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Northampton, MA

SUE HYDE

Interviewed by

ELLEN FITZGERALD

November 23, 2008
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Narrator

Sue Hyde (b. 1952) is an activist, author, and community leader. Hyde grew up in the small town of Beardstown, Illinois, and, after graduating from Beardstown High School in 1970, attended several colleges while working toward her Bachelor's degree. In 1974, Hyde co-founded Red Tomato, a production company that for eight years produced cultural events for women and lesbians in St. Louis, Missouri. Hyde relocated to Boston, Massachusetts in 1983 and became the editor of the *Gay Community News*, a position which she held for the next two years. In 1985, Hyde and others founded the Gay and Lesbian Defense Committee in response to Governor Michael Dukakis' policy on foster care placements that banned same-sex couples from consideration. Hyde was hired by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 1986, and has worked for the organization since that time. Since 1994, Hyde has directed the Task Force's annual Creating Change Conference, which brings together LGBT activists from around the country for collaboration and skill-building workshops. Hyde was a leader during the struggle to secure marriage rights for same-sex couples in Massachusetts, and has worked with several organizations including the Freedom to Marry Coalition and MassEquality. Hyde is the author of the book *Come Out and Win: Organizing Yourself, Your Community, and Your World*, a handbook for LGBT people and their allies. In 2002, Hyde received the Stonewall Award, which honored her for a lifetime of service to the LGBT political movement. Hyde lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her wife and their two teenage children.

Interviewer

Ellen Fitzgerald (b. 1986) is an undergraduate at Smith College, where she is an American Studies major focusing on women and feminism in United States history.

Abstract

In this oral history, Sue Hyde describes her childhood in the small town of Beardstown, Illinois, and her first experiences with activism as a student at Webster College in the early 1970s. The interview covers Hyde's experiences as a feminist and queer activist in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1970s and early 1980s, and Hyde describes her experience as a participant in the first Gay Olympics (now called the Gay Games) in 1982. The second half of the interview focuses on Hyde's work with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, including her first project which worked to repeal sodomy laws in the states where they existed, her role as director of the Creating Change Conference, and the practical tools with which she and the Task Force work to equip members of the LGBT movement. Hyde describes the direction in which she feels that the LGBT movement needs to go, the efforts that went into the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, and speaks about her experience as a resident of Massachusetts, where she has had the opportunity to marry her wife and enjoy legal protection that LGBT residents of other states do not have. This interview chronicles the several decades of work that Hyde has devoted to the LGBT movement, and illustrates the hope and determination that Hyde brings to the movement for full acceptance and legal protection for LGBT citizens.

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder. Three 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed and edited for clarity by Ellen Fitzgerald.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Hyde, Sue. Interview by Ellen Fitzgerald. Video recording, November 23, 2008. Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Sue Hyde interview by Ellen Fitzgerald, video recording, November 23, 2008, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Hyde, Sue. Interview by Ellen Fitzgerald. Transcript of video recording, November 23, 2008. Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Sue Hyde, interview by Ellen Fitzgerald, transcript of video recording, November 23, 2008, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 11-12.

Transcript of interview conducted November 23, 2008, with:

SUE HYDE
Cambridge, Massachusetts

by: ELLEN FITZGERALD

FITZGERALD: So today is Sunday, November 23, 2008. My name is Ellen Fitzgerald, I'm a student in Kelly Anderson's Oral History class at Smith College. I'm interviewing Sue Hyde at her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

So, let's begin by talking about your childhood. Um, could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up, and what it was like to grow up there?

HYDE: I was born in a small town in Illinois called Beardstown, Illinois. My, uh, family was comprised of my mother, my father, five brothers, and one sister. I am the fifth child of seven in our family. And our- our town—our hometown—is a farm town situated on the Illinois river. It's about 100 miles north of St. Louis, Missouri and about 250 miles south and a little bit west of Chicago, 45 miles west of the state capital of Springfield. So it's- it's in a little bit of a quiet, rural area. I always thought of it as relatively isolated. And, uh, one of the saving graces of my upbringing, I believe, is that my parents were not from the town where I grew up, so rather than being steeped in a kind of xenophobia that definitely is- has been expressed in this community over the years, um, my parents, uh, went there after World War II looking for a place to settle down and raise a family, but they came from Chicago. And had been- both of them had served in World War II and I think brought to our family conversations a kind of world view that was a little unusual in the town where we lived. My parents subscribed to four daily newspapers, um only one of them from the town where- where we lived, and many, many magazines. So I grew up reading publications like the New Yorker, uh, TIME and Newsweek, The Chicago Tribune, The Chicago Daily News, among other publications, so I- I very much had a, had an idea that there was a big world out there beyond our little town, and planned to participate in it and- and get involved and go there.

FITZGERALD: So what was it like, um, sort of being physically in this small town, but also knowing about the rest of this world. How did that sort of um influence your childhood, if it did?

HYDE: Well, the population of Beardstown, Illinois was then, and I believe still is, about 6,000 people. And I grew up with, um, a feeling of great safety and security, for example I spent almost every day—every summer day—of my childhood at our local swimming pool. Um, I got there on my bicycle, rode my bicycle home with really never a thought

about whether that was wise, or a safe thing to do, it's, it's how, it's how the community related to its own space and its own self. And, um, I had a great deal of freedom as a child, more freedom actually I think than my children have growing up in the metropolitan area of Boston. And I think that uh the- that the combination of freedom and safety and security with the notion that there was a big world out there to participate in gave me, and I think all my siblings, a sense of confidence and um self-determination, having determined much of the course of our childhoods, um I think there was no reason for us not to just go right ahead and do it as we became young adults and adults.

FITZGERALD: Mm hmm. So as a family did you talk about things that were going on in the world or um—you know national events, or any type of, you know, anything that was going on in the world. Did you talk about that kind of stuff as a family?

HYDE: Very much. When I was, um, when I was in grade school, there were a um number of very important events going on in relation to the Civil Rights movement, and I remember seeing in the newspapers that came to our house every day—in the news magazines—a lot of, a lot of, uh, information, photographs, articles, editorials, about the black civil rights movement and the impact that it was having uh all across the country. Uh we talked about certainly that, um, that dynamic and that phenomenon in politics and society when I was young. As the war in Vietnam became more significant and more important and much more a source of tension and conflict politically, we certainly talked about that.

My parents were, um, straight-ticket Republican voters, although they would not really recognize, um probably, Republicans these days. It was a different kind of Republicanism in post World War II, uh in the '50s and in the '60s. And although they were straight-ticket Republican voters, I found that they were relatively open-minded about, um, issues such as racial equality, what- what should we be doing in Vietnam, um what should the course of that public policy debate really be. They and I didn't necessarily agree on much politically, but the conversations were very mind opening.

FITZGERALD: So what was your relationship with your parents like? You said you didn't necessarily agree on much, but how would you characterize your relationship with them, when you were growing up?

HYDE: Well, my parents were of a generation that I would describe as, um, kind of parenting by formula almost. I don't mean formula that babies drink either. I mean, I mean they had an idea about how parents and children related, and that's how they related. So they were certainly, uh, giving guidance, they were certainly, um, being disciplinarians—I don't mean harsh or corporal punishment—but they were certainly trying to keep us all on a path to constructive citizenship. Uh, but they were not, as parents tend to be these days, they were not our best friends

or our best buddies. There was definitely a boundary between them and us that was very clearly marked. Um, it's not how I have chosen to raise my children but it's—you know, it worked. It worked for them, and in some ways it also worked for us

FITZGERALD: Different times, different, different formulas—

HYDE: Exactly. That's right, that's right. Different times, different ideas about parenting.

FITZGERALD: And were they, did they know about, or were they encouraging of, sort of your desire to, you know, not stay in this small town, to experience the world that you were, um, able to read and talk about as a family?

HYDE: Uh, I never felt any- anything except encouragement to, um, grow up, graduate from high school, go away to college, and settle myself somewhere besides the town where, where I had grown up. It never even came up, the possibility of settling in the town where we lived, was never raised.

FITZGERALD: Just wasn't a—

HYDE: It just wasn't happening (laughs). And in fact, none of my siblings live there.

FITZGERALD: Okay. What was your relationship with your siblings, kind of as you were growing up?

HYDE: I had a lot of them. Six of them. My sister—I have one sister—and she's the oldest in the family, so it was uh my sister, and then three brothers, then myself, and then two brothers. So, um, my sister was the oldest of the older kids and I was the oldest of the younger kids. And it was um, there was a clear demarcation between the older kids and the younger kids. I was um, you know, close, close at times with some of my brothers. I'm much closer with all of them now than I was when I was growing up. And my closest relationship was, and still is, with my sister. Um, we were, you know, siblings, friendly rivals, you know, sometimes obnoxious to each other, sometimes very supportive of each other, depending on our moods and what was happening (laughs).

FITZGERALD: So it sounds like a pretty typical sort of family experience.

HYDE: It was- I think it was a very typical family experience. Now, I was, um, from an early age gender non-conforming in the sense I was a tomboy, pretty, pretty defiant about defining my own gender not in terms of traditional expectations of girls and women. And that was sometimes a little bit of conflict with some of my brothers who were, especially when they were teenagers, maybe a little embarrassed of me. Um, you

know—why didn't I look like other girls, why couldn't I behave more like a real girl. But as, you know, we all got older that became less and less of an issue.

FITZGERALD: And was that an issue just within the town where you grew up at all—what was it like to, um, as you described, be sort of gender non-conforming from a young age in this small town where you grew up?

HYDE: Well you know, um, until girls were about thirteen– until adolescence really took hold of girls, there was a lot of room for girls to define ourselves, to participate in sports and rough and tumble play—or not, depending on, you know, who we were and what we wanted to do. It was at adolescence—um, seventh, eighth, ninth grade—where it became much more discouraged, frowned upon, disapproved of not just by adults, uh, but also by peers. So, it- it was, you know, it was great fun and kind of a mark of independence when I was a child. And then as I became a young adult and high school student it was, um, much more of a point of, um, teasing or disapproval. I don't ever remember being bullied, uh, but I certainly felt outside of a - of a social - social forms and, um, traditional social relationships that actually didn't interest me much.

FITZGERALD: So did that– did those experience go on to inform your activism in any way? Or were you, how should I put this, vocal about it? Or was it just sort of, you were quietly just kind of being yourself through high school? Does that make sense?

HYDE: Uh, I was not quiet. (laughs)

FITZGERALD: Okay, okay.

HYDE: Uh, from– I mean, I remember, um, in grade school thinking about how differently girls and boys were treated, thinking about how different the expectations were of girls and boys, and feeling, um, not- not willing to go along with that. Part of that was, you know, being- being a tomboy, but, um, I think other aspects of that had to do with lower expectations of girls' intellectual achievement and output, um, the expectation that girls were not really going to be leaders—leaders in the school or leaders in the community—the expectation that girls were prob- most, most of the girls in my town were going to, um, graduate from high school, get married to a boy they knew in high school, and um have children, raise a family, and that would be a life's work. So I was clearly not headed towards that kind of life, and um, my family's expectation was that I was going to go to college, I was going to, you know, have some kind of professional life, um, if I did choose to get married or have children that that would happen, but that was not necessarily, um, a forgone conclusion. Um, so I had a lot awareness early on that I was probably not going to live the kind of life that most

of my peers were. And then as I became aware of, um, being a lesbian and being attracted to women—girls, women—um as I got older, then it was really obvious to me I was really not going to have that life at all (laughs).

FITZGERALD: Mm hmm, yeah.

HYDE: I was headed in a completely different direction! Now, I was not- I wasn't really out as a lesbian in high school, although I had self awareness of an attraction to girls and women when I was in about the eighth grade, but living in such a small town, it was tough to really uh- it was tough to be out because there wasn't anything to be out into, so to speak. There was no um- there was no community, there were no other out lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people who lived in the town where I grew up, so it was, um, it took me a while to find that, and I didn't find it until I left. But at the same time, I was also politically aware of the various civil rights movements, um, for black Americans, and for other people of color, for women, uh, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in this country. I had political awareness, I read about it, I knew about it, um, and I remember- I remember the day I read about the Stonewall Riots in July, 1969 in TIME magazine. Um, which was a startling, a startling piece of information to me, that- that queer people had actually risen up against the police who were conducting a very routine raid on the Stonewall Inn that night in Greenwich Village. Um, it was um eye-opening to me that- that queer people had acted on their own behalf and in, um, in collaboration and coordination with each another, acting to resist this oppression. Um, and I spoke with other people, I spoke with friends about it. And I'm not sure if they were surprised that I- I doubt that they were surprised that I was talking about it because I talked about feminism, I talked about women's issues, I talked about the war in Vietnam, I talked about the need for employment—um, fairness in employment, fairness in housing, fairness in public accommodations for black people and people of color, so I think maybe they thought, Well, you know here she is again, just kind of, you know, read something in some one of these magazines, and now is going to be talking about gay people—

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: just like she talks about everything else. But, um, I was not the least bit quiet about my political views, and nor was I quiet about what I thought was, um, a clear social and systemic kind of, uh, discrimination and bias against girls and women.

FITZGERALD: So, um, all these experiences you were having as a kid, and it sounds like you were very politically aware, really understanding of really what was going on not just in your small town but in the world around you. Um, you went to college. Could you tell me about where you went to

college, and kind of what that was like for you to take a step beyond the small town that you had known until that time?

HYDE: I graduated from Beardstown High School in 1970. Uh, and that fall, the fall of 1970, I entered as a freshman at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Uh, a funny little town of Normal. But only- only stayed in school for one year. Um, it actually took me eleven years to graduate from college. So I had a pattern of attending for a year, taking a couple years out, attending for a year, taking a couple of years out, until I finally finished, um, finished up my requirements uh and got enough credits to get a Bachelor's degree in 1981.

FITZGERALD: Okay.

HYDE: So I was, you know, I was in and out, um, in part because I just- There- there wasn't anything in the the college undergraduate curriculum that really grabbed me. And, um, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do—what I wanted to be, when I grew up, and so I had kind of low motivation to stay in school. Uh, and also I was very interested in life outside of school. So when I- when I left Illinois State University after one year, I, for the next year, I lived in a, um, a collective—men and women, in this house in the country, uh that was, it was a farm house, and actually a couple of the people in the house worked on the farm where it was situated and others of us did other things. But I had a great, uh, curiosity about how about how other people chose to live- live life, and I wasn't finding that very satisfied as a freshman at Illinois State University. And um so I- I was, I still knew I was a lesbian, but, um, still yet had not really encountered an LGBT community in Normal, Illinois or in Bloomington, Illinois, although I was getting closer because I was hanging out with a lot of women who were feminists, some of whom were lesbians, or would be within the next couple of years. Um, so the kind of, um, alternative or counter-cultural community that I sought was getting more with- it was more within my grasp um, both when I was a freshman in college and for the next two years when I had stopped out.

In, um, the fall of 1973, I entered Webster College as a sophomore. Webster College is in Webster Groves, Missouri, um, and it was a women's school- a women's college, um a Catholic women's college actually, and had gone co-ed and secular I think in about '68 or '69, so it was relatively new as a co-ed, secular institution. And it was at Webster College that I, um, finally found myself in the midst of a very vibrant and very exciting lesbian community. Um, when uh in- in fact I was very involved with the Webster College Women's Union, um, which was a hotbed of- of lesbian activism. We organized in the spring of 1974, uh what we called the Women's Art Fair, a week- a weekend-long festival of women in the arts. Uh, and although we didn't intend this to be the case, every single woman we invited to come to the Webster College Women's Art Fair in 1974 turned out to be a lesbian,

and spoke about that of course, um, because they were they were talking about their art, their artistic expression, the melding of their um- their feminist politics and and lesbian politics with their art. And it came up over and over and over again the weekend of this, um, Women's Art Fair, and on Monday morning, we—all of us who uh were involved with the Webster College Women's Union—were summoned to the office of, um, the president of the school, Sister Barbara Barbato. We were still under the leadership of a- of a Catholic nun, who, um, was very upset that we had requested and received a couple thousand dollars from the school to organize this event, which she described as nothing more than an advertisement for lesbianism. So (laughter) it was it was very funny because we had to tell her that we had, although it had turned out to be (laughs)—

FITZGERALD: Yeah (laughs).

HYDE: —a significant gathering of lesbian women and lesbian energy and lesbian art, that we had not intended that at all. Which, I have to say, I don't really think she believed (laughs).

FITZGERALD: So was the Women's Union, um, sort of officially a feminist organization, was it just sort of a women's social organization? You said there were a lot of lesbians in the group, so could you sort of just describe the purpose and the atmosphere of the group?

HYDE: Certainly. It was, uh, it was a student organization, the Webster College Women's Union, it was- we, we were- we were welcoming of and open to any women who were interested in participating. Um, there were straight women who were in the Webster College Women's Union, and actually who were involved with, uh, the organizing of the Women's Art Fair. It just happened that most of us were lesbians, and as I mentioned all of the artists we invited also turned out to be lesbians. Uh, but it, it, it- we we had office space at Webster College, it wasn't exactly a resource center or a women's center in the sense that we think of now. It was really a student organization and a student-run organization. Um, we adopted feminist principles, the Women's Art Fair that we produced was thought of by us as, um, aligned with feminist principles, in- in bringing forward women artists to speak of and to share with us their thoughts of empowerment for women.

FITZGERALD: So what was that like for you to sort of have come from this small town, and sort of as you said slowly been inching toward, um, some sort of gay or lesbian community, and then to be at Webster and to be involved in what sounds like a pretty active or welcoming organization where you did find friendships with lesbians. And also to then kind of have kind of come up against this sort of controversial, um, experience—unintentionally controversial experience—of the of the Women's Fair, the Art Fair?

HYDE: Well, I was just like a pig in shit! (laughter) I was- I was thrilled, I was thrilled to, um, be in a in a space where there were lesbians and uh straight women allies to hang out with to- to socialize with. I found friendship, I found love—my first lover was a student at Webster College, and she and I, um, entered into a relationship that lasted, um, ten years, so it was it was very important.

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: Um, and encountering the- encountering the- encountering the institutional homophobia was, um, was not a surprise, although it was my first experience with, with a- with an institutional leader, the president of our college, publicly criticizing us for being out lesbians, and for- and for uh creating this event where lesbianism was publicly discussed, not a matter of shame, not a matter of embarrassment, but simply a part of who we were and a part of our politics. Um, so it- it was it was a little startling to me, because, um, up to that point I think, you know, the other side of, the other side of encountering the institutional homophobia was that I had not really had an opportunity to be out in that way. It hadn't- I hadn't been in an environment where that was a possibility, or um, or an experience that I could have with peers, with peers and friends, so um I was- I was both surprised and invigorated by it.

FITZGERALD: By participation in the in the organization?

HYDE: Well, I was surprised by the institutional homophobia, but also invigorated by it, because, um, you know, I had certainly read enough by then to understand that I that visible- visible lesbianism was likely to get that kind of response from powerful institutional leaders, um and I actually thought it was kind of exciting (laughs).

FITZGERALD: So how did you sort of take that excitement that you felt and apply it to sort of your next step, or even the organization as a whole—like what happened after the Women's Arts Fair and the and the controversy about that?

HYDE: Well actually, all of us—uh, all of us who participated in the organizing of the Women's Art Fair—left Webster College that spring. None of us returned to school. Um, and some of us, my- my lover and I in particular, um, having- having produced this- this women's artistic event, um, became very interested in culture and cultural projects. And my lover and I, uh, launched a production company called Red Tomato. Uh, that from 1974 to 1982 produced cultural events, uh, for women and lesbians in St. Louis, um, most of it was musical. Um, there were- at the time there was- there was a very lively, um, circuit of small- relatively small production companies, producing relatively small

events for, um, women musicians, all of whom were lesbians. Um, and we became a part of the women's music circuit that thrived through the '70s and, you know, up to the mid-'80s I would say. Um, so Red Tomato produced forty-two different cultural events in St. Louis, '74 to '82, um the largest- the largest event we produced garnered an audience of about a thousand people—most of them were much smaller, somewhere between, um, 75 and a couple of hundred- couple of hundred people in the audience.

FITZGERALD: And so how did you sort of spread the word about these events, and, um, was it mostly within a lesbian community or any type of feminist community, or was it- was it more widespread than that that you, that you kind of got the word out?

HYDE: Well, uh, there were a couple of publications—one- one was a women's publication in St. Louis, and one was a- a gay and lesbian publication. Ah, the women's publication was, um, tailing off towards the mid-'70s, but the gay and lesbian publication was just taking off—just, just getting up and running –

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: Yeah, there was a little transition there in, um, in community-based media that, um, that we utilized to publicize these events. But actually our primary way of publicizing the concerts was to um- was that we developed a mailing list. We developed a mailing list of, you know, in the beginning it was probably a hundred women. It grew to many hundreds of women who attended our events, and we were very conscientious about giving people the opportunity when they came to our events to sign up on the mailing list so we would have their contact information. Um, we also did flier-ing, um, put- put our posters, our very, um, modestly designed—manually designed—posters up around town. Um, you know there were a few hot spots where we were- where we could be assured that, um, interested women would see them and notice it, and we relied quite a lot on word-of-mouth.

These cultural events were really- were created by us, um, for a couple of different reasons. One is that we ourselves wanted to hear the music. There was, um, a small and uh, you know, important recording company at the time, Olivia Records—they produced vinyl record albums of these artists, and, um, and we were able to get the records, but we really also wanted to experience- um, experience the performers live and in person. So we ourselves had a very great hunger to bring these women to our community. But we also recognized that, by organizing these cultural events, that we were building community among women, and among particularly lesbians. And, uh, although there was at the time one- one lesbian bar—maybe there were two, at the time—two dyke bars in St. Louis, the opportunities for socializing together were- were pretty, you know, they were pretty minimal really.

So the other goal that we had was to create spaces where dykes could come together, enjoy each other's company, hear the cutting-edge music of the moment, and have a good time.

FITZGERALD: And what was kind of the atmosphere like of that lesbian community in St. Louis at the time, in the '70s?

HYDE: Well, we were a small but hardy band (laughter) of sisters. Um, it was very much a lesbian separatist community—for example, at Red Tomato productions we did not allow men to attend, we asked them to leave, um, should they come. And in fact on our- on our promotional materials we always had the phrase "For Women Only." Um, there were, as I mentioned, there were a couple of bars, so the bars were definitely, uh, a kind of a gathering- gathering space, as were our concerts. But, um, aside from that, you know, the primary- the primary sites of social life actually were in people's homes, and there were a number of collective households of lesbians in St. Louis and almost every weekend somebody would have a party, and, you know, we'd go to that to that house, or the other house, or it would be at our house (laughs). And uh there- there would be a party and, you know, music would be played, and beverages would be consumed, you know, people would hang and chat.

FITZGERALD: So it sounds like it was a very social type of atmosphere?

HYDE: It was social, and it was also political. There was a women's car repair collective, for example, you know, women taking control of their- of their tools and their machines and learning about them. There were also a number of political issues that- that got us out on the streets—um, reproductive rights was a very big issue, um well, still is- (laughs) still is in 2008! But in the, um, in the early '70s just after *Roe v. Wade* there were many, many efforts to restrict women's access to abortion and we were frequently on the streets demonstrating about that. Also, um, through the- through the mid-'70s to about mid-'80s there was an important movement called Take Back the Night—demonstrations and marches for women's safety on the street. Um, there was also of course the, um, beginnings of the anti-domestic violence movement, which was less about political or public demonstrations and more about organization-building that people were very, you know very active and involved in. Um so it- it- I spoke a little bit ago about the social aspects, but there were also political aspects that were very significant for all of us. And, um, there was an ongoing, lively political conversation about lesbian separatism—whether that was a value we um wanted to continue to embrace, um what that what that brought to us, did it cost us anything. Big- big big discussion going on about that.

FITZGERALD: And where did you sort of fall in that debate at the time?

HYDE: Well, um, I very much appreciated and valued women's- women-only social space, and felt that, for many reasons, women and lesbian women needed to be able to, um, relate to each other in a space un- unaffected by men, and what men tend to bring into, um, an environment that is primarily defined by women. Politically, I, um, when it came to political action, for example when it came to fighting for the continued access of women to abortion and reproductive choice, um, I did not find separatism to be particularly useful or productive. I wanted men to be involved in that, and then as a gay and lesbian, bi and trans community and movement, um, began to take shape in St. Louis I encountered many gay men in particular with whom I worked and wanted to be working, um and- and really when I started to become involved in queer politics in about 1979, 1980 that's when I pretty much let go of- of lesbian separatism as a as a political principle.

FITZGERALD: And how, um, were sort of this activism about reproductive rights, Take Back the Night, domestic violence, and then eventually LGBT issues—how was that kind of received in St. Louis as a whole? Um, did you encounter any backlash, or anything like that?

HYDE: Well, St. Louis is a very, um, it was- it was then, and still is, a pretty conservative city, although it's come some way since the mid-'70s. I think that what we were able to do, um, was build- build institutions and work with existing institutions such that the—I'm thinking in particular of the movement for women's reproductive choice and freedom—um working with existing institutions – Planned Parenthood particularly comes to mind, NARAL, what was then called NARAL – National Abortion Rights Action League, Missouri chapter. Um we carved- altogether we carved out the space for that kind of political expression, which didn't mean that we were necessarily winning politically in Missouri, um, because we- we were fighting I think for every inch of political progress that we could, that we could achieve, but in terms of, you know, sort of people's responses on the street, or public discourse, um, I really- my memory is that, uh, the public discourse was relatively civil. And particularly post *Roe v. Wade* there was an acknowledgement, even grudgingly, from our opponents that, um, actually there had been recognized a constitutional right of women to make these decisions, and it kind of cast it on another- a different level.

FITZGERALD: So you didn't- it wasn't like every time you, you know, were active or vocal or visible it wasn't like you were experiencing from every turn any kind of, you know, direct backlash? Is that, is that accurate?

HYDE: (pause) Depends upon the issue. You know, absolutely there was backlash on- on reproductive rights for women. But my point is less that there was backlash and more that there was a building movement,

um, of- of women and of men who were ready to- um, ready to do the work to secure those freedoms for women, and to maintain them.

Um, in terms of LGBT issues and community, it was such a new idea, and uh taking- taking the LGBT presence and visibility from the bars to the streets was so novel at the time, uh, in the late-'70s and early-'80s. It wasn't even, it wasn't even that there was backlash, there was I think just utter puzzlement, and, um, a kind of bafflement about it, with the exception of Phyllis Schlafly and the Eagle Forum. Phyllis Schlafly is from Alton, Illinois—right across the river from St. Louis—and she and the Eagle Forum very early on identified lesbianism as a strong aspect of feminism, and recognized that, um, feminism, taken to taken to its political conclusions, would result in the- in the freedom—in the release, in the liberation—of women to choose to love and, uh, make their lives with other women. And they were bananas about it, they were- they were off the hook about it! Uh, during the 1970s one of the- one of the big political issues was the Equal Rights Amendment, and Illinois was a state that was one of the battleground states. I think, if I remember correctly, Illinois could have been the thirty-eighth state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. And, uh, Phyllis Schlafly—the old the old battle-ax from Illinois—was just determined that that was not going to happen, um, and I remember that she would do these speaking engagements around Illinois—debates, um actually with various- various feminists to talk about the Equal Rights Amendment. And she would make three points about the ERA: that if the Equal Rights Amendment passed that we would- we would see the beginning of same sex marriage, gender-neutral restrooms, and women in combat (laughs).

FITZGERALD: So those were sort of her three main-

HYDE: Those were her three-

FITZGERALD: -nightmares.

HYDE: Yes, those were her three, um, bugaboos about passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. And, you know, for a lot of reasons the Equal Rights Amendment was never passed, and never made part of our Constitution, not the least of which was Phyllis Schlafly and her- and her three nightmare scenarios should feminists be successful.

Well, we weren't successful and here we are in the midst of, um, vigorous debates all over the United States about the right of same-sex couples to marry. And here you and I sit in the great state of Massachusetts, today one of two states, um, permitting same-sex couples to legally marry—the other being Connecticut, California having just lost it on November 4th, 2008. So here we are in the midst of this huge debate about- about same-sex marriage, here we are at a moment when in not insignificant numbers of public places and spaces and at- on on at colleges and universities, um, it is relatively common

for restrooms to be gender-neutral, or co-sex, or just marked "restroom" (laughs). And, um, women have- have not quite reached full inclusion in combat units, but there are plenty of women in the military who learn and do- learn to use weapons and guns, and do carry guns and use them, um and are engaged in other aspects of combat-related activity in the military, so- (laughs)

FITZGERALD: Yeah, so even without the amendment we've- we've sort of realized some of her fears.

HYDE: Exactly! (two voices)

FITZGERALD: Depending on where you are in the United States.

HYDE: Right, Phyllis'- some of Phyllis' nightmares have come true.

FITZGERALD: Yep.

HYDE: But it was, you know, it was our staunchest enemies on the right, um—the most conservative, the most right-wing women's organizations—that recognized and understood what lesbianism actually would mean politically, socially, and culturally in the United States. And from them came, um, a very fierce backlash against us. For most- I think for most people it was, um, kind of a head-scratcher, they didn't really get it (laughs).

FITZGERALD: So as you were having these, um, really formative experiences as an activist, and sort of finding a lesbian community to be part of, um, were you- did you talk to your family about the kinds of things you were participating in—your siblings or your parents? (two voices)

HYDE: I did, yes, I- I spoke with my mother, um, quite a bit about feminism and the uh- the need for the liberation of women, and, you know, she was interested, you know, she was- she was reading the newspaper, she was certainly aware that the women's movement was gaining- gaining strength and gaining in numbers. And one day she said to me uh, "Are all feminists lesbians?" and I said, "No mom, all feminists aren't lesbians, and let me just share this with you: all lesbians are not feminists, either!" (laughs)

FITZGERALD It's true!

HYDE: Yeah, so we had, you know, we had a great conversation about that. Um, and I actually can't remember if it was a little bit before that or a little bit after that that I actually came out to her and said, you know, "Mom, I just want you to know *I'm* a lesbian."

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: And, um, she said- she was she was a bit upset—she was a Catholic woman and had raised us in the Catholic church—so she wasn't all that happy about it. But her response was, "What did- what did we do wrong? What did your father and I do wrong?" So, um, you know, it was- it was a while, but we got through that. My sister is a very strong feminist and women's advocate, so she and I were on the same page both about, um, both about women's- the women's movement and women's issues, and we were always on the same page about queer people and queer issues. And she was nothing but supportive of my coming out. In fact, she was living in a- in a community of women in, um, Tucson, Arizona, most of whom were lesbians. So (laughs) I mean she was- we were hanging out in the same kinds of, you know, social and political spaces. Um, for my five brothers, you know, it really- it really varied from brother to brother but each of them- all of them have come to accept me, and to accept my my wife and my family, my kids, you know, we're a part of the family picture certainly without any- without any issue about that.

FITZGERALD: Yeah, so it sounds like it was a pretty- pretty good process—the coming out process. (two voices)

HYDE: Yeah, it was a pretty good process. I mean I- I think, um, I think for my brothers probably each of them had to go through his own thinking-feeling process, but I doubt that any of them was terribly shocked to get the news that one of their sisters is a lesbian, because they grew up with me. I mean, they grew up with my non-conforming- (laughs) non-conforming gender their entire lives, so I think it was a pretty short process for each of them.

FITZGERALD: Yeah. So we're almost out of tape on this tape so if it's okay with you I'm going to stop here for just a moment.

HYDE: Sure.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

FITZGERALD: So up until this point we've been talking about some of your early experiences in your childhood, and in your college years as a young activist. Um, so I was wondering if you could tell me about what it was like to participate in the Gay Olympics in 1982.

HYDE: The Gay Olympics were held for the first time in 1982 in San Francisco, and in fact that was the only time the Gay Olympics were ever held because, um, the U.S. Olympic Committee filed suit against the organizers of the Gay Olympics to strip away from them, um, the use of the word "Olympics" in connection with the word "gay." Um, and they were successful, actually—the U.S.O.C. succeeded in um- they went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and succeeded in forcing the organizers of that event to change the name of the event to the Gay Games, which is what it's known now. In 1982, my uh lover and I, and- and a friend, had a- we had a great urge to go to the Gay Olympics in San Francisco. Um, we were living in St. Louis and were reading about this- this wonderful event, and each of us had, um, each of us had a um- an athletic skill (laughs) to take to the- to take to the Olympics and to um, you know, bring into the competition. And altogether we made a triathlon team—my lover was a runner, I was a swimmer, and our friend, um, was a bicyclist. So- (laughs)

FITZGERALD: Perfect!

HYDE: It was perfect! So each of us competed in biking or running or swimming events um at the Gay Olympics in 1982. And my um- It was great fun, I mean, you know, it was just a blast to be there. It was my first trip to San Francisco. There were about a thousand , um, competitors—a thousand athletes competing, and the number has grown tremendously since then. I think maybe even the last Gay Games was something like 14,000, I believe 14,000 athletes. So in- in relative terms this was very small.

But, um, for me the most vivid memory I have, and the experience that really changed my way of thinking about queer people, was to observe gay men, um, engaging in playful- uh, playful and very sexy displays of public affection—P.D.A., public display of affection! (laughs) It was tremendous, because, you know, I lived in St. Louis and queer- gay men, queer people, lesbians, nobody acted that way! You know it was very- we were very um, in public we were very hands off. We, um, not even in- at pride events really were we necessarily particularly public about our affection for each other. So to go to San Francisco and to be at this, what for me was a very large event, um, with men and women both, but particularly men, who were um- felt very free to touch each other, to hold each other, to hold hands, to act as if they- they were lovers, they were who they were to each other, was very eye-opening. Um, and I- never again did I feel happy censoring my own- my own impulses towards publicly showing my affection for my lover, so-

FITZGERALD: So yeah, it sounds like it was a *really* eye-opening experience!

HYDE: It was, it was very eye-opening-

FITZGERALD: To sort of see the possibility of what things could be like-

HYDE: Exactly, exactly! (two voices) It was- to visit San Francisco was to have a little window open up into the future, into what I would hope for—what I strive for.

FITZGERALD: And so how did that- what was next for you then, like how did that experience sort of take you to whatever was next in your life in terms of your activism? From St. Louis, where did you go next?

HYDE: Well, there- you know a couple things were happening for me at that time. One- one was I knew that I wanted to- I knew that the organizing skills that I had learned producing, um, our concert series were good. I knew they were good organizing skills, and I wanted to use them in a more political context, in a more politicized way. And yet, the LGBT political moment in St. Louis had not really arrived, and, um, I remember talking with my lover about this and saying, "You know, I know I could stay here and just kind of keep doing the same thing I've been doing over and over and over again until the moment is more ripe. Or, I could- I could go somewhere where the movement's already happening and join in." Uh, and she- she did then and does now own a bookstore in St. Louis and was not very happy to hear me talking about wanting to leave our home city and our home, but I felt really it was, you know, my time to go.

So, um, late in 1982 I made a trip out to the Boston area. And while I was here—I was I was visiting someone—and while I was here I happened to become aware that the *Gay Community News* was looking for a news editor. And I had done some work at a- at the, um, the *St. Louis Gay News Telegraph*—that was the name of our queer newspaper out there—I had done some work there editing, but also felt able to do it, felt, you know, kind of drawn actually to this job, and applied for it and was offered the job and relocated to the Boston area in January 1983. For two years plus—two years and, you know, five month—I was on the staff at *Gay Community News* and was steeped, absolutely steeped in a community and atmosphere where, um, gay men and lesbians and gender-bending folk joined together to produce this weekly publication that was- that was read all over the country. One of our staff members would say, "Well our subscription list is, well it's not quite 5,000 yet but it's 5,000 of the most important people in the United States!" (laughter)

FITZGERALD: That's a very positive way to look at it!

HYDE: It is a very positive way to look at it. This was, uh, this was a wonderful- a wonderful project where women, men, gender-bending folk—gender non-conforming folk—came together to, um, not just to create this publication, but to create a common- a sort of common community space where ideas and ideologies could be debated,

discussed, where issues of the moment were taken up and, um, analyzed and better understood and then put out in the pages of the newspaper so that others in our communities around the country would also benefit from the analysis and understanding.

You know in- in 1983, 1984 was the beginning of the AIDS crisis and *Gay Community News* I'm fairly certain published either the first or one of the first articles about safe sex and safe sex education, among other things. Um, we also published a ton of articles on the science of AIDS and HIV, which, you know, at the time was not called HIV (laughs). Um, in the beginning it was called G.R.I.D.—Gay Related Immune Disorder. Um, so it was a very- it was a very heated moment, it was a very important moment for our communities when the devastation of this epidemic and crisis began to really be felt all over the United States. And, um, to be there- to be there in a place like *Gay Community News* where people were trying to grapple with the daily developments in science, in politics, in social policy about this very new phenomenon in the world was, um, incredibly exciting and stimulating and sometimes bewildering (laughs), but it was- it was a wonderfully educating experience for me coming from, um, coming from the Midwest, which was, even though I lived in a big city in the Midwest at the time, it was it was nothing like Boston, it was nothing like what was going on here.

FITZGERALD: Yeah. So this experience that you had with the *Gay Community News*, did that pretty much sort of solidify for you that you wanted to stay in Massachusetts and stay in Boston to continue working here—you said that the movement was really more present here than in St. Louis-

HYDE: Yes.

FITZGERALD: Um, and so was that, was it location that really kept you here, or- I guess what I'm trying to say is, you know, what kept you in Massachusetts and in Boston?

HYDE: I so loved working at *Gay Community News* that even- even when it, uh, when I knew it was time for me to leave after two-and-a-half years, I wanted to stay in this community, in this area, because there was so much rich richness and texture in LGBT life and community here. Um, I left the newspaper in mid-1985, and at just about that moment, Governor Michael Dukakis declared that in Massachusetts same-sex couples would not be considered to be foster parents by the State Department of Social Services. And this- this ignited a huge, huge movement, um, both to rescind the governor's foster care policy but also a movement to bring forward the families and parents in our community. Um, it was- it was very important, and at the time was really singular to Massachusetts—at that point, in most states I don't even think anyone had even thought about whether same-sex couples would be foster parents or would not be foster parents. It happened

here that, um, a gay male couple were, were- were credited or, you know, what's the word—licensed, licensed. They were licensed to be foster parents and the information floated over to a *Boston Globe* reporter who wrote a news article about this, and then the governor intervened and said, "No, no more of this." Because of course, as- as everyone knows, homosexuality is endangering to children. That's- that's what his that's what his policy was predicated on—that homosexuality is, of course, and endangerment to children. And so this *huge* movement to, um, overturn the policy and to declare for all the world to hear that gay parents, lesbian parents, bisexual parents, transgender parents are good parents, who can raise wonderful citizens of the world and- and that we were not going to accept this indictment from the state of Massachusetts.

Huge, huge movement—the Gay and Lesbian Defense Committee was the grassroots aspect of that movement, Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, our legal organization that advocates on behalf of LGBT people took up the legal cases around it, uh lobbyists and lobbying organizations fought in the state legislature—fought against he codification of these regulations. They were codified eventually, and were the subject of a successful lawsuit and were eventually overturned in court. But that, uh (laughs)- the foster care—the Foster Equality movement as we called it—was my first immersion in uh- in an LGBT issue here in the Boston area. Although there was plenty going on when I was at *Gay Community News*, because I was also trying to edit this newspaper, I didn't have a lot of time to- to dive into something for any, you know, that would sort of take me through an extended period of time. So the Foster Equality movement was really my, uh, my first immersion, and I loved it.

And from that in, um,1986, when the U.S. Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick* declared that there was no constitutionally guaranteed right to privacy for homosexual behavior. Um, from that, I really caught the organizing bug and when the *Hardwick* decision came down on June 30th, 1986, I and others here in Boston, people- LGBT people all over the United States, organized demonstrations to protest the decision in *Hardwick*, much like we see right now with demonstrations all over the country regarding the passage of Proposition 8 in California. It was very similar to that. There were 4,000 people in the street in New York City, uh we had about 250 here in Boston but still, you know, the fact of it was that the *Hardwick* decision was another teaching moment for us to, um, to grab hold of and to say, you know, We do not accept this, we will not accept that, and in fact we will organize to make sure that the *Hardwick* decision does not remain the last word on homosexual behavior. So, so I was very excited about organizing, and after the *Hardwick* decision in, uh, June '86 I was sitting on the beach with my friend Urvashi Vaid who was the media director at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and she said to me, "You know, this *Hardwick* decision thing has caused us at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to create an organizing job

to repeal sodomy laws in the 25 states where they exist." She said, "I think you should apply for the job." I said, "Great! I will! (laughs) I will apply for that job!" And, uh, in October 1986 I went down to Washington, D.C. and was interviewed for this- for this organizing position—director of what was called the Privacy Project at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. And while I was there had the great pleasure and privilege to meet Michael Hardwick of *Bowers v. Hardwick*. Um, he was in Washington, D.C. because the 1986 Court session was just opening, um, when I was there for my job interview and we- I'll be darned we did a demonstration at the U.S. Supreme Court! (laughter)

FITZGERALD: Just spontaneously?

HYDE: It wasn't spontaneous at all, no, he was- he came especially because it was the opening of the of the Court session for that year and uh- no, it was a planned demonstration, but my attendance at it was a little bit unplanned, so-

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: But, um, I was hired by the Task Force to run the Privacy Project, and embarked on a four year long campaign to work with activists on the ground in the 25 states where there still were sodomy laws to, um, organize public education aspects and legislative aspects of a- of an overarching goal to repeal sodomy laws in the states where they still existed. Now, in my time there, we didn't repeal a single sodomy law. But, um, I was involved in organizing 13 state-wide political organizations where they had never before existed, in states where they didn't exist. So, um, as I- as I looked around at the infrastructure that would be required to undertake public education and a legislative campaign to overturn sodomy laws, it was immediately obvious to me that it was not happening in any state where there was not a state-wide political organization that could take on the- the organizing and the advocacy and the public education aspects of the campaign. So, so that's what I did.

FITZGERALD: And so what was- tell me about what the Task Force was like 20 years ago as—you could compare it to now or just, what was it like then?

HYDE: Well in the mid-'80s, um, we had a staff of—it depends which year you're talking about—but we had a staff of between eight and ten people, we now have a staff of 50; our budget, I'm pretty certain was under half a million dollars a year when I arrived, and our annual budget now is ten million dollars. With such a small staff we were organized, um, actually by projects. So, my project was the Privacy Project—repeal of sodomy laws. One of my colleagues, Kevin Berril, was the director of the anti-violence project and he was working to, um,

initiate local anti-violence projects in cities around the country, and also to survey and document the extent of biased crimes against LGBT people. Um, while I was there another staff person came on, Ivy Young, who ran our Families Project—one of the earliest, uh, organizing and education projects related to LGBT families. And also while I was there we, uh, brought on a federal legislative director who worked- worked on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. lobbying and advocating on a number of issues related to LGBT people.

One of our great successes was in 1989 when the Congress of the United States passed, and George Herbert Walker Bush—Bush one—signed into law a bill called the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, which was the first piece of federal legislation that included the phrase "sexual orientation," and, um, mandated that the Federal Bureau of Investigations begin to collect data on the incidence of hate crimes against lesbian and gay people. Um, I am relatively certain that at that time in 1989 the language did not include gender identity and expression, although it did include bisexual people under the rubric of sexual orientation. But um, the passage of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act was the result of a years-long- years-long campaign to, um, to direct some federal attention to the issue of biased violence against LGBT people, and was absolutely the crowning achievement of Kevin Barrel's work at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

FITZGERALD: I bet, yeah.

HYDE: Another- another huge issue that we were grappling with all through the '80s was the AIDS crisis. Jeff Levi, who was our Executive Director at the time, um, was one of the founders of a- of a coalition called National Organizations Responding to AIDS—the NORA Coalition. Um, and it was through the NORA Coalition that much of the lobbying and advocacy for steadily-increasing federal funding for both drug research and, um, HIV prevention efforts came to be. So that was- that was a huge focus. The Families Project was, uh, more of a more- the Families Project and the Privacy Project were both more intra-community organizing projects—doing education, sort of on the ground education, at the grassroots of LGBT communities around both family issues and, um, the great need to rid us of these sodomy laws. So they were- they were a little less about the work on Capitol Hill or in the media, and a little more about, um, educating our own.

FITZGERALD: So, then in the mid-'90s you started directing the Creating Change Conference for the Task Force. Um, could you tell me a little bit about how that came to be, and what the conference initially sort of started as, or was envisioned to be?

HYDE: In 1988, the Task Force launched the Creating Change Conference. Um, in 1987, the 1987 March on Washington had brought to Washington, D.C.—you know, there's always a little disagreement

about how many people attended—but I would say somewhere between 300 and 400 thousand people to march through the streets of Washington in support of, um, full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The message of the march was, Go home and get to work in your own communities and in your own states, uh, much to be done and, you know, let's get to it. So what we found at the Task Force was that, um, many people took that message to heart and when they got home, they called us. (laughter) This was pre-Internet, and this is when people were communicating by phone and by snail mail, principally, so they called us, they sent us letters, they were asking for help. And one day Irva Shevad and I turned to each other—we shared an office, she was she was the Media Director still at the- at the Task Force—we shared an office, we turned to each other and said, "There must be a better way for our movement to teach itself, to learn from itself, and to nurture and grow itself." So we, um, hatched this idea of an annual, national organizing, skills-building, and strategy conference for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political movement, and we called it Creating Change. October 1988 was the first- the first Creating Change Conference. It was held almost to the day, on the first anniversary of the 1987 March on Washington. I think we missed it by a couple of days because of the way weekends were configured that year. But, um, it was held at the Hotel Washington across the street form the Reagan White House and was attended by 350 people. It was- it was a great event and one that we at the Task Force believed had a bright future because it held so much promise for doing exactly what we wanted it to do: provide for us in the movement an opportunity to learn from each other, to break out of our isolation as organizers and activists, and to build the skills and confidence needed for our movement to go forward and make enduring progress on an agenda of legal equality and social acceptance for all of us.

FITZGERALD: So is that still how the conference is operating today? How has the conference sort of evolved as you've seen it, from 1988 until now?

HYDE: I became the director in 1994, and uh, from- from I would say from 1988 until about- to the mid-'90s—1995, '96—the conference remained very much an environment of peer education—organizers and activists teaching other organizers and activists lessons from the field. And then in the late '90s, the Task Force recognized that in order to bring our movement's skills up to a higher level that, uh, we would probably need to offer more sophisticated trainings and more sophisticated, um, teaching and learning sessions at Creating Change. And from- from, oh 2000 on to 2006 we were much more intentional about what the program would include and who would be- who would be leading sessions at the conference. But then in 2007 we realized that we needed to do even more and launched what we call the Academy for Leadership and Action, which now comprises about 35 to 40 percent of the Creating Change curriculum. And the Academy for Leadership and

Action is- is again another bump up for, um, the sophistication of sessions being offered, and for the kind of trainers that we look for to offer these various training sessions, these skill sessions, which we regard as kind of core- core to the mission of the Task Force. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force believes very much in building the political power of our movement from the grassroots up and, um, to do that we think that our grassroots organizers and local and state-wide political groups need to be always - always raising the level of their own skills and capacity that they can deliver to their communities. So the Academy for Leadership and Action was launched at- it was conceived in 2007 and launched at the 2008 Creating Change conference held in February '08 in Detroit. And will- we are, we are bringing an even more uh- we're, we're bring more sessions to the 2009 conference in Denver, in January '09, but also expanding the number of partner organizations we're working with to deliver the training sessions.

So, you know, rather than talking in the abstract, I want to be clear that when I talk about skills I am talking about what it takes to, um, build and run an advocacy organization—we're talking in terms of management skills, such as developing budgets, managing personnel and human resources for an organization, managing leadership transitions and growth transitions. When organizations, you know, move from a budget of a half million dollars to a budget of one-and-a-half million dollars, what does that mean for its leadership? We're also talking about skills related to building a more multi-racial movement, and therefore more multi-racial organizations. Uh, the LGBT political movement has for too long been dominated by white activists, and we believe that that in order to um- in order to build a multi-racial movement that our organizations have to take seriously, um, recruitment and training and leadership development of LGBT people of color, both on staff and as members of boards of directors, and then of course as part of a volunteer pool that they draw upon. Um we're also talking about media skills—using the media and understanding how the media works to better move our messages out in front of people who are not necessarily familiar with LGBT issues or people, not necessarily conversant, and maybe not even necessarily supportive. But, you know, we believe that the media is a primary vehicle of communicating with the very folks we need to be most in touch with. We also are talking about skills to work better and more effectively with faith communities, religious leaders. As we saw in California in the battle over Proposition 8, which we just lost earlier this month, the- the presence and the visibility of religious leaders who were supportive of Prop 8 and opposed to our equality was devastating to us, to the goal of defeating Proposition 8. So we believe that we must do better and work better with pro-LGBT faith leaders to blunt the impact of anti-LGBT faith leaders. So when I'm talking skills I'm talking about all of these kinds of skills, um, and others that I probably forgot to say right here.

FITZGERALD: Yeah.

HYDE: But, um, we- at the Task Force we believe that our movement needs organizations, that it is- it is organizations and institutions that can give space and shape to people- people's energy. Like right now there's a lot of energy about Prop 8 in communities all over the country, and what we think is that folks who are, um, fired up and ready to go need a place to go, and those places and spaces are LGBT advocacy organizations that that are- that exist to do the daily grunt work of moving our agenda forward in public advocacy, in legislative arenas, um, and in public communications.

FITZGERALD: So are these experiences that you've had, um, at the Task Force that have been very centered it sounds like very practical tools that are needed by leaders at the local level. Um, is that sort of what inspired you to write your book Come Out and Win in which you talk about a lot these same sorts of organizing strategies and tools, um- I see you have it with you (laughs).

HYDE: I'll hold this up.

FITZGERALD: Okay, thank you! (laughter)

HYDE: This is my book, it's called Come Out and Win: Organizing Yourself, Your Community and Your World. It was published by Beacon Press in June 2007. I wrote- I wrote Come Out and Win because I want more colleagues. I want- I want more people to be active and engaged and working in our LGBT political movement. Folks had told me, um, over and over again that they believed there was a gap in LGBT political literature, a gap that could be filled by, um, a short book that was pithy and engaging and gave the new activists, curious people, straight allies a kind of orientation to the history of the LGBT political movement ,but also some tips and advice on what to do. So it's- it's sort of both- it's both where we've come from and how we're going to keep going forward.

FITZGERALD: And so where do you, on that note, sort of see the LGBT movement going next, or, um, going in the future?

HYDE: I think there is great optimism right now because of the election of Barack Obama and, uh, Democratic party majorities in both the House and the Senate, although on this day we still don't know whether the Senate will have a 60-member Democratic majority or fewer, which of course makes a big difference in how the Senate then handles all legislative matters, but I would say particularly legislative matters related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. So there is great hope and optimism on the one hand. Uh, and it does seem that the

thaw um- the thaw of a real ice floe (laughs) around, um, federal legislation related to LGBT people may actually happen—that the ice might melt, that things might move forward. I don't think any of us really know how quickly that will happen, and I hope that all of our people can take a breath and realize that, um, the new president and the new Congress have tremendous challenges in front of them. And errors that were made in the earliest days of the Clinton Administration, in 1993, when um- when we ended up with Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy in the military, errors- errors were made that need to be learned from. So I am- I am, as are many of us, hopeful and I am also a little bit cautious about assuming too much about how quickly we're going to be able to move. But, I'm looking forward to two terms of a Democratic president and think that, um, we will see progress.

Now, at the same time there is this tremendous frustration—tremendous frustration and anger—over the passage of Prop 8 in California and, uh, two other anti-marriage amendments in Arizona and Florida, and the passage of, ironically, kind of a copy-cat constitutional amendment in Arkansas to ban unmarried couples from being foster parents or adopted parents in the state of Arkansas, which was of course targeted at same-sex couples who can never be married in Arkansas. So this frustration uh I- I hope will be translated into action, that people will understand that their anger can be, um, transformed into positive action for our communities all over the country. Uh, we have- we have much to do: there- there is the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy which has to go; there the DOMA, the Defense of- the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which absolutely has to go; uh, and then there are 30 constitutional amendments in states all over the- all over the country that ban legal marriage for same-sex couples, they must go.

And then on the proactive side, Matthew Shepherd was murdered in 1998 and there is still not federal hate crimes legislation that empowers federal investigative authorities to get involved in biased crimes that result in homicides of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, that- that is something that must be corrected because local authorities don't always have the will or the authority to do the kind of investigations that we need. We obviously, um, need the passage of non-discrimination legislation at the federal level because still in, um, thirty—I believe it's 30 states, it may be 31 states right now—LGBT people can be fired simply for being who we are, having nothing to do with our ability to do our jobs. And that non-discrimination legislation related to employment must be inclusive of gender identity and expression. The most vulnerable people in our community to employment discrimination, and for that matter to hate crimes and to discrimination in any- any number of contexts involving, um, public accommodations like education, like credit, like housing, are gender non-conforming people. Uh, whether those folks are transgender people or whether they are lesbians, gay men, bisexual people who don't conform to traditional gender roles. No matter- no matter their

identities, the fact of gender non-conformance is something that people are punished for every single day in this country and thus we must be fully- fully inclusive in all of our non-discrimination laws and policies going forward of gender identity and expression.

So that's, you know, that's sort of a summary, and really I didn't include everything, but that's a short summary of where we are legislatively. More broadly, on a on a level of social acceptance, we must achieve in every community in this country, uh the- not just tolerance of LGBT people, not just acceptance, but an actual, uh, attitude of valuing LGBT people, of embracing LGBT people. Just as those who- those of us who are fortunate enough to have won the embrace of our families as openly lesbian, openly gay, openly transgender, openly bisexual people. We also must- must win the embrace of our communities, so that our participation in our communities' civic lives can be, uh, can be guaranteed. We have much to offer, uh we- we have already contributed a lot, but there are many of us who have to stand back because they- many of use are afraid. We're afraid of losing our jobs, our housing, our families; we're afraid of prosecution, we're afraid of persecution, we're afraid of punishment for being fully open about who we are, and that simply has to change. And ultimately I believe that's what our goal is: full valuing of our lives as openly LGBT people.

FITZGERALD: So I wanted to go along with that theme for a minute of, um, you talked about on the legislative side that there's, you know, marriage legislation to be you know dealt with in a lot of states—um, all except Massachusetts and Connecticut at this point—and also sort of feeling the embrace of the community. And I wanted to talk about your experiences as, um, someone who does live in a state where marriage between couples of the same sex is legal. And you've also worked for that and witnessed in 2003 the *Goodridge* decision that made same-sex marriage legal. So I was wondering if you could talk about what that was like to experience that and then to be able to get married, um, after working so hard for that exact, you know, outcome.

HYDE: The defeat of the, um, of the last constitutional amendment that we faced that would have banned legal marriage for same-sex couples occurred on June 14th, 2007 at the Massachusetts State House. And it was an absolutely exhilarating moment because through- through three-and-a-half years of really tough, tough political work, we had gone from having about 50 votes to defeat the constitutional amendment to 158 votes in the legislature. And the turnaround of our legislators happened through- happened through the glorious educational work of our couples who had been able to be married in Massachusetts. And it was glorious educational work because, um, many of us who- who were able to be married visited with our legislators, uh took our children to meet our legislators, took other married couples—married same-sex couples—to meet legislators, and sat down and spoke with them in a

very personal and first person kind of way: with- with eye contact, with photographs, with stories of the way that marriage had affected our lives, and the lives of our children, and the lives of our extended family members. So to have- to have won that battle through visibility, through education, through advocacy by all of our couples and families across the state was, um, a true- it was a true transformation I think of um of the atmosphere in our state.

I like to think of those 10,000, 11,000 weddings that have taken place as, um, being the fundamental- the fundamental unit of the social change that we've seen. Because, you know, if you think about 11,000 weddings you can think about all of the- all of the family members who attended the weddings, all of the people who conducted the weddings, all of the City Clerks and staff in City Clerk's offices who processed applications for licenses. For those who were lucky enough to do this: all of the wedding industry personnel who were involved—the caterers, the florists, the cake bakers, the people who- who sell or rent attire for wedding parties, uh the musicians, the staff at inns and hotels and, uh, those people who work at newspapers who received announcements of- and photographs of weddings. All- all of the thousands and thousands of people who, in one way or another, had contact with the wedding of a same-sex couple created along with us an atmosphere in which the legislators—the actual decision-makers themselves—really found it difficult to deny us our- not just our constitutional right to marry, but to deny us our happiness, to deny our love, to deny the goodness of our of our families. Um, and so that's, you know, that's how I think about that that three-and-a-half year process from *Goodridge* to winning in the state legislature—that that it was truly grassroots in the in the most important sense. That from the tip of Cape Cod to the top of the Berkshires we got married, and people were involved in that. And through their involvement they- they came to be part of our movement and part of our community. Um, it's a wonderful thing. And my girlfriend and I got married too!

FITZGERALD: Yeah, tell me about that! What was that like?

HYDE: We eloped. (laughter) Um, on May 17th, 2004 at Cambridge City Hall there was a huge event because the city of Cambridge was the first city to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and, um, my girlfriend and I were the second couple in line to get our marriage license. So we got the marriage license not really knowing whether we were going to get married, but our children were very excited. They were with us all evening and all night really at Cambridge City Hall, and once we got the marriage license they kept saying, When are you going to get married? When are you going to get married? And on the very last day that the license was still valid my girlfriend called me and—it was a Friday—and she said, "Well, let's take a few minutes and go down to City Hall and get married." (laughs) I said, "Okay sweetheart!" (laughs) So we did, um, but we eloped to Cambridge City Hall. We actually didn't

have flowers, caterers, musicians, hotels, inns. (laughter) We- we were probably one of the quieter, uh, weddings that happened. But it was a wonderful feeling to hear our City Clerk say, "By the powers invested in my by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I now pronounce you spouse and spouse." It was great. I giggled through the whole thing. (laughter)

FITZGERALD: And how did your kids feel after that? You said they were- they really wanted you to get married.

HYDE: They were excited that we had gotten married and they were mad that we eloped because they really wanted to have a party and we promised them a party, but haven't done it yet.

FITZGERALD: Not yet, still?

HYDE: Not yet, we're a little behind on that.

FITZGERALD: So we're almost out of time on this tape.

HYDE: Yep.

FITZGERALD: And I'm so glad we got to hear that story too, um, I love that that's how you got married. Um, so I'm going to just pause here for a second.

END TAPE 2

TAPE 3

HYDE: I feel- I feel very blessed and very privileged to live in the state of Massachusetts. Uh, it was the second state in the U.S. to, um, pass what is still called the Gay Rights Bill, because it has not yet been amended to include gender identity and expression, although we're working on that. Uh, it was the first state to permit and allow adoptions- uh, same-sex couples to adopt children together. It was in Massachusetts where, um, the concept of government-sponsored commissions focused on the lives of LGBT youth were launched, we were the first state to have one. Um, and it's the state where the State Department of Education first really invested resources in creating safe schools—safe public schools for LGBT students, faculty, and staff. And, uh, also we were the first state in the country to allow same-sex marriages um to take place and to be legal and to be recognized. I feel such pride in our state, and really believe that the- the acceptance and the valuing of LGBT people is further along- We are closer to reaching that goal in Massachusetts I think than we are anywhere else in the United States. All over the Boston area we see the word "beacon"—Beacon Street, you know, beacon this beacon that—but I- I want to- I really want to lift up and

put out to the historical record that Massachusetts is a real beacon of freedom, of equality, and social justice for lesbians, for gay men, for bisexual and for transgender people. And we will continue to be, I believe, if not the leader state, a very important leader state around these issues in the U.S., and in the world. And I feel- I feel great about that. Uh, I wouldn't live anywhere else. (laughs)

FITZGERALD: So this- this is making me think of your experiences in 1982 when you went to San Francisco and you sort of saw what things could be like. And so now you've been experiencing for the last couple decades living in the state that, you know, you say is a beacon and that you- You're seeing really what life can be like, and hopefully will be like, in the future for all gay and lesbian couples, and bisexual and transgender people. Um, so is that sort of what- is that, you know, keeping you going at all? Is that kind of informing your work still—this daily experience that you're able to have in Massachusetts?

HYDE: The Massachusetts way of embracing LGBT people absolutely keeps- keeps me rolling through the day. Um, there is uh- the state of Maine has this little phrase, I think it might even be on the road signs when you enter the state of Maine: "Maine, the way life should be." Well, I feel that way about Massachusetts: "Massachusetts, the way LGBT life should be." And I hold in my heart and in my mind not just the hope or the dream but the absolute certainty that LGBT people in every state in this country, and, frankly, in every country in this world, will someday live the way we live here, and uh, I look forward to that. It's a great goal.

FITZGERALD: Yeah, it's so- *so* positive. (laughter) So where do you see from here your own personal activism going? We talked a little bit about where the movement as a whole is going, so where are you kind of seeing yourself go as an activist?

HYDE: Well, it's not so much I see myself going in any different or particular direction. Um, I am very- I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to run the Creating Change conference, because through that event, I and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force have helped to shape, um, and teach and educate 30,000 activists and organizers in the LGBT movement, and we will continue to do that. Um I feel it is my- it's, you know, not to wax too much like an outgoing president, but I feel that the education and that training that we bring to the movement through the Creating Change conference is a lasting contribution of mine to the movement and one that I want to continue to offer and to bring to our movement and to our people.

FITZGERALD: So once again I just want to, you know, make sure—is there anything else that you would like, on this particular interview, to be available to researchers, to students who are going to see this interview hopefully in

the future. Um, is there anything- anything that you'd to particularly end with?

HYDE: Um, you know, I think, yeah, I think I'll just tell a little story. I- my wife and I have two children, right now they are 16 and 13, but when our son, who's the younger of the two of them, when our son was in pre-school I went to pick him up one day and the teacher at his pre-school told me this very sweet story. That at lunch that day the kids had been talking about, um, getting married and, you know, whom they each might marry, and our son Max said something about, you know, he might marry a boy someday and someone else at the table said, "Oh, you can't marry a boy, that's not allowed." And Max said, "Yes, it's not allowed now, but we're working on that." (laughs)

FITZGERALD: What a great story, wow.

HYDE: So um, you know, I really believe that, um, for- for all of us who want a better and a different world for our people and our families that making sure that that we speak with children about our dreams of equality is central- central to the project. So I was- I was tickled pink by the story, and our children remain very strong allies to the to the LGBT movement.

FITZGERALD: Yeah, what a great- what a great sort of reassurance from such a, you know, such a young member of your family that- An awareness of what's you know going on and what the hopes are.

HYDE: Yes.

FITZGERALD: And how great that he's been able to see in Massachusetts same-sex couples be able to get married.

HYDE: He and his sister have watched history be made and they've been a part of it. They've both spoken at the legislature and have been, um, involved as they have been able to be with their school schedules in our in our advocacy work.

FITZGERALD: So you- it sounds like you've really worked to make, um, activism sort of a family thing. I mean, I think it would be hard not to, but- (laughter) um but that it's really become sort of a family activity, I guess?

HYDE: Yes, yes it is. You know it's- everybody's got things they need to do so not everybody goes to everything or does everything that I do. But they- they certainly have been um shoulder to shoulder—my wife and my two kids—have been shoulder to shoulder with me on many, many occasions.

FITZGERALD: How great. Well thank you so much, Sue, for sharing your story and allowing me to videotape it so that this can go into the historical record, as you as you say.

HYDE: You are welcome!

FITZGERALD: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Ellen Fitzgerald, December 2008.