sort of a more continual process. It was something that would show up and I'd be like, "Why is he talking to me about sex?" Or I'd be thinking, we're involved in this dialogue, and I don't know why we are here. I don't know why we're having this conversation.

The same thing would happen with my mom, or sometimes together. The three of us would kind of break away and I'd be like, well, I wonder where everybody else is, and why is it just the three of us? I liked it. I enjoyed it. It was like, great, I don't have to compete with my sisters or brothers. And so I would equate all of that to their attempts to sort of guide me in the direction that they felt was best.

Monique M. Did you see them, or is there too much of an age difference, trying to guide your oldest brother in that same way?

Zachary J. Well, yes. My oldest brother, he was still very much in the house. He's only ten years older than I was, so when I was ten, he was maybe 19, 20. And I remember wanting to be with him all the time. And he would go to Hollywood, and my

mom would say, well, you know, he left me behind and I would go into these tantrums, and she'd be like, "Why is it that every time Larry leaves you want to go with him?" And I'd be like, "I don't know."

And I didn't. I just loved his company. He was my big brother. And then my brother had this condition. He was like, "I'm gonna take you with me, but on one condition. You can't speak. You can't speak. You have to see and you can't tell anything that you've seen." So he would swear me to secrecy while he'd go around his gay friends. And I'd, you know, park in a little chair.

And I was sort of his ticket away, because then he could go. It wasn't like kids get 20 now and they're adults and they're out on their way. You were 20 then, you were still in your mom's house. You still had to give an account to where you would go. So we'd go to Hollywood, I'd sit in the chair, they'd go back and forth camping and talking, and I'd sit there and watch them.

And I thought it was the most amazing thing. And I would say, oh my goodness. Some of them had their own living quarters, they were a little bit older. And I'd say, well, you know, there's aspects about them that I like, and there's aspects about them I don't like, and I would just sort of pick out of the personalities aspects that I would see myself functioning as.

But my brother was met with very much...oh, my god. I can remember him yelling at him, like, "Where have you been?" Sometimes he would go out and they wouldn't know where he was. And then my father stalked him one time and followed him, and then came back and told all of where he had been. "I know

where you've been. You've been to Hollywood with those people," and "We know what you're doing." And my mother would be checking, like, his underwear. I mean, it was like Sherlock Holmes.

It was just crazy, the sort of investigation they would have, and the yelling that they would do, and he'd be yelling back at them. And I thought, what is all of this noise about? And a lot of it had to do with the secrets that they were trying to find out about his life, and the speculations that would be said. And basically about 22, 23, he left and we didn't see him for years.

A few years later, when I got my place, I mean, by then there had been talk and we'd pulled it all together, and I'd see him periodically. Once I got in high school, I'd look him up and I'd want to hang out with him, and he'd bring me over and introduce me to his white lover. Apparently they had had a history for more years than I knew. So I did everything I could to forge the relationship that we once knew. And I wanted to get past all of what the differences was between him and my parents. And so that's kind of the relationship there.

Monique M. I'm going to switch gears and ask a question in relation to your religious community as you were figuring things out and your parents were giving you internal/external advice and pressures. What role did the religious community play in figuring all of that out?

Zachary J. Well, they were silent. It was just never things talked about, under any circumstances. We had, you know, the national Bible Sunday School lesson books. We had maybe 20 minutes, at best, to hear the lessons from our Sunday

School teachers, and they would prep us for sort of the review session, which was the gathered classes all together. And each class was responsible for having someone talk on the lesson. And so that was their focus. We've got this preprinted lesson, we've got to regurgitate it, and someone's got to speak.

And the few times we would have discussion, there was another gentleman in the class – by now we're about 14, 15 – so we want to know about God and sex, we want to know about girls, we want to know about what...we're having these feelings, what about God? We heard these things, can you help us? So we had one Sunday School teacher that would indulge us for a few moments and would share things or talk offline to us about the questions that we may have. Then it was about being right back on the lesson, get right back to the page, that's not what the lesson is about, let's stay focused on the subject matter. So a lot of things that we wondered did not come up.

By the time we got 13, 14, or maybe even 16, folks were pairing up and folks had girlfriends and boyfriends in the choir. We had youth choir and it was very active, and we were very dependent on each other because all of us pretty much came from sheltered homes that, you know, the church outlet was a place that we could play and share information. So as teenagers do, we would begin to sort of pass information around based on our experience and the things that we could talk about in the absence of adults. But as far as the parents or the upper echelon taking on difficult topics about homosexuality, it was a non-existing discussion.

There were effeminate men, not in the church, but certainly in the neighborhood. And in the neighborhood, particularly if it was a drag queen, people would just point at her. I can remember two drag queens that lived in our neighborhood, and they would just laugh at them secretly, never publicly, and that was it. That was just it. There was no long...it was a discussion that was definitely steered away from. As quickly as it would come up, it would go out.

Monique M. Now, did this remain the same when you moved and went to the Pentecostal experience?

Zachary J. When I moved and went to the Pentecostal experience, by now I've had neighborhood boyfriends, I've explored, I've had crushes on guys and I've had girlfriends and boyfriends. I moved to the Pentecostal experience by way of other large families. I would go to church with other kids who had a different church experience. There was another group of folks who moved in. This woman had six girls, two boys – one boy, six girls, Craig. He and I would have sexual encounters and then we'd all go to church. I mean, we would all kind of...they went every night. They went every single night they went to church.

Monique M. Wow.

Zachary J. And so they would always love having folks from the neighborhood come because typically the mother would go up front, the kids, after they finished singing, would hang out back, and all sorts of things were being said, and notes passed, and that kind of thing. The mother was busy up front falling out in the spirit or praying or whatever, and so it was great for us, because then we had

another company of folks that we could hang out with. And so homosexuality talked about – only teased about, never discussed in any kind of environment that was healthy.

Monique M. So the ability to sort of go with families – these were families from your neighborhood?

Zachary J. Yes.

Monique M. Was that seen as just your religious freedom, or was it sanctioned because they were from the neighborhood and your parents knew them?

Zachary J. I think a combination of both. My mom knew by now that I had this strong sense of church and God. She didn't really worry about it much. I was able to gain an enormous amount of trust from my parents early on. And so they were hands off, really, in maybe my pre-teens. And I didn't want to go anywhere but to church and on my little bike trips, or work in the garden. That's all I wanted to do. So they didn't care. I mean, at some point they even stopped questioning where I was going because they felt like, well, you know Zach has always been kind of doing his thing or carving out his own space. It's always a non-threatening kind of environment, it's always very safe. And so I guess somewhere in their head they realized they didn't really have to worry about me.

I was not like my brother Thaddeus, who was in constant trouble of some sort – running away, not staying at home, staying out all night at a very young age, gravitating towards families that were just what we would call ill repute. He

would love that environment. And they were preoccupied with trying to kind of keep him at home, because there would be times they'd go in the room and his bed would be empty, where he'd crawl out the window and run over to these folks' home, and they could not figure it out, for the life of them. Here they had another problem that was far more pressing than any little problem I had, so I think they saw my life as one that they didn't have to give a lot of attention to.

Monique M. I see. So where is he in relation to the oldest brother?

Zachary J. He is...there's Larry, Kenneth, Cassandra and Thaddeus – number four.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. He's kind of the official middle.

Monique M. And so towards the end of their child rearing, do you think they just were more lenient just in general, as parents tend to do as they get older?

Zachary J. In general, I would say far more lenient. Not to my little sister, though. My little sister, who was next to me, they were very preoccupied with her life, very preoccupied with what she was doing. If she did it with me, she got far more...her boundaries were extended. If it was alone, forget about it. It had to be monitored, it had to be very closely watched. She was only permitted to be who she was in my presence. Other than that, there was a lot of control and a lot of focus on what she was doing in her spare time.

Monique M. You mentioned that your mom had a strong sense of your calling to God and church activities, and I'm certain with you going to Bible college and participating in so many church activities that that was really clear. Were they supportive of that?

Zachary J. No. No. Well, I mean, I don't know about that term. In general I felt no then. At that time I felt that I had outgrown them spiritually, and I felt that they...it was clear to me that they really didn't understand spirituality in the ways that I thought they really should. And so around 18, 19 I began to hold Bible studies, and I would invite my mom to come, because I just felt like she needed more than what she was being exposed to.

Monique M. Did she go?

Zachary J. Sometimes she would come. I think she wanted to just check out what was going on. She would come and she would listen. So that level of support, yes. On the level of support that you want to be a minister, there was a very casual indifference. We had had...my aunt had married a minister, and he really did not treat her in the best of light. I think he had external relationships, and they were all sort of imbibed in the church life.

And so my mom...and my dad certainly was very not engaged in religious activity. He didn't believe in church. He never went. My mom would go, but of course with her being a working mother, Sundays, if we went to church with my grandmother, that would give her an opportunity to spend that time with my dad.

So that's kind of the way things would go. She'd send us off and then whatever they did in their own spare time, they did.

So when I pronounced to them that I felt this calling on my life, it had come when I was age 16, and I kept it a secret for two years. I didn't want to tell them. I couldn't understand why I didn't want to tell them. Probably because I felt that they would be totally disappointed in my career choice. So I just kept it to myself. I knew, somehow I'd gotten the message that it would be my responsibility to sort of fund it and make it happen, so there was a lot that I didn't talk about.

And even to this day. My mom knows more about the work that I do now through relationships that she's built with my church members versus me. I still don't talk a lot about the things that I do. I don't know that there's a real depth of interest there, so I've always been kind of reluctant to share.

Monique M. I find that really fascinating, seeing how much religion plays a part in your life. When you went through the process of being licensed in the Baptist tradition, were they present?

Zachary J. They were always present. My mom always saw it important to be present, to come. She realized that I was holding back, I guess, somewhere along the line, because other people would tell her, and she'd say, "Gee, I didn't know." I remember one time she asked, "Well, why didn't you tell me?" And I said, "Well, I didn't think you cared." I just kind of held to that. My mom never rang a lot of noise around the successes of her kids.

My mother – [*laughs*] – I always say my mother was busy enjoying some of her own fruit of her accomplishments. So it was always, whenever we have conversation with my mom...even today, I'll call my mother and my mother will just start talking about things that she's doing, and she'll occupy all the conversation about that, and that'll be the end of the conversation. So I already know what the conversation's going to be like, and it probably was never very different.

My mom was always very self-consumed in her activities, and her social life, and things that she was doing. And by the time...or if you said something, you didn't get the level of energy that you had thought you would get, and you'd be like, well, what the hell? I don't think she cares, so... She's not going to, like, say, "Oh my god, that's great, that's wonderful, that's fantastic." You're not going to get that out of my mother.

Monique M. But they did attend?

Zachary J. But they were present. They were there, they were present, they did all the right things. They were there, you know. So yes. My dad I didn't...my dad was not...no, I didn't tell him. And I think by that time, by the time I graduated high school, they were divorced, and I really was injured by their divorce. I lost a lot of respect for my dad in that process that I have been busy regaining as the years went on because I just felt like his walking out was just so cowardly. And so my dad and I stopped talking in the immediate years after the divorce.

Monique M. Now, I remember you said to me that you got married. You got married as a member of the Foursquare?

Zachary J. Yes, yes.

Monique M. Were they present there for the marriage?

Zachary J. They were present there, yes. Very much involved and engaged. They didn't put up any money, but I had to pay for all that. But they were excited about the marriage and the family and that kind of thing, yes.

Monique M. So how old were you?

Zachary J. Twenty-three.

Monique M. So what's the time frame? So your parents divorced by the time you're done with school?

Zachary J. Yes. My parents divorced the year that I graduated, because I thought they were going to help me with my college, and they didn't. So it was like '76. They'd been having problems prior to then off and on, but '76 was the apex, and they just sort of split there. And then '81 was about the time that I got married.

Monique M. So at that point you had reunited enough with your father that he was present for the wedding?

Zachary J. Yes, yes.

Monique M. And was that seen as a surprise? Were they accepting of your wife and stepson?

Zachary J. Very accepting. Anybody that I brought home, my family was always embracing. My dad had very little conversation about it. There was sort of a nodding agreement. My mom kind of was indifferent. She didn't care. You know, it seemed like the right thing to do. She worked hard at befriending my ex-wife and trying to make life comfortable for her.

My ex-wife was a very...she was a very suspicious person. She didn't trust very well, very easily, so my mom had to work really extra hard in befriending her and trying to embrace her. She always thought that was associated with something else. So my wife would just kind of draw back and my mom would pull forward, so there was always that sort of tug of war between the two of them, which I never quite understood.

Monique M. At the point at which you ended up divorcing – I'm going to jump forward by a great deal – were your parents supportive, your family supportive of that choice? Were they resistant?

Zachary J. Indifferent.

Monique M. Indifferent?

Zachary J. Indifferent. Very indifferent. That was the year that I came out to my mom, and I explained to her that I had researched my life and my thoughts and it was time for me to live my life now as a gay man, that I basically had tried marriage, I had discovered it was not for me, and that my life really needed to take a turn, and I needed to cultivate the healthiest lifestyle that I could with all of the values that

they had taught me. So I remember taking her out to breakfast and sitting down and having this talk with her.

Monique M. Her by herself?

Zachary J. Yes. And she basically said, “Well, Zach, you know, have you thought about getting yourself some help?” And I says, “Help? I don’t need help. We tried that already, remember?” I said, “All those years we were trying.” I said, “No, I don’t need help.” I said, “Right now I just need to live my life. I’m sharing this with you and that’s it.” And so she sort of accepted it, and she says, “Well, you know, times are changing, and I hear so much now about gay people, and, you know, take good care of yourself.” She was very gentle and very accepting.

And by this time I’m trying to reconstruct my life, and I had joined up with Unity Fellowship, and my mom came, and when I preached there, she was always present. She’s present now. She’ll come. When she comes to New York she always comes to the church. She comes to the church there in L.A. when I’m there. So she just sort of took a back seat and went along for the ride.

Monique M. Now, the period between that and there, you said to me earlier that you were in sort of a religious exile for a couple of years, that you were on hiatus. Was that, for you, part of the process of coming out, sort of discerning that spiritually as well as socially?

Zachary J. Well, after my Foursquare experience, and coming out there to my pastors, there was a clear message there that my coming out was not a godly idea. And so I

retreated and thought yeah, this is the time that I need to really think about me and God, what my options religiously are. So I'd have to say yes to your question.

Monique M. And that time period, was that the time period you sort of ventured to MCCs and different churches?

Zachary J. Yes, exactly.

Monique M. And they didn't take because?

Zachary J. You know, it was so foreign. I had been exposed to other religious practices because we had gone to the Church of Christ. They had a religious release at the schools that I attended. I was in different glee clubs that went to various churches. There were Catholic churches in the neighborhoods that I would visit periodically. I had an older sister who had converted to Islam, and she would always say – this was the sister, Cassandra, who took us to the library – and she'd always say, “You know, whatever you do, stay open. Don't pigeonhole yourself. Stay open religiously and read this, read that,” and she'd recommend stuff that we should read.

And I would read. I remember as a kid I read about Edgar Cayce and his powerful prophetic ministry. She'd give us other material to read. Things that the Muslims would put out she'd make sure we would read and stuff that she would run across. And then my oldest brother Larry, he was a musician, so he would take us around. But it was something about incorporating those religious

experiences as my own that did not stick. And I couldn't figure out, couldn't put my finger on why it was, but I knew it was there.

Monique M. So what was the light bulb moment for you at Unity? What made it stick?

Zachary J. Oh, that became instantaneous. That was so there. The first time I went, and my date at that time took me, I was just thinking to myself, oh my god, this is really wonderful. I just loved the atmosphere. It was familiar to me. The songs and the hymns sung were familiar, and the structure of the worship service was familiar, so I had literally come back home.

Monique M. Okay. Now, given your very eclectic religious background, what remnants were present in Unity specifically that were familiar? You said the structure of worship. Was it just it being a black body of believers or was the theology similar?

Zachary J. Well, it was all of that because by this time I had studied and realized that the theology that was being taught was things that I had pretty much thought about in my development. And so here Bishop Bean was daring to say them and vocalize them across the pulpit, which was a very sacred desk for me. So to have heard these things expounded by a minister, I was deeply taken in, and very intrigued as to what his background was and what gave him this extraordinary freedom to speak so boldly about same gender loving people. And I stuck around to find out what that was.

Monique M. Now, you talked to me a bit about your working there and being there, but not being on staff, just feeling your way in. What made you, after you were appointed assistant pastor, what made you continue forward in the role of leadership in the church?

Zachary J. Well, there was a sense of desperation that had emerged because now we're talking early '80s, mid to late '80s, and we're talking about an emergency of those people who were coming down sick who were primarily gay people. And we're talking about a community that is not responding, because of who is getting sick. And we're talking about a ministry that was needing support in all kinds of ways that just was not there at the time. And just from a human aspect, as well as my upbringing that said we needed to, as a community, pull together.

So I think that sense of urgency within the community pretty much kept me glued in. We were in an environment that was unbeknownst to any environment I had ever been in, where people just showed up sick and dying, or sick, frail and die.

Yes, Reverend Holly?

Rev. Holly The cab will be here at 2:15.

Zachary J. Pardon me?

Rev. Holly The cab will be here at 2:15.

Zachary J. Oh, excellent. Okay, thank you. Yeah, so we've got about five minutes. Thank you.

Rev. Holly You're welcome.

Zachary J. So, you know, it was those kinds of experiences that just kept me plugged in. We were just...we had our nose to the grind, and every time the phone would ring, it felt like there was an urgent care or an urgent situation that we needed to focus in on.

Monique M. So how did you all go from sort of the emergent crisis and being the church that spoke to this dire time to expanding and being churches everywhere?

Zachary J. Oh! Well, I mean, you know, life was as it was, and the news of our work and our communal building became known because Archbishop, at the time what was Carl Bean, would connect to what many of the other organizations were doing, many of those that were in Hollywood. And they were very much speaking to power about resources, about the crisis that was being had. We were learning how to engage political policy and affect those things, and so his terrain became very broad.

I mean, he would be on the speaking circuit talking about the experience in South Central Los Angeles, and speaking truth to power wherever he could. And there were those allies who made sure that he had a platform to speak on. So as he was talking and gaining this experience, we were building and becoming a focal point of many interested groups and organizations.

Monique M. So were you involved in the initial church plants across the country?

Zachary J. Yes. I was the first transplant. He had connected to Renee McCoy in Detroit, who was also doing similar work in building a church. She was straight out of the MCC church. In fact, she had pastored an MCC church here in Brooklyn and then moved back to Detroit to educate herself. And I think she has a PhD at this time, or was working on it around that time. And so there was the Detroit church that became a part of this sort of triad.

When New York called, its African American gay community had called and wanted to replicate the work in Los Angeles, I stepped out and said, listen, I'll take it, I'll do it, and that became the first church grown out of the Los Angeles church. As a result of that, Archbishop felt like there was the work that was being done in Detroit, now the work done here in New York, the work in Los Angeles, and that there was some kind of commonality that was being formalized from that.

Monique M. And so from coming from L.A. to here, was that a tense decision or were you following the work and going where you needed to go?

Zachary J. I thought it was a tense decision. It was a decision that I didn't have a lot of time to think about. When he received the call, it was a Sunday afternoon, and he was really in a...I went to his office. He was just like, you know, he had his head in his hand, and he says, "Zach, I don't know what to do. People are calling for churches all over the place. I can't keep running on the speaking circuit and taking care of the church here. It's having its own demands." He says, "I need

help.” I say, “Well, I’ll go to New York and do whatever I can do to see what needs to be done.”

And I thought we were going to probably aid them in setting up their work [correction: **there**,] and I was going to eventually come back or whatever. I went home and I told my boyfriend, I said, “Look, you know, this thing is going out of hand, and it has spread to other places across the country. We need to do something.” And my boyfriend said, “Well, you know, whatever you want to do.” He knew about my love for the church and whatnot.

And after I came here I realized that there was no real black voice, that the Chelsea area and the Village, they had theirs, but that there was the segregated subculture, and I felt that I needed to bring that message here. And upon bringing that message, we had these throngs of people that would just come in droves like...it took off like wildfire.

Monique M. So you never left?

Zachary J. I never left.

Monique M. What year was that?

Zachary J. This was 1992, '91. I’m talking about thousands of, hundreds of people attending the services. You had to come...you had to get to church like two hours ahead. There would be people waiting. I mean, it was just an unbelievable kind of experience and phenomenon.

Monique M. And so were you then the pastor of that forming church?

Zachary J. Yes.

Monique M. And so how did you move from pastor to, I guess, more of the hierarchy of the bishop?

Zachary J. Well, along that time, I would report back to some of the phenomena here, Rene would report to Bishop Bean at that time, Reverend Bean at that time who was going there, and it was his guiding that says, "You know what, I think we need to formalize. Something's happening here and I think we need to formalize a denomination, and we need to look at this and where else this is being affected, because the message that we're teaching, our people are taking hold of it."

I mean, he would come here and they knew him from his disco record, and so they would gather in large crowds. We'd have to look for a venue large enough. And it was very clear that the message was taking root that God is love and love is for everyone. And the way that we shaped the message, people would take to it. And so because of the demand and this overwhelming kind of response to it, it was clear to us that we needed to think about what else.

Monique M. I have about ten minutes' worth of questions left. Do you think the cab would wait that long? **[could we remove this]**

Zachary J. Yeah, he will.

Monique M. Okay. So from the sense of being formalized, how did your duties change as pastor and then as it related to the hierarchy? Where did you see your role being most useful, your calling being most useful?

Zachary J. Where are we now in terms of time?

Monique M. After the church is formalized and has gotten several branches started, several people are in place that aren't just you, and then you make the move to...well, I'm not sure. What was the next move, from pastor to...was it pastor to bishop immediately?

Zachary J. No. It was assistant pastor to pastor, because at the time that I came here I was Archbishop's assistant pastor. By the time I came here and started this work, the structure began to take place. Archbishop decided, well, you know, let's apply structure to this and let's ordain you an elder of the church, because there were other pastors that we were now training and preparing them for the work.

So that's when he saw himself as bishop, and then there was me and Rainey Cheeks, who had come from the religious science experience, shared what he was doing in Washington, D.C., wanted to become a part of us. There was Renee in Detroit who was doing her work, wanted to become a part. And so the structure began to take form as Bishop saw himself as the leader and wanted to assign titles to those who were working with him.

Monique M. Okay.

Zachary J. So I was elder. From elder I became bishop.

Rev. Holly The cab is outside.

Zachary J. Okay. He became archbishop and we began from there.

Monique M. Two other questions.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. And these are just general questions.

Zachary J. Let me just talk to your cab, and let me tell him that...

Monique M. Okay.

[Zachary leaves room; returns.]

Monique M. So given your many roles, what other activities do you participate in, other than just church related functions?

Zachary J. I'm a common law husband. I'm a father. I adopted a son in the backdrop of all this in the early '90s. He's now 18. And I'm a friend. I'm a good friend to a nice group of people. So between parenting – and I'm a musician. I took up my music more seriously about seven years ago.

Monique M. What do you play?

Zachary J. Piano. Jazz. And so that, of course, keeps me extremely busy. And my role in my common law relationship is very much what I would consider more effeminate roles because I do the cooking, the shopping, the ironing, the laundry –

[*laughs*] – and all those kinds of things. So I stay pretty busy just trying to maintain and keep my little family structure together.

Monique M. And then the final question. What fulfills you?

Zachary J. Those things I just listed. My music is now my main heartthrob. I devote a lot of time per day to it. And still my cycling. I'm an avid sports fan, believe it or not. And, you know, I have wonderful friends, just wonderful, wonderful people. New Yorkers are great hanger-outers. They love to do restaurants and hang out.

Monique M. Well, that was my list.

Zachary J. Well, great.

Monique M. Do you have anything else you want to include on the official record?

Zachary J. No. I think we covered a wide range of my life relived, and I don't think we missed much at all, no.

Monique M. Well, thank you again for your time. I'm told this is a pretty quick turnaround. I'll send this as an MP3 to the LGBTRAN folks and they'll transcribe it and send it back to me.

Zachary J. Okay.

Monique M. I need an email address, or some way to email it to you.

Zachary J. Not a problem. I'll give you my card.

[*End Part 1; Start Part 2*]