

Summer 7-20-2009

Max Dare and Ernest Marc Oral History Interview

Max Dare

Ernest Marc

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/lgbtq_oh

Recommended Citation

Dare, Max and Marc, Ernest, "Max Dare and Ernest Marc Oral History Interview" (2009). *LGBTQ+ Oral History Project*. 3.

https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/lgbtq_oh/3

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the LGBTQ+ Collections at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in LGBTQ+ Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

LGBT Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: L34-00001
Interviewees: Max Dare (MD), Ernest Marc (EM)
Interviewer: Jessica Merrick (JM)
Interview date: March 2, 2009
Interview location: Undisclosed
Transcribed by: Jessica Merrick
Transcription date: March 4-12, 2009
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon, Mary Beth Isaacson
Audit Edit date: April 20-23, 2009
Interview Changes by: Christine Toth
Interview Changes date: May 20, 2009
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson
Final Edit date: July 20, 2009

[Transcriber's note: The following changes have been made at the request of the Interviewer: pseudonyms are used throughout the Interview, the use of ellipses indicates that material has been removed by the Interviewer, names of persons not directly connected with the Interview have been replaced with pseudonyms, some identifying geographical details have been removed.]

Jessica Merrick: Today is March second [2009], and I'm sitting with Max and Ernest, and so I'll just ask you to tell me a little bit about yourselves and how you grew up.

Max Dare: Do you want me to start?

Ernest Marc: We'll let the elders start.

MD: (laughs) Okay. I was born in Chicago, Illinois. And my father lost his business in Chicago in the Depression. And so he decided to move up to Wisconsin in a shack that my—a hunting shack that my uncle owned in northern Wisconsin. So, he moved the whole family up there. I was four years old. So I really grew up in Wisconsin.

JM: Yeah.

MD: And on a—he bought a farm shortly thereafter, and we were dairy farmers. Small farm in a place called Hannibal, Wisconsin, very small town. About sixty people at that time; I think it has fewer now.

EM: Maximum population.

JM: (laughs)

MD: It was actually a farm near there. And I went to the local schools there. There were very small classes and I graduated from high school. I was born in 1930. And I graduated from high school in 1948. And my principal talked my parents into letting me to college—sending me to college.

I went to a place called River Falls State University in western Wisconsin¹. I went four years there, and it basically was for education courses. I never thought I'd be a very good teacher, but I decided to teach anyway. And I taught high school for one year. And during that year—that was during the—

EM: Korean War.

MD: Korean War. And I was called up to be drafted, and in the middle of the school year—the superintendent of the school where I taught in Abbotsford, Wisconsin, decided that I'd better—that he could get me off, and so he got me off for the rest of the year. So I went in right as the war was ending, the Korean War. And I went in the [United States] Army. I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

JM: My grandpa was stationed there for a little bit.

MD: Was he really? Well, I was just—that was my basic training. I went to my third choice, (laughs) which was clerk typist school—to be a company clerk—and was going to—went to the Pentagon, to a unit at the Pentagon. And luckily I was not the company clerk—I hated typing! (laughs)

And I went into machine records, which was the earliest computers, very early computers, in the basement of the Pentagon and that's where I spent my Army career. It was sort of exciting for a farm boy—

JM: Yeah.

MD: —to be in Washington, D.C.

JM: With the first computers.

MD: And also ending up, you know, going up to New York on weekends and that type of things. And late in my Army career, everybody in my unit—all the draftees—decided they better go back to college because they could get out early. And so they were figuring out ways of getting out early. (laughs) Cause you could get out up to three months early.

So I decided to go to the University of Wisconsin and got out early to do so. I started out in chemistry, which was my major in high school. And I decided I couldn't stand labs anymore, and changed to geography, which was my second—one of my minors in college.

¹ Now known as the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

I got a master's degree in geography and got recruited to go and work at the C.I.A. [Central Intelligence Agency]. I had several other possibilities.

JM: Back in D.C., then.

MD: Back in D.C., which I loved. And so I worked at C.I.A. for my whole career, with ups and downs.

JM: Maybe you should be interviewing me, huh? (laughs)

MD: I was an analyst. Eventually after a few years, I ended up working on China, the economy of China. And that was most of my career. I ended up being branch chief, but retired early—as early as I could. (laughs) I retired when I was fifty-five. And that's twenty-three years ago. And so after I retired I thought I might try—by the way, I was married. (laughs)

EM: Yeah, I was wondering when you were going to get around to that!

JM: (laughs)

MD: At the University of Wisconsin I worked at a women's dormitory and my wife-to-be was a waitress and I was working there as a busboy and a dishwasher. And we met at a picnic and fell in love, and—after she had graduated, actually, and I mostly was out of school—we got married in Washington, D.C., as a matter of fact. And I was married for nearly thirty years.

And I felt the rumblings of my homosexuality. When I was young, I didn't even know what homosexuality was—I mean, nobody talked about anything like this. I didn't know at all. But I began to get urgings, and I must say that I cheated on my wife because of my homosexuality, my homosexual relations. But all very undercover, because after all. I was working for C.I.A. (laughs) Afraid to death that they would discover it and fire me, but I never had a security—

We had lie detector tests when I went in. I didn't have any trouble with that, because I didn't know where I was then. And I only got one about two years before I retired, and at that point, I was—the person that gave me the test, I knew the guy because we had met a number of times because I was at the gym and stuff. And he didn't ask me any personal questions at all! All he asked me was whether I felt I could be security-conscious, and of course I was! I didn't have any trouble at all passing it with him, easy!

JM: Yeah.

MD: But anyhow, after I retired I finally took a test for AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome], because I thought I probably was positive and I didn't think it was fair to my wife. I went to a private physician because I was so in the closet. And the first test came out positive. And I told my wife. We talked about it. I thought maybe I could try to get, you know—

EM: Straightened out.

MD: Straighten myself out! (laughs) I guess. Actually, she said right away that she was not about to share me with anyone. (laughs) And anyway, I went to a psychologist and all that kind of stuff.

But in the meantime, I discovered it was a false positive test.

JM: Oh, wow!

MD: But anyway, the psychologist didn't work. He's terrible. He didn't understand homosexuality at all.

JM: What kind of stuff was he telling you to do?

MD: What?

JM: What kind of stuff was he telling you that you should do?

MD: Well, he thought he could cure me, I think.

JM: Oh, okay. "Fix you," huh?

MD: It's pretty hard to do, (laughs) so to speak. Oh, it was terrible. I mean, I used to go to his office, and then I would go out and act out my homosexuality (laughs) on the way home type of thing! It was pretty bad.

And anyway, when we got a divorce I went to a different psychologist for a while, and she was really quite good. It was a woman, but she did pretty well. At least sort of understood what homosexuality was all about and tackled really the other problems. That helped a lot.

But anyway, going back to the main line—after I retired I decided to work part time, so I went back to school in a travel course. I was going to go into the travel industry. But I wanted to work part time, and I found that I couldn't really get a job part time; they all wanted me to work full time and then go into part time. I didn't want to do that, so I took a tax course and decided to do taxes for several years, which I did.

Let's see— About a year and a half after I retired and was having my go with my wife and decided what to do, I went to my church's—I'm a Unitarian Universalist. I had gone to a couple of general assemblies before. But I went to this general assembly, went to a course on coming out late in life, which was one of the workshops they offered, and I met this guy! (laughs)

Yeah. I fell in love. In the meantime, my wife and I, like I say, were trying to straighten it out. And when she came back, I told her that this had happened and, you know, I just—it

wasn't working—and I was in love with someone, and she said, “No, I can't share you with anyone.” And really, we hadn't talked about sharing very much, and I don't think I would have either.

And anyway, we decided to divorce. It was an amicable divorce. And I went back and forth between my home, which was in Virginia, and his in Maryland. We met in Little Rock, Arkansas, at general assembly. And he lived in Maryland, I lived in Virginia! (laughs) Outside of Washington, D.C.

JM: So this was a workshop where you had to go away for it?

MD: Oh, yeah, it's a general assembly of our church, which is an annual affair.

JM: Okay.

MD: And so that's where we met. And he went down there. And he can tell you about that. But I went down there and went to this workshop, and that's where we met. So we went back and forth from about—from June to—what, about September, October? (laughs) And, driving back and forth, we decided that we would live together. And I moved in with him in the fall that year, and we've been together ever since.

There's some highlights of our relationship, I think, besides just the meeting part. I had to tell my—oh, I have three daughters from the marriage. One was in a lesbian relationship. She, at the time, thought she was a lesbian. I was convinced that she was because she was living with a woman! (laughs) And the sisters all got along together very well, the other two having boyfriends or husbands. And so I told them. The first one I told was my lesbian daughter, and then I told my other two. And they were upset, of course, because of the separation with my wife. Especially my second daughter, who came running up to the Washington area—she lived in Colorado—and in the meantime, we were going off somewhere! (laughs) I was going off to do something and my wife was going off to something. But anyway, we had a—they were supportive; they were fine with it. My wife had a lot of trouble at first, because she sort of blamed Ernest.

EM: A home wrecker!

MD: Yeah, as a home wrecker.

JM: I knew that about you.

MD: But we continued to meet and get along fine. And she finally started to feel better about it and joined us at parties at our house. So it was a good relationship after a while. And at about—what was it, our eighth year, Ernest? We decided to have a ceremony of union. We had it at our church. We were both very active in the church, and some two hundred people came to see that. It was pretty, you know—we jazzed it up! We dressed in formals, had a wonderful service with three different ministers! (laughs) And it was fun, a great time. We have tapes of that service and pictures if you're interested in looking at the pictures or listening to the tapes, which are not very good. But there are

videos, but they're not terribly good, because they were (inaudible) videos, and they weren't professionally done.

But then a little over five years ago—well, maybe about seven, eight years ago, after he retired—we started looking for retirement places. We had some—our very best friends decided to move down to Florida. And they're a black couple who live now in North Tampa [Florida]. They stood up at our wedding; they were ones who stood up at our ceremony of union. And they moved down here and we said—you know, we started getting interested. We looked around at a number of retirement places and were unhappy with what we were finding. Didn't feel that most of them understood that open gay people—what their needs were. We came down here and found a very delightful place up near Tampa and almost went there.

But in the meantime, we found this place. We looked at this place and they had—the homes they had at that time were only the triplexes. And they just seemed too small to us, so we just said, “Well, why don't you tell us when there's an opening—if somebody's selling out at the homes up front.” And then we came back here and discovered that they had the bigger places, and thought, “Oh, this is interesting.”

So, we almost, like I said, bought this place in Tampa that had all the wonderful things, about the same price that we were going to pay here. And we came to sign up, and in the middle of the night we woke up and said, “Hey, this is not what we came down here for. We really—I don't think we would be completely happy here.” We came back here and we had looked at this place, like I said, and we said we were going to buy. We just walked in and said we were going to buy here! (laughs)

EM: Easiest sale she ever had! (laughs)

MD: And that's how we ended up here, so I'll leave it at that. That's pretty long.

JM: No, you're fine!

MD: And if you have any questions, I'll fill in—

JM: Okay.

MD: —on that brief history.

EM: He's writing a biography, by the way.

JM: Really?

EM: Yeah, he's been very diligent at it.

MD: Well, I haven't written anything for a while. I'm up to page fifty—year fifty-something, I'm doing it in order.

JM: Still, it's evident though, too; it shows. If I had to tell my story, I couldn't tell that coherent of a story. I'd forget everything and everything would be out of order. That's impressive.

MD: Yeah, well, it gets—sometimes you just want to do that. I'll probably re-organize it, if I ever get to the point where I'm almost finished. (laughs)

JM: How about you? How'd you grow up?

EM: Well, let's see—born in Buffalo, New York, and lived there till I was eighteen. Enjoyed—pretty much enjoyed my childhood, although I always felt a little bit of a loner, because I grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood where everybody was a factory worker or something like that. I enjoyed the environment, but I was the smart kid in school (laughs) and that sort of set me aside some. And also, I was not athletically inclined. That was something I put up with all my life.

But, otherwise, had a pretty nice childhood. My dad always had a job through the Depression as a stationary engineer at a big refrigeration plant. So, although we never had a lot of money, we always were like everybody else there. We never felt poor, although by today's standards, people might have considered everybody there poor. But, we didn't feel that. We didn't feel disadvantaged to any great extent.

I had two sisters, three years older and three years younger. I was in the middle. My older sister was always bigger than me; she could beat me up! I could never do anything to my younger sister, or my dad would come after me! (laughs) So, I had some problems there, really I did. Especially when my older sister was always the first person chosen on the make-up teams for softball, stuff like that, around the neighborhood. And, I was always the last person chosen for anything like that. (laughs)

But, I excelled in school, and I led the class in grammar school and led the class in high school. I went on to college. Was with a fairly tight-knit group of guys from my small little mission church in South Buffalo. South Buffalo was at that point very much an immigrant—recent immigrant—community, first generation, a lot of folks. Polish and Italian. It went from its German roots—Buffalo—to the Italian-Polish neighborhood while I was growing up.

South Buffalo was entirely Catholic, and we were Lutheran. (laughs) So we had this little Lutheran missionary church down there. The guys my age, we hung out together just about everything. We went to scouts together. We played basketball together. We joined DeMolay² together, which is sort of a junior Masonic group. We were fairly closely knit. Those were the guys I was close with, rather the ones in my immediate neighborhood.

School—I pretty much sailed through grammar school and high school.

MD: (inaudible reference to coffee)

² DeMolay International, also known as the Order of DeMolay.

JM: (to MD) Maybe just a little bit. Thanks, thanks a lot.

EM: And as I said, I graduated at the head of the class, along with my high school girlfriend of the last two years; she was number two in high school. We were quite a team. She was a beautiful artist.

I went off to RPI [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute], an engineering and science school at the other end of the state.

JM: Okay. What does that stand for?

EM: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. At that time it was considered the number two engineering and science school in the country. There were folks at RPI who thought it was number one, but that was wishful thinking, because nobody ever got better than MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology].

Did not do all that great in college. I was okay my first two years, but my last two years my inability to study caught up with me. I had sailed through school and through my first two years of college without ever developing good study habits. And, in the physics course at RPI even the smart guys had to study, something I didn't do too well. So, my last couple years of college were not that great.

JM: (to MD) Thanks.

MD: I think I spilled a little bit here.

EM: But, I did get out in four years and had a number of job offers. I got out at the right time: it was 1957 and Sputnik had gone up and they were hiring like mad—engineers and scientists everywhere. So, I had job offers from places I didn't even interview.

JM: (to MD) Thank you.

EM: Ended up signing on with the federal government labs, because I had worked for two summers in Washington D.C. at a summer job down at one of the labs down there and I liked it. I liked Washington D.C. and I liked the laboratory environment. I had a good career there. I stayed there my whole career, about thirty-seven years worth of it, and retired when I was fifty-seven.

And I was married. I had two children, one of which—my daughter died at age nineteen in a traffic accident, unfortunately. It was a traumatic experience. My wife had some deep-seated emotional problems, which could never really be overcome in our marriage. And after—

JM: Is this your high school sweetheart you're talking about?

EM: No! No, no. This was someone that I had met when I was about twenty-eight or so, and we were married when I was thirty, but we'd already—my daughter was already born. (laughs) That was sort of funny. I went around the office the day after my daughter was born, and I had decided to get married, and gave everybody a cigar and an invitation—an announcement of the wedding—at the same time. So, I had a little bit of fun with that. My mother—my poor mother was shocked at it all.

JM: She didn't want you to get married?

EM: Well, she didn't like the way I did it—having the baby before we got married. My wife—I sensed some of the emotional problems before we got married. When she did get pregnant—and she wasn't supposed to get pregnant—when she did get pregnant, she seemed to change some, enough so that I thought we could have a reasonable life together. And it just didn't work out at all. There were always problems in the marriage. Eventually she took to drinking. After many, many trips to psychiatrists and that sort of stuff, we sort of threw in the towel after we'd been married for ten years.

I was left with the children, raising the children by myself. They were eight and ten at the time. So, I took them through their teenage years. I fell into a relationship with another woman, which went on for about two years. I found myself unable to commit to marriage again, and went to something called Lifespring training, which was a little like est³—have you ever heard of est?—which is a self awareness training that you go through, very intensive.

JM: Was that with the church?

EM: No. This was a separate, independent, for-profit organization. This was Lifespring; there were a couple of those organizations around. Lifespring, I thought, was the best of them.

And, it was part way through the second part of their trainings. I came to grips with the fact that I had never really made peace with the fact that I liked to have sex with men. Would like to have had sex with men. All through my teens, I had sex with the guys that I grew up with. Didn't think anything of it, always thought the right woman would come along, and—I thought all guys did that till the right woman came along. (laughs)

So, in my twenties I put that behind me and started dating women and got married. But after that training I realized I had never really honestly looked at my attraction to males. And so, with the help of my girlfriend at the time, who got me my first pair of tight jeans—

JM: (laughs)

³ Erhard Seminars Training, or est, was a large group awareness training program popular in the 1970s.

EM: —and pushed me out of the house on Friday nights to go to the bars. And she thought that I was hanging on to some childhood fantasies and that once I played it out I'd be back and okay, and what really happened is that I really discovered where I was the whole time, all along.

JM: So, she actually encouraged you to go to the gay bars.

EM: Oh, yeah, she did. She was very honest. We had a very good relationship. We really did—and [she was] a wonderful woman. And there was no question that I was in love with her. And still think very highly of her. But it just—it wouldn't—I couldn't bring myself to make another commitment to a woman at that time.

And when I found my first lover, she tried very hard to accept what was happening for me. And finally decided she couldn't compete with the emotions I was going through. I tell you, when you've kept that stuff down there for forty years—I was forty-two when I came out—and you let go of it, it's like a volcano going off. For most people who come out late in life it's just an unbelievable experience, the change in your outlook, and the energy you have and the release of all that stuff you've kept bottled up. Fantastic!

Anyway, she saw that she couldn't really compete with my feelings for my first lover. And so after about eight or nine months of trying to stay together, she split. And I moved out into the gay community, while raising my children and having a top secret security clearance. (laughs) It was a rather ticklish situation, to say the least.

But, I survived it. The kids survived it. I came out to the kids about a year and a half after I came out to myself. And my son had some difficulty accepting it. My daughter, after the initial shock, was very accepting. It took my son probably a couple years to become comfortable with it, but eventually he did.

So, I was active right from the beginning in various gay and lesbian organizations, and special civil rights type things. Helped put together a gay group in the suburbs of Washington, the Gay People of Laurel. Helped put together the Gay Fathers Association. Even participated in what became initially the Gay Parents Association, the International Gay Parents Association. So, I was very active from right after I came out.

And when Max and I met—he told you how we met—when Max and I met, we continued that activity. We helped found the interfaith organization for gay and lesbian rights and stuff—working with churches and trying to get them to modify their stance on gay rights. We founded the interfaith organization in Maryland through our own church and sponsorship from the Unitarian Universalist Association. We were quite successful with that. And it's still going on. It survived us leaving. Which is—

JM: Congrats.

EM: —sort of a miracle, because we were doing everything there! It's still playing a fairly important role in trying to open up churches to gay and lesbian people.

We also worked very hard in our own church. After I came out—I was chair of the church board at the time, when I came out. We had our first service about gay rights and stuff in the church—which people still remember, twenty-some years later, (laughs) cause it was a very emotional service.

And we went around the district doing gay and lesbian services and workshops, trying to help churches become more welcoming towards gay and lesbian folks. So, we were very, very active in gay and lesbian issues, both politically and religiously, all the while we were up there in Maryland.

So, I think that's pretty much a very brief summary of things.

JM: Yeah, that's great. Thank you. So, I'll start asking you some questions about moving here and that sort of thing. So—in your old neighborhood, before you came down here, were there any gay people in your neighborhood, or was it pretty—?

EM: No.

MD: No.

JM: How did you—?

EM: We obviously had some—we founded the Gay People of Laurel. So, there were some gay folks around in the Laurel area, the small city we lived in, but nobody in our neighbor—at least, nobody who was out in our neighborhood. (laughs)

MD: But they—you know we were pretty open, although we didn't flaunt it, because—mostly because of teens and the question of what they might do.

I was in the AIDS program for a while, helping AIDS people, people with AIDS. I had one of my buddies who used to come there all the time (laughs) and he was very, I mean—his car had signs all over it! (laughs) He wore all these clothes; it was pretty—he did flaunt the fact that he was gay. (laughs) That bothered me a little bit! But we survived it. And actually, when we left, the neighbors gave us a nice party—farewell party.

EM: Yeah, I was there from sixty-six [1966]—

MD: Ernest knew everybody, of course, and Ernest lived there for quite a while.

EM: Until we left in 2003, so I was there for a long time. And it was a nice—really nice neighborhood.

JM: How'd you find out about this neighborhood?

EM: Well, we—it's sort of strange. *The Washington Blade* is the gay paper up there in that area. It's a big gay paper. And they had a teensy-weensy little article in it, saying that Ted—

MD: Koppel.

EM: Ted Koppel was going to be doing a week long program on gay in America, in whatever it was—2002 or something like that. His first night was going to be with folks in this community here.

JM: Mm.

EM: That was a surprise to us, because we had never heard of a gay retirement community. Of course there weren't any others at the time. (laughs)

So, we were down here tending to some—my mother used to live in [nearby location] and she had left a mobile home there that needed—we were trying to get rid of it and we were down to do some cleaning up on that, I guess, and straightening it out. We had a free day and we thought we'd come up from [nearby location] and just take a look at this place. So, that's how we had heard about it, was just this little item in the gay paper up there.

And we came here and the woman, Lisa, was pretty aggressive—and helpful. And they only had the triplexes here. And we looked them over. They were just too small, just no way! Our house up there in Maryland was—we had to get rid of over half of our stuff in order to come down here, and you can still see what we got. It was just much, much too small.

So, Max told you how we came back a second time and took a look and found out that they had started to build the bigger units, and that's how we got here.

JM: So, what kinds of questions did you have about the community? What things were you looking into before—what did you really need to know before you could move here? Was there something that, you know—?

EM: We were attracted immediately by the community—just the community spirit and the way people just seem so natural to be gay and open around here.

JM: So, it felt like there was a spirit when you came to visit?

EM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that's really what attracted us. As far as questions—we always wondered about whether it was going to survive. Right from the beginning, we knew that they didn't have a lot of money behind it. They didn't have their swimming pool and community center yet, (laughs) although they were going to have one soon! If the housing market hadn't crashed we would maybe have at least a community center. We almost don't need a swimming pool anymore, because five minutes away at [nearby location] you can join for four hundred dollars a year for a family, and that almost doesn't make sense for us to try and put a pool in. But, a community center we need.

So they didn't have that stuff, and we traded off those niceties of the larger retirement communities in order to get the community here. That's really what we wanted.

MD: There were a couple of things. We found that we didn't really want a community—we didn't care much for senior housing in large complexes where there were corridors all over the place. We didn't really want to live—we didn't care that much whether we had a lot of activities, so that you feel that you're overwhelmed with all the possibilities. It was okay to have some, but not the way they had them at some of these places.

And like I said, we were turned off by what seemed to be acceptance—but really wasn't—of openly gay people. The one in—we went to a large one near where we lived up in Washington D.C., which a lot of our friends have moved to, and I just didn't feel that they were very welcoming to gay people. It just didn't seem like there was going to be any kind of—sort of—way that you could really feel good about being an openly gay person there, and not be harassed or have problems. I know a—we know a gay person who lives there, but he's closeted.

That is another problem. That can be a real, major problem. These closeted people do not want to associate with somebody who's open! Because then people would know or think that they're gay, too! So that gets to be a problem, too! (laughs) So part of it's people in the gay community itself—and a lot of older people stay in that closet and just refuse to get out of it. They find a difficult situation.

JM: After you found out about that this place and there were, you know, that a gay retirement place did exist, did you look around for anywhere else? You said you didn't think there weren't any at the time. But did you look around, or were you just found this one and you were happy to go on and come on down here?

MD: Well, like I said, we looked around a bit before we decided on this place—partly because on the size problem, but also, we were—we just had decided we probably wanted to move to a warmer climate at that point. We looked at trailer-park type situations, a number of those. So we looked at a lot of different places down here—never hiding the fact that we were gay. But we never really investigated most of them enough so that we had a feeling about how they would handle it, except for the one that we almost went into.

And at that one, a couple of instances happened. We were at dinner one day—they put us up overnight and had meals and stuff—and she asked if we would like—

Well, first of all, we said, “Are there were any other gay people here?”

And she said, “Well, I think this one couple is, but they are not—they don't make a big deal of it.” (laughs) So, she said, “I'll check with them and see if they want to join you.” And that was a bit naïve on her part, I think. She came back the next day and said, “Well, no, they'd rather not.” That type of thing, and sort of apologetic.

But then they said, “Well, would you like men or women to accompany you to your dinner?”

And we said, “Well, it’d be nice to meet some of the men.” We had dinner with a couple one time and it was fine—a male/female couple. Well—there weren’t any. So we ended up sitting alone.

JM: Mm.

MD: There were what—six or eight people at a table next to us, Ernest?

EM: Eight, and all women.

MD: And they obviously were looking at us, talking about us. So, one of them finally got up the nerve to come to our table, and says, “Oh, are you going to be moving here?”

We said, “Well, yeah, probably. It looks like we are.”

And she said, “Are you single?”

And Ernest said, “No, we’re partners.”

And she said very loudly, “Hey girls, they’re single!” (laughs)

JM: Oh, geez.

MD: I said, “Oh, no! Is this what we’re going to run into?” I was sitting at the bar having a drink one day, and this woman really hit on me. (laughs) This older woman and I’m saying, “Oh, God, do I have to go through all this?” (laughs)

That’s one of the problems you have as a couple. I think, probably more so—well, maybe women have that as much—have a problem with that part of it, I’m not sure. We discussed it with a female couple—

JM: So, that doesn’t happen to—

MD: You know, female couples at least don’t have any trouble dancing together. Men do in this country. It’s not favorably looked on. (laughs)

JM: When you first came to visit, were you able to meet some of the neighbors then? Or did you meet them later?

EM: The very first time we were down here we were walking around on our own, and we met (...).

MD: Yeah, we met good old (...). (laughs)

EM: ... who unfortunately died a couple of years ago now. But he was very gracious, and invited us up to the porch and offered us a beer. We chatted for a while. And as we were continuing our walk we saw several of the other guys who were coming back from—I don't know where they were at that time. They were walking along, obviously all enjoying each other's company very much, and we got a wonderful sense of community on our very first visit here. And dear old (...) and his beer cans! (laughs)

JM: Can you tell me about the things you find most important about living here?

EM: Well, for us it's the sense of community, really. Just being in a place where your next door neighbor understands. When you want to talk about your partner, you can talk about the male partner that you have, and don't have to pretend anything at all. That part of it's pretty nice. The overall sense of community is nice and supportive around here. Folks are very supportive.

We have—a little bit of a separation between the male community and the female community, I think. But on the whole, we get along pretty well together. And we're friends with really—really, friends with everybody.

JM: If you had the choice, would you rather be in an all male community?

EM: No.

MD: No, I prefer the mix.

EM: No. I would like to see a few more men back here, because we're pretty heavily dominated by the women right now in this area. Up front it's just the opposite.

JM: Okay.

MD: The women tend to do things together much more than the men do, I think.

EM: Mm-hm.

JM: So they have parties for all of the women sometimes?

MD: Yeah, oh, yeah.

JM: You don't have parties for all men?

EM: We're going to start that!

MD: We're starting to work on that!

EM: We decided that. We had two male couples over for dinner this week and we learned more about them in one night of a nice, intimate dinner than we had known in knowing them several years. That was very nice. We all enjoyed it. So I think there'd be a little bit

more of that. But I hope it doesn't—I like things where the whole community gets together, male and female and so on.

JM: Has your view changed since you moved in? Did anything look like it changed over time, or maybe your opinion of it changed?

MD: Of the community? Well—except for there being a lot more women than there were at the beginning! Because here in particular, the ones who live here are mostly—most of the ones at our end are women. There aren't any single women, right?

EM: Not at this end. There are at the other end.

MD: There are at the other end. But there are two—

JM: Mostly couples?

EM: Yeah, Allison and Rebecca are single.

MD: Yeah, over there, there are, and there are a couple of single men on this side. And they sort of go their own way. I guess—I mean, I'm not sure—it'd be interesting, probably, if you could get one of them to talk to you! (laughs) You might get a feeling for them. (...) would be almost impossible. (...) is so involved with theatre he doesn't—he's hardly ever here. ... also works.

EM: (...) might be interesting to talk to, because (...) 's been here now for—what, at least three years?

MD: Oh, yeah, probably four.

EM: Maybe four. And we do not know (...) very well. He keeps pretty much to himself, but not as bad as (...). We never see—he is totally enthralled with theatre. That's his love and his life.

We are heavily involved in our church here, the Unitarian Universalist church. So, we have two support communities, which certainly helped us to adjust.

JM: You're talking about this one, the neighborhood, and then also the church?

EM: The church. Yeah, two very different support groups.

JM: Is there a good gay community in the area?

EM: Well, there's a Prime Timers organization⁴, which is very active. That's retired gay men—or supposedly gay men over fifty, I guess you don't have to be retired. And those who like gay men over fifty! (laughs) They're very, very active, and we do a number of

⁴ Prime Timers is a national organization promoting social activities for older gay and bisexual men.

things with them from time to time. We're not—we're so busy with our two communities here already that it's not a primary community for us.

But we've gone on—in fact this last cruise we went on in January was with a number of folks, Prime Timers national. And it was very nice. We met some nice folks there. That's very important for people who are living outside of our own community here, because that's their group of people that they get to associate with, like we do around here. So it's very important organization for retired gay men. Less so for us folks here, where we've got two nice, good support communities in which we can be open.

JM: Does anybody else from the neighborhood go to your church?

EM: As a matter of fact, yes. Next door—Evelyn and Carme, and Josephine and Beatrice.

JM: Okay.

EM: So we have seven!

JM: A whole lot of you.

EM: (laughs) Yeah! And we didn't have a lot to do with getting them there, strangely enough. They sort of wanted to see what it was like on their own pretty much. I was hoping I'd get some of the folks from up front interested, but they're pretty much—a lot of them are associated with MCC, the Metropolitan Community Church [of the] Trinity. That's a large gay church here. A lot of them are associated with them there. I was hoping to get some of those who were more liberal in their religion into—(laughs)

JM: Convert them over?

EM: —into our group, but that hasn't happened yet.

JM: Is that generally—is there more of a split between people in Phase I sort of being a group, and then the people in Phase II being a group?

EM: There is definitely something of a split there. We do do quite a few things as a whole community. But we don't have a community center. And when we try to get most people together, either it's going to be an outdoor thing or we have to use one of the largest houses down there. There are a couple places down there that are quite large, but only a couple. So they get the brunt of anything where we're trying to bring the community together for a potluck dinner or something. We're going to try that here in a couple of weeks.

MD: Yes, we are.

EM: We've had a tea dance here at our place.

JM: What's a tea dance?

EM: That's an afternoon dance. Like a weekend—

JM: Like a tea.

EM: Like a teatime.

JM: I thought that was a special kind of line dance that I didn't know about. (laughs)

EM: Oh, no, no. (laughs) That refers to a time of day; the English teatime is four PM. I guess that's where it came from.

JM: Okay.

EM: When I was first coming out and heard of tea dance, I too gave it an entirely different meaning, because there was the tea rooms, right? That's what they used to call the men's rooms.

JM: The meet-up places?

EM: To meet up with people, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, in men's rooms. And I couldn't imagine this—a tea dance?

JM: (laughs)

EM: So I didn't know what it meant when I first went to one, too. (laughs) And that went over quite well, but it was mostly the women who showed up.

MD: Yeah, well, in fact there were a few men—

EM: There were only a couple of guys besides us who were here, and all the rest were women. We did have quite a crowd. We had a good time. And we could clear out enough stuff here so that there was room to dance.

And we've had a New Year's brunch here, where we've invited front and back. We couldn't have it this year, because we had family visiting us over the holidays—in fact, the last two years, we've had family over the holidays, and couldn't hold it. So, that's why we're having the potluck dinner on Saint Patrick's Day.

JM: Okay, great.

EM: 'Cause we missed our New Year's Day again. So, believe it or not, we can seat about thirty people in here—thirty, thirty-five people in here.

JM: I believe it; you got a nice big patio table.

EM: We borrow a table and chairs—

MD: If the weather is nice we can put the tables outside.

JM: Sounds like you have a good relationship with your neighbors. How would describe it on the whole?

EM: With nearly all the neighbors. We have trouble with one or two of the newer women here. (laughs) But then again there are a lot of women who have trouble with—there are some women—

MD: The older women! (laughs)

EM: The older women have some trouble with some of the newer women who have moved in, so we are not alone. (laughs)

There's—the problems are some people move in and don't realize what being in a condominium really means. And they think they're still free agents to do anything they wish with their land, with the property around. And independent of the community associations and stuff like that. And, that has led to some problems from time to time.

JM: Everybody's supposed to decide together what's allowed?

EM: That's correct. Yep. Yeah, yeah. We have our rules and regs [regulations], and to live in a condo community, you've got to yield some of your independence. And some folks moving in aren't prepared to do that. And that leads to some problems.

We just recently had a case where—I don't know if you've ever heard of [the water management district] thing—and they—okay, they [are] very difficult people to get along with. And we have a number of things on our property which are not up to [their] standards.

JM: Okay.

EM: And we dread the thought of anybody from [the water management district] showing up at this place, because it's probably going to end up costing us money.

JM: So, you try to self-regulate?

EM: To try and to get things—well, we—shall I tell her? Yeah, I think. It's sort of interesting. Yeah, you see that little pile of reeds down there in the middle, the little island of reeds?

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

EM: For the last few years—a few years ago, that whole end was completely blanketed by the tall reeds and blocking the view for anything new that was going to be built down on that end.

MD: There were also some on the front end, too.

EM: Oh yeah, there were actually some up here too. And so it was decided as a community we had to do something about the tall reeds in order to finish off selling places. So we reduced the size to the small little island there, and didn't take it all out because there were some birds nesting in there. We left that bunch there to protect the birds. We've been sort of making sure it doesn't expand, and sort of trimming up the edges of it every year, but we've been keeping it there.

And a couple of the women down here decided that they wanted to see more—they wanted it all left alone and they wanted to see more of the tall reeds and stuff like that. And even though the developer, the builder and the incorporation board and all of us have approved of what we've been doing here the last couple of—just keeping that little island, keeping it trimmed. One of the women, on her own, without asking anybody, called [the water management district].

JM: Oh, no! (laughs)

EM: And told them that, “There some people who want to pull reeds out down here. What are the legal requirements for a pond?”

And they immediately said, “Well, we'll send somebody out to help you and advise you.” And I sort of blew up at the women who made that phone call without checking with anyone. (laughs) And not knowing any of the past history of our relationship with [the water management district].

Anyway, the guy—the person did show up, and it's obvious we're going to have to do something here, and we don't know what yet; we're waiting for a letter to come from them. But it's going to cost money, because we—incidentally, we had approval from [the water management district] to take out all those tall reeds, as long as we did the plantings that you see, the smaller stuff that's around the back there, as long as we did that planting. But it's probably not going to be enough to satisfy them this time, so we are going to have to wait and see. It's going to cost us money.

JM: Good luck with that.

EM: We were scared to death that they were going to see some of the other things that are on our property that are not up to [the water management district's] specifications, but they ignored it, thank God. Because it's many, many thousands of dollars to bring everything up to the standards that [the water management district] has set.

Well, anyway, that's one of the little problems that you get into when people are determined to have their way no matter what the community's saying, and it can cost us money—which it did this time. So that's where the problems are, I think. If there are any real problems to community, it's people wanting their way regardless of what the

community says. Otherwise, the community works very well. It really does. Socially, we all tend to get along and lots of parties.

JM: Can you tell me about some of the parties you have here? I've heard about a few already.

EM: We've had block parties; we've had our annual regatta, (laughs) where we get these little powered boats and have an afternoon of trying to race boats that are all on the same frequency. It doesn't work at all, but we all have a lot of fun out there. We've done that for a couple years now. And we're going to be racing some mini racers up at the other end, at the dead end street there.

JM: You got a lot of toys here. (laughs)

EM: That's coming up—when? That's not—it's coming up pretty soon. I think in April.

MD: I think in April.

EM: Yeah, in April.

MD: I'm on the social committee.

EM: And we have—December is a terrible time around here because there's always some kind of open house or cocktail hour or potluck dinner or something going on. Four, five, six of those in December! December's already a busy month without all this stuff going on here. And there are smaller, more intimate dinner parties, like we had the other night.

MD: We go out for dinner once in a while.

EM: That's right. We used to go out once a month.

JM: Pretty regular, on the same day each month or something?

EM: Not necessarily. Whatever day we could agree on at that month's meeting. We haven't been doing that too much lately. The last one we had was down at the Dutch—the Pennsylvania Dutch cook place down there. It was very nice and well-attended.

MD: But we are a retirement community, and so things are pretty calm. We don't have wild things going on! (laughs)

JM: I don't believe you; I was at that party Saturday, so I know. (laughs)

MD: (laughs) Not very.

EM: (laughs) One thing we missed so far and haven't been able to get organized is a poker game. We'd love to play penny ante; we don't play—

JM: High stakes?

EM: —for high stakes. The fun is in winning; it doesn't matter how much you are winning. And we sort of miss a regular poker night.

We do play bridge with a couple of our neighbors just down the road. There aren't too many people here who play bridge here, which I find sort of strange. This is sort of a generation that grew up when bridge was a pretty big thing everywhere, I thought, but there just aren't that many in the community. But we do play with two women down there—who are very close to being our closest friends here, actually. (...).

MD: Yeah.

EM: We go to concerts with them. They join us at the local symphony's concert nights.

JM: Do you play, or do you just attend the concerts?

EM: Pardon?

JM: You attend the concerts, or do you play an instrument?

EM: Oh, gosh, we attend them, everything.

MD: No, we don't play.

EM: We don't play, that's right. Evelyn and—

MD: Carme do.

JM: She told me they—you know—

MD: A number of people here are at the choir at our church.

EM: Yeah, Evelyn's in the choir. I've been in the choir for years.

MD: Rebecca is in the choir.

EM: (...) is in the choir. We never talked much about what we do socially around here. In addition to the Prime Timers, we've got all the stuff at church, and then we go to two different concert series, the one in [nearby location] and the local one here. We go to the opera down in [nearby location], the opera season; we just went to opera yesterday. Very nice opera.

JM: So you're pretty happy with what the area has to offer?

EM: Oh, yeah! We can't believe it!

MD: And we go to plays in (inaudible), and we go to plays at the local theater here.

EM: There used to be a nice gay establishment. Uh, what would you call it?

MD: The (...).

EM: Yeah, it was called the (...), just over the bridge in [nearby location]. And for the first four years that we were here it was about a fifteen-minute ride to go to this place that had a theater—the Gypsy Theater was there—and they did productions for the gay community. This was like a complex of motels and a restaurant.

JM: I hadn't heard about this.

EM: Yeah, and all this sort of stuff at the (...). And, it was wonderful. Unfortunately, last year they sold out to Home Depot⁵.

JM: Oh, that's awful!

EM: And they have not reestablished themselves anywhere, and certainly not within fifteen-minutes of us. It's terrible; we loved having it there!

MD: The theater group is now in Tampa. Tampa is just too far away for evening events as far as we're concerned.

EM: But this was (...) away; it was just wonderful. We're so sad to see it go. This is the time of year where we are busiest. Because not only are all the snowbirds down so that the church is busy as hell, but we have all the plays, all the concerts, all the operas—everything is trying to cram it all in to catch the snowbirds, and so there's something going on all the time.

We thought when we moved we were really going to miss the cultural stuff from the Baltimore/Washington area. We lived about a half hour from either downtown—

JM: Yeah, that's where the action is.

EM: —as long as it wasn't rush hour—where we lived up there in Laurel, Maryland, and so we had the best of both communities. Very different cities, Baltimore and Washington. So we went to opera up there and the orchestras and plays and stuff up there. We thought we were going to miss a lot of that when we came down here, but not really. You're familiar with Ringling, of course, from school?

JM: The Ringling? The circus?

EM: Well, the whole Ringling Museum complex, [nearby location].

⁵ Home Depot is a national retailer of home improvement and construction products and services.

JM: Oh, yes. Yeah, okay.

MD: No, that's—she's up at [nearby location].

EM: Oh, that's right; you're not down in South Florida here.

JM: Yeah, there's so many different campuses.

EM: Yeah, right, right, right. Well, anyway, that is marvelous; it is—their art museum is one of the best ones in the country. And the mansion is there, the circus museum is there, and they have three different theaters in that complex. It's got marvelous gardens. It is just a gem. It's one of the great attractions in Florida. It's a beautiful—and you can join it for seventy-five dollars a year for a family, and you get all sorts of benefits from that membership.

First recording ends; second recording begins.

JM: I was wondering how you decide who gets to live here. You have rules about—I mean, is there like a way that you're able to keep it mostly gay and lesbian people here, or is it—

EM: You mean here?

JM: 'Cause you do have a rule that—yeah, in the community—do you have a rule that people can't move in, cause you do have a—?

EM: You cannot say only gay and lesbian people can live here. We do have a straight couple just up here, a short ways, (...). And we had another one who bought a place down there—that's now in foreclosure unfortunately—and lived with us for about two years, and seemed to fit in the community very well. But the house was too small, so they eventually found something more to their liking as far as space went. And unfortunately their house has been sitting there for two years and is now in foreclosure. But there was no problem with them adjusting to the gay community. Both couples attended our parties, do things with the rest of the community.

JM: And is this—

EM: And by Florida law you can't exclude straight folks. If they can accept the community, the community's bound to accept them.

JM: Okay. So, you don't think anybody sort of thought they shouldn't live here, or do you think that it was okay that they moved in?

EM: I didn't hear that last—?

JM: Do you think—I just said do you think it was—everybody sort of thought it was okay that they moved here, or do you think some people wish maybe it was all gay and lesbian couples?

EM: Well, I think if it suddenly became half straight, I think there would be a number of folks who would be unhappy. (laughs) But, it doesn't look like that's ever going to happen, so—

JM: So, maybe, it sounds like you're saying maybe it's more about being the majority and that sort of thing?

EM: Yeah.

MD: Probably so, yeah.

EM: So, I can't think of much else. Any more questions?

JM: Um—

EM: You gotta have some more!

JM: A couple more. (laughs) You covered most of the things I was going to ask, and I didn't get to ask them. So, I guess I was wondering—if this place didn't exist, where might you be living instead?

EM: Oh boy. Uh— Well, now that we know there are other gay communities, we probably—given our experience of visiting—I don't know how many retirement communities we've visited, I bet it was a dozen or more, probably more than a dozen—we didn't really feel comfortable in any of them. So, we probably would have picked another gay retirement community somewhere, even if we had to go way out west to do it. And they're much more expensive, by the way.

JM: Yeah. Do you think you would have had to live differently if this place wasn't available? If you ended up living in a different community, do you think you would have had to have been more closeted, like you said some of your friends were? Or, do you think you would have just, you know, been yourself—

MD: I'd say not so much closeted, but we wouldn't feel as comfortable being out.

JM: Right.

EM: Yeah, we almost—we came very close to signing up at (...) over there in [nearby location]. We were down there—we came down solely to complete the deal when we came down that time. And partway through the night, decided that, adding up our total experience of who we been exposed to there, that we just wouldn't feel that comfortable. We loved the place; they had all the amenities were there already. And, they had extended long term care—course, you had to pay extra for that, but they had it.

JM: That's not something that you have here, right?

MD: No.

EM: No, but we're trying to form an organization to work formally—in fact, we do have a corporation actually has been formed. Non-profit corporation—God, what do we call it? I can't think of the name of it right now—to look for monies to develop keep-them-in-the-home type care. And we were going to have a separate facility at one point, and then decided it would be very difficult to support such a facility with the size of this complex. There are only going to be about fifty-three units here when it's totally done, between front and back.

MD: No, it's going to be more than that, isn't it?

EM: No, about fifty-three. Twenty-one and thirty-two: fifty-three.

MD: Oh, right.

JM: Are they still building now?

EM: Pardon?

JM: Are they still building right now?

MD: Oh yeah, they're building. That's what that junk is up there. They're building as soon as they can sell. They've got to sell—two more units are available up there and ready for somebody to move in. They've got to sell them before the bank will give them money to complete the other one that's sitting out there. And then there are two more buildings to go up over here, and eventually two very large triplexes on the other side of the road. In all, there will be fifty-three units back here—excuse me, thirty-two units back here, twenty-one up front. So, it will be fifty-three.

Sounds like a lot, but to support something like a separate care facility—

JM: These other places are all huge.

MD: —you would have to go outside the community. And no one was too happy at that thought. But they really jumped on the idea—a lot of communities are going to this idea of trying to keep people in the homes as long as possible and provide the care for people who can't care for themselves in their own home. And, that's the route they decided to go here. And I think it's filling.

We almost have that already, though, because people really look out for each other here. It's just amazing.

JM: Yeah?

MD: Help shows up when you really need it here.

JM: Has that been the case for you guys?

EM: Well, we have not needed it too much. Max was probably hospitalized for quite a while a year and a half ago—two years ago. He had to have a valve replaced, and then they developed a big infection about six months after it all and it had to be redone, but we didn't really need a lot of help at that time but people were helpful.

MD: No, we—

EM: But I pretty much took care of Max.

MD: Yeah.

EM: He didn't approve of my cooking too much. (laughs)

MD: Are you kidding? I thought that was great! (laughs) I didn't have to cook! Well, I have three daughters too, and they all came up—

EM: From time to time, especially right after he got back from rehab; they came up for a week or so.

MD: Two of them were helpful. (laughs) One of them is just another bird! (laughs) They're all very different.

EM: Max's three daughters are so different from each other; it's hard to believe it's the same family. But I tell you, my son and my daughter were—you wouldn't believe they were from the same family, either, when they were growing up. Just very, very different from each other. And unfortunately, my daughter got killed. Beautiful, wonderful girl.

MD: My daughter wasn't as helpful as her over-helpful husband. He does really try.

EM: But, he's a little too helpful sometimes! (laughs) He gets out in the kitchen, and you can't find anything! (laughs) But he's a wonderful teddy bear, really.

JM: So, what are your plans for the future? Do you think you'll be staying here? Are you pretty set, or do you think about moving other places?

MD: No, no, no.

EM: We're not moving. They're going to carry us out. (laughs) That experience of moving out of that house after thirty-five years in Maryland was—you cannot believe. I had all—I already had a clogged house when he moved in, because one of my lovers had left a lot of stuff. And he moved in, and he had a half a household that he tried to bring along, in addition to it, and I had thirty-five years of accumulation.

MD: Oh, my God.

EM: It was horrible. I don't know—it's so easy to keep accumulating stuff!

JM: I hear it! (laughs)

EM: We've already gotten to the point where we need to do something around here, because we're really hanging onto a lot of stuff we don't need at this point.

MD: We like the knicky-knacks and the stuff that we pick up on our travels and stuff, and that doesn't take up an awful lot of space. But books—

JM: You've got stuff that looks African, maybe Asian, too?

EM: Well, that we actually picked up down in the Caribbean, just the last cruise we were on, in January.

JM: Oh, okay. Nice.

EM: We love that. That's from Aruba.

JM: Oh, I went there!

EM: Uh-huh. And we loved her. It's just a tourist-type memento, but very graceful.

MD: Yeah, one of my son-in-laws—he makes those wooden things. (laughs) So we get those as gifts.

JM: Are those mushrooms?

MD: Yes.

JM: (laughs)

EM: And he makes—he is taken to making odd things and woodworking for a living right now. He was a furniture refinisher, and a very good one; had his own business for many years. But he could never—apparently, according to his wife, was not much of a businessman.

MD: No, he wasn't.

EM: He did wonderful work.

MD: So I paint, too. That's another thing.

EM: Yeah, we got a pile of paintings around here. Those are Max's paintings, those two are Max's paintings, the one in the kitchen is his painting.

JM: This one I thought you must have gotten in Aruba, too. Is this one of yours?

MD: No, no, I did that years ago.

JM: Wow. These are great. I couldn't tell—I mean, if I painted something to put on the wall, you would know it wasn't a real painting! (laughs)

EM: (laughs)

MD: (laughs)

JM: Is there anything I haven't asked about or mentioned that you'd like to talk about?

EM: I don't think so, except that—I'm sort of unique in the gay community because I grew up from age twelve, all through my teens, having sex with guys and never thinking there was anything wrong with it. And I never developed the deep-seated guilt that an awful lot of gay people have had to overcome.

The guys I had sex with—we were all doing it. I just thought that this was what guys did, and you found the right woman and (laughs) you know—everything would settle down. Well, as far as I know almost all of us got married. Any of those that I've had sex with that I still know about—all of us got married and had kids.

But, when it came time for me to come out—when I finally admitted that I really was a gay person, I didn't have a lot of that background of guilt—

JM: That's nice.

EM: —because when I was having that stuff with guys, I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. (laughs) Yeah, I knew you didn't run out and publish the fact, you know. But I never had that feeling.

I was always surprised in going to—I helped form the Gay Fathers Coalition here, and also was instrumental in the Gay Married Men's Association that they had in the Washington, D.C. area. And I was always surprised at the amount of guilt that was still in a lot of these guys that were married and feeling they had done wrong and they were guilty of great wrongs and stuff like that. That was surprising, and I never did have that.

But, I did have the urge to have family. That was instilled in me when I was a kid. You just got married, and you had a family. So, I might like sex with guys but you got married and had a family! (laughs) So that's where I was, and I suspect a lot of those other guys I had sex with in my teens were in the same boat, some of them. Some of them had to be gay—I know that now.

Didn't know anything about a gay community, though, during those—didn't know anything about that.

JM: It sounds like you made it up yourself, you know; you got all those organizations together. You mean—you're talking about when you were growing up.

EM: When I was growing up, yeah. I didn't know anything about a gay community. My first exposure to something called a gay community was a movie, *Advise and Consent*⁶.

JM: I don't know that one.

EM: When the senator went down—there was a senator being blackmailed over an affair he had had when he was in the Army. And he went to find the guy who was trying to blackmail him and he went into a gay bar in New York City. And it was—just sort of a very unattractive atmosphere. It was about as unattractive as you can make a gay bar look, and they can be pretty unattractive. And that was my whole experience of what they called a gay community.

So, I was not in any hurry to go join the gay community! And it took a while for me, when I finally realized it was okay to be who I was. It took a while for me to really work into the gay community and become comfortable in a gay bar. In fact, I still don't really care for the bars all that much.

Well—I can't think of anything else.

JM: Okay. Do you have any questions for me?

MD: No.

JM: No?

EM: No. How long is it going to be before you have this project completed?

JM: All done? Well, I'll be writing the paper for the class, and that's due in April, so I'll have that done at least by April. But to get all the final transcripts just right and all that, it might be a couple of months. If I can—if people here are interested, I'd like to do this for my master's thesis, and that would take, you know, up to a year. So, I'd just be—if people wanted to invite me to their party or something, I'd love to be involved.

EM: So, this is the research project for a course you're doing?

JM: It's for a course, but I'd like to develop it into my thesis.

EM: Into a master's thesis.

⁶ Based on the novel of the same name by Allen Drury, this movie was released in 1962.

JM: Yeah. It's sort of—I wanted to come and see how receptive people were, and then if people seemed like they were enjoying [being] interviewed and that sort of thing, then maybe go from there, doing more—maybe have a focus group and maybe do something like that. So it just depends on what people really want to do. But I'd love to make this my thesis, and I'm treating it as such, you know, and it would definitely—

EM: Mm-hm. Well, that sounds like a great project. They require a thesis for your master's here?

JM: Mm-hm. Well, I think there's other options, but I hope to go on to a doctorate program, so—

EM: Oh. I got a master's without a thesis, but I sure did have to write a term paper for one professor—

JM: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah.

EM: —which was basically a thesis. But there wasn't a formal one required. That was a long time ago now, too; that was seventy [1970].

Well, I think it's my turn. (laughs)

EM: We're both (inaudible).

JM: And I need to go after you! (laughs) Too much coffee.

EM: There's one down there.

JM: Okay, thanks. So I think we've wrapped up, but just to make sure—is there anything I haven't mentioned that you want to talk about?

MD: No. I guess the only thing I think about sometimes is if I had known about acting upon my gayness when I was young, I wonder what would have happened. (laughs) I feel so lucky that I sort of survived all of the stuff that I did. (laughs) I'm very happy that I was able to have a family and things like that, and I just don't know what would have happened if I would've known and acted on this when I was young. You know, like a lot of people do now. This is a different world. It's really changed a lot in the last forty, fifty years, I think.

JM: I think that there's also more options, too, available for people.

MD: There are. There are. But there's still an awful lot of problems that go along with those options.

JM: Right. (...)

MD: There's not much acceptance in many areas yet.

JM: Yeah, definitely location is important. (...)

MD: Oh, you can. There's no question, I think people can do that. And it's become, I think, much easier to live a whole life now, because you were so divided between your sexual needs and the other parts of your life. But it's tough, there's no question about that.

EM: We're very fortunate, in that the churches that we've been in, the Unitarian Universalist churches have been very supportive of the gay communities. It's just been nice. We've got two communities in which we can be totally ourselves.

JM: That's good. Does one of those communities, you think, play a bigger role—like, is it maybe more important to have a neighborhood or more important to have the church, or is that both together?

EM: I would say almost equally, as far as we're concerned.

MD: Yeah.

EM: The church is certainly different from the community here, but it's just as accepting, and of course we can do more things through the church in terms of reaching out to social action type stuff than we can with just this community. So, it's nice to be associated with something like the U.U. church.

MD: And also, I've always felt that I wanted to be associated with other than just the gay community. I always had strong feelings for helping social justice type things, and the church does give me that possibility of working in that stuff, as well.

EM: We—I have never been comfortable with a good portion of the gay community because they are so busy being gay! (laughs) And in all the gay organizations I belonged to, they were always a cadre there that was busy being gay and being up on all the movie stars and all the latest fashions and stuff like that.

MD: You couldn't have a conversation with them, because they had to make some gay joke out of it! (laughs) Everything you said! (laughs)

EM: (laughs) So, we've had something of a problem with that. The Gay People of Laurel, which I helped put together initially—went on for twenty-some years, twenty-five years—it was about half of that community was sort of like that.

MD: Yeah, right!

EM: Very busy being into all the stuff gay people are supposed to be into. We found it boring, that's all. I mean—that's fine, if that was good for them, that was okay. It's just that it was boring for us.

JM: How do you think this neighborhood compares to that sort of idea?

EM: This neighborhood is a lot less like that.

JM: Yeah.

EM: Although the women sometimes tend to—into things lesbian. They do tend to get a little more of that, I think.

JM: You mean just in terms of like T.V. shows, or—?

EM: But the men don't seem to be into that sort of thing at all here. And the women only to a small extent. But I can see it from time to time.

MD: Yeah, I guess. There aren't any gay men here—I don't think that I ever thought [them] of as being the sort of the gay—what's the word I'm going to use?—the one that people think of being as typically gay.

EM: Stereotype.

MD: The stereotype. There aren't. There just aren't.

EM: Yeah, I tend to agree with you. I don't know any of them.

MD: But if you go down to Washington, D.C., you'll find all kinds of them! Especially if you go to the bars. (laughs)

JM: Does it feel a little bit more comfortable this way? That it's not so—maybe pronounced?

MD: It's more comfortable for us, for sure. At least for me.

EM: It might be just age, though.

MD: It might be.

EM: I honestly don't know who among the guys would have been like that twenty years ago. I don't know.

MD: (...) might have! (laughs)

EM: (...) ? Which—?

JM: Nobody (inaudible) (...).

MD: (...).

EM: Oh. Oh—well, you may be right. You may be right.

MD: He's very, very liberal politically, so he's pretty interested in the political stuff. Stereotypes tend to almost ignore political stuff. (laughs)

EM: (...) might have been like that when he was younger. I don't think—I don't know—

MD: On the opposite end, because he was very conservative in some ways. (laughs)

EM: Yeah, there aren't too many Republicans here. There are probably a couple. And they don't say much! (laughs)

JM: They're closeted Republicans.

EM: It's like our church: if you're Republican, you don't ever state that openly in the U.U. church (laughs) which is sort of a shame, since we're supposed to be all inclusive of all political viewpoints and religious viewpoints and stuff like that. But I don't know of any Republicans, except maybe—

JM: Do you mind if I take my bathroom break? I'm sorry. (laughs)

EM: Please do!

MD: What time is your appointment?

EM: It's right up there.

JM: Okay, I'm sorry.

MD: What time is your appointment?

EM: Three fifteen.

MD: Oh. (murmurs something to himself)

EM: I don't have anything to do to get ready for it, except write down (inaudible). I mean, that's what I'm on.

(clocks chime)

MD: Sounds like (...) and (...) might have been in that category, too. Especially (...).

EM: (...)?

MD: When he was talking the other night. (laughs)

EM: I would have thought it much more of (...).

MD: Maybe.

EM: Boy, they fascinate me as a couple. They're a very accomplished pair of people.

MD: Oh, yes.

JM: So sorry. (laughs)

EM: That's all right.

JM: That isn't protocol, but the coffee was— (laughs) Where were we?

EM: Just talking.

MD: (laughs) Did you meet (...) and (...)?

JM: Yes. (...) was the guy with the red hat, right?

EM: Did they volunteer?

JM: They did. I think—

EM: Oh, that's good.

JM: I think we're talking—no, we don't have anything set up. I e-mailed (...).

MD: That's good because, they're almost a generation away from us in some ways. Much different.

EM: He's going to be seventy-nine soon, I'm going to be seventy-four, so we're getting there. We've got a lot of folks who are twenty years younger than us now.

JM: Is that a pretty good mix though, having a whole spectrum of everybody here?

EM: I think so. It's nice to have older guys like us around, but it's also nice to have somebody who can crawl upstairs in the attic. That's not for us! (laughs) We decorate for Christmas like you wouldn't believe here.

JM: Does everybody do that? Lights?

EM: No, there are only a couple places that really decorate a lot. And I decorate more than most. I've always been that way, since I've been a kid. I love to decorate at Christmas. But we've got all that stuff, and the attic is full—it's all Christmas stuff. It's getting to the point now where we do need help to get it in and out of the attic.

JM: Well, if I'm around writing my thesis, let me know and I can crawl around in your attic.

EM: (laughs)

MD: Actually we've got a young guy from church who's quite willing to do it. He's very nice.

EM: Yeah, he's quite willing to hire himself out as a handyman. He feels a little bad about accepting money from us, but we know he needs money. He's a student studying finance. He's going to be a financial advisor when he graduates. He can start with us!

MD: (laughs)

JM: All right.

end of interview