

**Voices of Feminism Oral History Project**  
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College  
Northampton, MA

**VIRGINIA APUZZO**

Interviewed by

**KELLY ANDERSON**

June 2 and 3, 2004  
Kingston, New York

This interview was made possible  
with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

© Sophia Smith Collection 2004

## Narrator

Virginia (Ginny) Apuzzo (b.1941) was raised in the Bronx, graduated with a B.A. from SUNY New Paltz and an M.A. from Fordham University, and entered the convent at the age of 26. After leaving the convent, Apuzzo came out publicly as a lesbian, taught at Brooklyn College, and dove head first into movement politics. Working with the then-named National Gay Task Force, Apuzzo worked to have a gay and lesbian plank included in the 1976 Democratic Party platform. Subsequently, she became the Director of the Task Force, directing much of her attention to the AIDS crisis. Apuzzo's impressive political accomplishments led to two decades of political appointments, first with the Cuomo administration and then the Clinton administration, where she was appointed Assistant to the President for Administration and Management, making her the highest ranking out lesbian government official to date. Apuzzo left this post in 1999 when she rejoined the Task Force as the first holder of the Virginia Apuzzo Chair for Leadership in Public Policy. She currently resides in Kingston, New York.

## Interviewer

Kelly Anderson (b.1969) is an educator, historian, and community activist. She has an M.A. in women's history from Sarah Lawrence College and is a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. History at the CUNY Graduate Center.

## Abstract

In this oral history Virginia Apuzzo discusses her family heritage, growing up in an Italian American community in the Bronx, and her choice to enter the convent. The interview is particularly strong in the areas of Catholicism, faith, and spirituality. Apuzzo discusses her coming out process and the ways that her sexuality became her politics. While she touches on the women's movement, the Houston conference, and the impact of feminism in her life, Apuzzo details in depth her relationship to the gay and lesbian movement, in particular her experience with the Task Force. She also describes her campaign for the New York State Assembly and the formation of Lambda Independent Democrats. A significant focus of the interview is Apuzzo's service in the Cuomo and Clinton administrations.

## Restrictions

None

## Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Six 60-minute tapes.

## Transcript

Transcribed by Luann Jette. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Kelly Anderson. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Virginia Apuzzo.

### Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

#### Video Recording

**Bibliography:** Apuzzo, Virginia. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Video recording, June 2 and 3, 2004. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Virginia Apuzzo, interview by Kelly Anderson, video recording, June 2, 2004, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

#### Transcript

**Bibliography:** Apuzzo, Virginia. Interview by Kelly Anderson. Transcript of video recording, June 2 and 3, 2004. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Virginia Apuzzo, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, June 2, 2004, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23-24.

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project  
Sophia Smith Collection  
Smith College  
Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted JUNE 1 and 2, 2004, with:

VIRGINIA APUZZO

at: Kingston, New York

by: KELLY ANDERSON

ANDERSON Is the music on?

APUZZO: Oh, please, yeah. I'm sorry.

ANDERSON: It just started to...

APUZZO: I don't want to – oh, yes.

ANDERSON: OK. OK. So, can you just tap the microphone?

APUZZO: Tap it?

ANDERSON: Yeah, OK. Um, All right, so, we're going to begin. This is Kelly Anderson and Virginia Apuzzo, and we're at her home in Kingston, New York, on June 2, and this is an interview that we're doing for the Voices of Feminism Oral History Project at the Sophia Smith Collection. And, let's start by talking about your childhood in the broadest terms, um, and let's take it all the way back and start with your parents and their families, where they came from and how they got to New York.

APUZZO: My –three out of four of my grandparents came to America from other places. My father's family came from Italy and my mother's mother came from England. So, I always think that that's an interesting piece that your – your grandparents took that trip, you know, that extraordinary journey in – in, you know, what could be hardly considered comfortable circumstances to get you here, to get their children here. My third grandparent – my grandfather on my mother's side was a blacksmith in this area, actually, south of here down in the Cornwall area.

So my mother grew up, she was the youngest in her family, um, with a lot of alcoholism in her family and my father grew up as the oldest male in an Italian family in the Bronx. Actually, I think they lived for a

while in Harlem. A lot of Italians lived in Harlem. And then my grandparents moved up to the Bronx which in those days was the country. My grandfather had a garden and pigeons and, you know, it was the country, when you compare it to Harlem.

My mother and father met – I was conceived, um, my parents didn't marry for 13 months after I was born. And probably the most significant thing to me is what my mother must have gone through as a woman who was pregnant before World War II to an Italian who, in those days Italians were – there was a fair amount of prejudice against Italians, particularly Southern Italians – and uh, and how she got through that nine months is an extraordinary thing for me. I've thought about it so often, I've wondered about it, but she did, and –

ANDERSON: Why did they wait to marry until after you were born?

APUZZO: I don't know. I think they were both young. My father was 19, my mother was 20. She was from a very unhappy family. My father was Italian. You had to – as the oldest Italian male, you were expected to marry an Italian. The word for a non-Italian woman who was, you know, a little loose, in my family, in the dialect my family spoke was a Strush, which if you just listen to the sound of it, it doesn't sound like a fun thing to be called. And my uh, my father's family, you know, kind of had the attitude that my mother ruined my father and my mother's family had the attitude that my father ruined my mother, and there was a reluctance to get married and finally, 13 – in July, after my 1<sup>st</sup> birthday, my parents got married, and they stayed married for, um, about 20 years. But I – my father kept my mother, uh, in a furnished room for a while and she never met her in-laws until I was born.

And basically, I was the entrée to my father's family because my grandmother was still very young. She had lost her oldest child, my father's older brother, and my grandmother really just kind of adopted me, and my mother came along. My grandmother – my mother hadn't given me a bath for months and months after I was born because she was afraid of this infant, you know. But my grandmother having raised several of her own children, really took on a lot of the maternal care for me.

I had – I had, you know, I thought I had a really happy childhood. I loved being – I couldn't – I loved being with the large family. I loved the cultural – when I say cultural, it's Italian, because if you're Italian, it's something else. That something else always disappears, you know? I loved being with the family, meaning the Italian family.

I really hated coming to see my English grandmother. First of all, as a child, you have to understand the color of food in an Italian family. It's green, it's red, it's wonderful. And you go visit your English grandmother and they have white bread and butter that's kept in a cupboard and lamb that's cooked till it's gray and cauliflower and I

mean, all this white food. You know? And they – it's just a different – it's like being in an alien environment when you're in an Italian environment.

So, I – you know, I really have to say I had a good time. I loved being out with my friends. I was always part of the gang, you know, always played with boys, a real tomboy, fell in love with girls. When I was 10, I fell in love with my first – my best friend and proposed, and it was a really negative experience and so, I tried real hard never to mention that again. That's how I learned the "love that dare not speak it's name" when I proposed to Lucille. When I was 10 years old.

ANDERSON: She said no?

APUZZO: Well, she was, like 11 or 12, and she really had it for Eddy. [laugh] So, but she uh, I guess– I guess heterosexuals, you know– maybe intuitively she knew it was the wrong thing because she responded, you know, aghast, that I would say such a thing. It didn't seem like such a weird thing to me. But, you know, I loved school, I had a good time in school. I uh, I did well in school but I was always in trouble. Um, and I loved that. I loved being naughty.

ANDERSON: Were you in Catholic school?

APUZZO: No, I went to public school for the first eight years. I went to Catholic High School. Actually, my parents – my parents thought that since all the girls who went to our local high school, Columbus High School, ended up getting pregnant, that they would punish me and send me to Catholic school. Well, there I was, at Cathedral High School with 4000 girls. Big punishment. I had a ball. I thought it was terrific. Um, but I had – I-I had a very – I had a – I had a childhood that outside the little, you know, my-my – my immediate family was terrific. It was full of imagination and games and the kind of intrigue and fun you have when you imagine and you go to the movies on Saturday and you – you know, you sit with all the kids and you get in trouble with the matron. I mean, these are just wonderful memories that I have.

Um, there was a darkness in my life. I was sexually abused by a relative, um, when I was very young, and I've never mentioned it to my family. My family knows nothing at all about it. And that – I think that does things to a child that somehow takes the wonder off things, that it tarnishes trust in a way that – that you can still smile and run around and have a good time and fun but there's just a little bit something that happens and it's not good. It's – whether it's guilt or because I think you always feel like somehow responsible even though you're 9 or 10 years old and this is an adult, um, but it's a very tragic thing, and it's – although I don't believe in the death penalty, it's left me so angry that I would never be willing to sit on a jury in a sex abuse case because I

know I couldn't be reasonable about it. I couldn't weigh with any measure because of my own feelings.

ANDERSON: Did this go on into high school?

APUZZO: No, it went - well, it went on into like, the eighth grade, about.

ANDERSON: And then did you sort of block it out, compartmentalize it?

APUZZO: I compartmentalized – yeah, I just compartmentalized it but, you know, being Catholic, you know, being Catholic and having sex be such, you know, an overwhelming issue and inordinately, inordinately demonized by the church, when something like that is your first sexual experience, you just, um, you always carry it. You always feel that there's a burden of guilt on you, somehow you did it. You were responsible. It was your fault. At any rate –

ANDERSON: Did you get help from any adult at that time?

APUZZO: No. I've never gotten – I've never –

ANDERSON: Not – no teachers, no one?

APUZZO: No. No. Um, but I entered high school, and uh, was delighted to be there, had a great time. You know, a lot of us who went to Catholic school who were lesbian have crushes on teachers. I had the experience where the teachers had crushes on me. And it was overwhelming in not a good way.

ANDERSON: How did they display their affection towards you?

APUZZO: One nun kept a diary that she would give to me periodically. And um, it just – it wasn't abuse in the way that we're experiencing the church today but it was – it was emotionally imposing. It was—I was 13 years old. Um, to have all that attention, to be kept after school, to just – for someone else's enjoyment. I mean, I got off on it. It was not like the world's worst thing, but again, there is a burden of an adult imposing their emotional needs on a youngster. This is just – it's a theme in my life.

ANDERSON: Did they do this to any other young woman that you knew of?

APUZZO: Oh, yeah, you know. The nuns – mostly the girls had crushes on the nuns, you know, and you knew the girls who had crushes on the nuns and it was, you know, it's like, very girl, blah-blah. But, uh, I guess maybe it was my previous experience with an adult who, you know,

really did such a boundary issue on me. But it was difficult to reconcile. But I had a great time in high school. I – you know, I had – I had scads of friends, I had a great time, I did very well, loved it, loved it, loved it, loved it. And didn't get pregnant.

I fell in love with a young girl who flunked out of Cathedral but ended up because she had the same name as my mother's maiden name, my mother took her in. My mother always kind of adopted my friends, you know. So I was competing with my mother for some of these girls, and she ended up staying with us, and we had an affair for several years. I went away to college.

ANDERSON: And that wasn't suspected by your parents?

APUZZO: Well, while I was in college, my mother found a letter. So, you know, it's the usual. Your mother turns over mattresses. Who turns over mattresses? My mother turns over mattresses. But I – but, you know, it would be – I would be really, I would be missing a whole piece of my life if I didn't talk about my grandmother in my life. Here is an Italian woman who, everyone in the family says I look just like her. No one else in the family looks like me so I guess – and everyone says you're the only one who looks like Nana, and I'm so grateful that she was in my life.

14:45

I'll show you, if you're interested, there's a picture of my English grandmother standing holding lilacs, I think, and I'm on the floor in the grass. And my – this English grandmother is standing very tall and looking very proper. And then there's a picture of my Italian grandmother, Nana, who was feeding a goat, bending over. She's a big woman, and she bends over and she's feeding a goat, but she turns around to look at my sister, and my arm, as I'm leaning up against a tree, looking at her, and, in a way, the juxtaposition of those two pictures tells the story.

My Italian grandmother was nurturing, loving – she was the heart of the family. She was, emotionally for me, an anchor. My mother was very ill when I was a child and was in the hospital a great deal and in those days, they would say, your mother had – your mother's very nervous. I never knew what that meant. My mother was very nervous. Don't get your mother nervous. Well, my mother, as it turns out, had some kind of cancer when she was 28, had a hysterectomy at 28. She had – she had a very difficult life, and uh, emotionally, I think she probably went through a very tough time. But to me, I always felt I was walking around on eggshells and so, when I was with Nana, I could just, you know, do anything, you know?

But the problem was that where Nana lived was also where the relative was who was abusive. So it was, uh, it was a – the plot thickened, so to speak.

ANDERSON: Yeah, you had to pay a big price for getting her love.

APUZZO: Yeah, but you know, my grandmother took me to church. I mean, one of the great memories I have as a kid. My grandmother would go to 7 o'clock mass where all the Italian women went, and we would go along the street. I would be, you know, short. She would have my by the arm and sometimes my feet wouldn't touch the ground because she was rushing to get to St. Teresa's Church, and uh, and we would get there, and the church was never as bright as it was – I mean, for the Italian women, they kind of left the church dark. It was never as bright as it was when everyone else was there.

But these women came, you know, with their kerchiefs on, dressed mostly in black, and they would – in those days, the Latin mass, and they would race the priests to the end of the prayers. They would make it before the priest made it and there was – there was something about it. No other mass did the congregation race the priests to get to the end, but those Italian women it's like – they were claiming this mass as theirs. This church for that hour was theirs. And when they sang – I mean, you could hardly call it singing, but the point was, there wasn't embarrassment.

There were these old ladies, the gnarled old ladies who were the monuments in your neighborhood. And there was a place that they came and they claimed, as much as it was dominated by men and the priests was at the front – I loved that hour with them, because from a child, it was just something told me these women, you know, this belonged to them. This guy was borrowing it from them. He – they made him feel good. That's the sense I got from it. So my grandmother, you know, was religious and she gave me that and that has mattered to me in my life, not without conflict and not without contradiction, but it is – I think it's a gift that she gave me.

ANDERSON: Let's back up and talk about your mom a little bit more. What did you learn from your mom – well, your entire nuclear family, but mostly your mom about being female or about being a girl in the world? Or was she unavailable to you?

APUZZO: No, she wasn't – she – my mother and I had an extraordinary relationship because it went through so many bad periods like us girls go through those periods with their moms, you know, My mother was – my mother wanted a little blond girl with curls and blue eyes and she got a girl with blue eyes, no curls. And from her point of view, she didn't get a girlie-girl. She wanted a girlie-girl and instead she got this little fat kid who wanted to play with boys. [laugh] And you know, she was angry at that. That made her angry. When I – when I - when it was clear I was gay, in those days, that's what we said. I didn't even know the word "lesbian" yet. When it was clear that I was homosexual, my

mother hated it. When I came out and, you know, took on activist – you know, an activist role, my mother was very disappointed and embarrassed by it. You know, but she came around, she came around.

But you know, as a kid, I learned that it's hard to be a girl. You know, it's hard. You know, you had responsibilities, you had – and my mother – my mother, um, imposed that discipline on me, you know. I had to clean the bathroom if I wanted to go to the movies. I had to clean the kitchen floor if I wanted to go the movies. I had to this before I could do that. You know? There always was a quid pro quo and it always had to do with housework. To this day, I hate housework. I hate it. [laugh] Because it reminds me of, you know, this thing that was around. My father got up in the morning, had his coffee and went off. He worked very hard, but to my eyes, as a child, he was gone. And to me, getting out of the house was terrific.

Um, my mother, as I said, had health problems, was very nervous, had a lot of responsibilities to the other men and women in the family. Uh, my grandfather was very domineering. My father was very domineering. My mother outsmarted him, so my mother taught me, you can outsmart these men.

ANDERSON: Did you also see her as subservient to them?

APUZZO: Well, I'm going to give you a little image, a little anecdote. We would sit at the table, when I was real small, and my father would take a glass and put it in front of my mother and that meant, "Get me a glass of water." When I got a little older, my father would take the glass and put it in front of me and that meant, "Get me a glass." And I would say, "But how come you can't say please?" I couldn't understand why she didn't say to him, "How come you can't say please?" To me, that little piece, that little frame, you know, that little frozen frame for me was, um, it told a story, you know, that women served, and even if they didn't say please, these men could get it. My grandfather was, you know, had a notorious temper and people would say, "Martin is hungry." [laugh] "Feed Martin. Feed Papa." You know, it was like the lion's roar, you know.

And there was a lot of strictness. But there was also a lot of – a lot of noise and a lot of activity and a lot of stuff that I like, or I did when I was younger. Um, when all the family got together and we sat around a huge table, the men just sat there and yeah, the women worked. But they produced something that made an event special, you know? And that part I liked. I liked that it made something special. If Nana wasn't there, it wasn't special. It didn't matter if you got presents. It didn't matter if the food was identical. And now that I've lost my mother, I see that it's like that, you know, it doesn't matter that I had the same Thanksgiving. My mother isn't sitting at the table with me, you know, and it's the

spirit that comes. But as a kid, I really got a lot of that from my grandmother.

My mother was very strict with me. My father was very strict with me. And, uh, these days, you know, the parents would be arrested for the kinds of beatings that we got, which were very physical and punishment was very severe and frequent. You did it and you did it right or you got the consequence. And to me, I thought that all the kids got that, you know? I didn't know that, uh, that you didn't get beat up with a wooden spoon or a coat-hanger.

ANDERSON: What were some of your crimes?

APUZZO: Well, my— the one that's most in my head, and it's unfair because it projects my father as a terrible demon, but I — there's a reason I remember it. When you're a kid, you know, you deposit on sodas. In those days, you got two cents deposit, maybe, but citrus of magnesia, you got five cents for them. And my father needed citrus of magnesia. And so one day, I poured the remaining — not the whole bottle — the remaining portion down the drain, took the bottle, and got the deposit. That night, my parents got home from wherever they were and um, my father went for the citrus magnesia; I was already sleeping. And when it wasn't there, you know, it was like that goddamn kid took that — well, he ended up waking me up and literally throwing me across the room for a nickel. For a nickel. Uh, and then from time to time, I would be threatened with going into a home. You know, in those days, they took you into a home. I don't think kids would know what a home is today, but, go to a home. So, I would get into trouble. You know, I was - I was — I got it.

But I must say, because you know, you lived in a really kind of ethnic ghetto, I thought everybody's father was like that. I thought that's how father — that's how my grandfather was, so I thought that's how it is. And I must say, you know, I would hate to think of a child getting that today but, you know, I got through it.

ANDERSON: Were they like that with your sister?

APUZZO: No. My sister was born with the socket to her hip missing, so as an infant, she was in braces and a cast for a long time. And so my sister — nobody ever raised a hand to my sister.

ANDERSON: That protected her for the rest of her life at home?

APUZZO: Well, it protected and it crippled her. My sister — my sister is in recovery for, you know, the fifth or sixth time in her life. Um, she really never — they never exacted anything from her and she was always very pretty. She has beautiful dark hair, beautiful dark eyes and a real girlie-

girl. And I think it was a great burden on her because, you know, she's had a life that I don't think I could endure. And she's – she keeps trying to stand up now, as an adult, she battles every day, battles that I don't think I could win.

ANDERSON: What's your relationship like? Or what was it like as children?

APUZZO: As children, it was terrible. I mean, you could tell, you know. I would get into trouble. She'd not get into trouble. I did well in school, she did not do well in school. I was a tomboy, she was a girlie-girl. She was pretty, I was smart.

ANDERSON: One would think the two of you would have been allies.

APUZZO: No, we weren't – we weren't allies and when she began to drink, um, which is when my father left home and she was about 16 or 17 at the time, and I guess she was smoking marijuana, and I have a tremendous problem being around people who are out of control. It just really bothers me a lot. So we really didn't have any relationship at all for many years. You know, we'd talk a little but, you know, when she was drinking, I couldn't be around her. And she was – she became really very controlling in a – in the way that alcoholics become controlling. But we have a wonderful relationship now. She doesn't live far from here and so we see each other, we go to lunch and enjoy. But we talk almost every day.

ANDERSON: Talk about politics in your family. What were your parents' political leanings?

APUZZO: Well, my great-grandmother, my grandmother, Mamadon, they called her. I don't know what that meant, but they called her Mamadon. And Mamadon and my grandfather, they sent gold to Mussolini. [laugh] These were, woah, you know. They were very conservative. My father was a republican. My father would have republican signs on his lawn in Clintondale when I was working for Mario Cuomo. I would be, like, what is with you?

ANDERSON: But he wasn't doing that to be provocative. He really was –

APUZZO: No, that's – well, you know.

ANDERSON: Those were his true – right.

APUZZO: He was – I don't know why. But you know, they were working class people. They were – they were poor working class people and they came here and they did get into the union movement. My grandfather

was a tailor, my grandmother was a seamstress. My mother worked – you know, my mother had many jobs when I was young. She worked in a pocketbook factory. She worked for Catholic Charities. She worked as a waitress on Zerega Avenue in the Bronx at a diner. I mean, these people worked hard, you know? They worked hard and they had – they had a tremendous, um, a tremendous sense of burden on them, you know? I sometimes think they were totally unprepared for – for life, and the way life moved. Um, so, there were no flaming liberals in my family, at all. No one I can think of.

ANDERSON: Did you talk about politics in your home?

APUZZO: No.

ANDERSON: So you don't remember getting any political messages?

APUZZO: Oh, no-no-no-no-no. No-no-no-no. We watched the, you know, after the war, of course, we watched all the pictures on television, all the, you know, victory at sea, the crusades, all these pictures that were on television documenting World War II, and we would watch that. But, you know, there was no discussion of politics whatsoever. I'm sure they had feelings. My grandfather read the Italian newspaper every day, so I'm sure he had, you know, strong feelings but I'm sure that we wouldn't have seen eye to eye at any point.

ANDERSON: And what was your father's profession?

APUZZO: My father was a mechanic. He worked – as a child, when I was a child, he worked for a cab company, Pomely Cab Company in New York City as a mechanic. And, uh, when I got a little older, he and his brother opened up a gas station in the Bronx, on White Plains Road in the Bronx, and he worked six days a week, 12 hours a day, and he worked hard. He was – he worked hard. It was not a life that was easy. You're on – he was the mechanic so he was under the cars on a cement floor, which sometimes it was so cold you could feel the cold through your shoes. Out pumping gas in those days. No machines. You don't put the card in. You go out and people bought two dollars worth of gas, or a dollar's worth of gas. And that meant you put on your coat and went out and pumped the gas for them. Um, so my – my father worked hard. He wasn't a very good businessman but he worked hard.

ANDERSON: And he left your mom after twenty years?

APUZZO: He left – he left my mother, yeah, my mother, my mother wanted to move up to the area she lived in when she was younger, which is south of here, around Washingtonville, and it would be, today, would seem to

me, that a couple would say, gee, that's going to be a long distance for me to commute, dear.

ANDERSON: Let's talk about this.

APUZZO: Let's talk about it. But my mother found a house she loved and it was a house she remembered when she was a child and it was the house on the hill in Salisbury Mills and we had to have that house and so they bought that house. They didn't have any money. They probably borrowed it from, you know, somebody else in the family. They bought the house and my father then commuted every other night or whatever the arrangement was and you know, that's – that was the beginning of the end. I'm sure he resented having to work all day and then every other day, driving up to Salisbury Mills from the Bronx. And it was a big house and, you know, my mother spent her time keeping it clean and neat and making it beautiful and I remember one day saying to her, when the family was together, "One day you're going to be all alone in a very clean house." And that's exactly what happened to her.

When he left, my mother had a nervous breakdown, literally. She checked herself into Albany State, had a full treatment of shock treatment. It was my first year of teaching, and it's where I learned to uh, really love teaching, because you could go inside and close the door and for 50 minutes, nothing else was in your mind except the kids in front of you and what you wanted to get across that day. And then that ten minutes in between classes, back to reality, back to the thought of your mother in a – in that state, and so...

ANDERSON: How long did she stay there?

APUZZO: It seemed like a long time. In the course of the time she was there, I drove up one day. I had a Mercury Comet, which rhymes with vomit.

ANDERSON: Sounds like a sexy car. [laugh]

APUZZO: Oh, no, but it blew up on the road. The engine blew up on my way up to Albany, and when I got there, my mother – she was so out of it, all she could think of was that - why was I late? Why was I late? You know, I mean, she was just – was gone, you know. She would think that you were eight and having a party, and just a very – tragic. But you know what it said to me? How could you give so much of yourself over, that when this man leaves, you have nothing? Nothing. I mean, she wanted to kill herself. It was a – it was a real lesson in trying to retain yourself, even in a relationship, even in a marriage. How could you let that much of you be so dependent on your role as the wife? So...

ANDERSON: Did she recover?

APUZZO: She did. She recovered. And it's kind of an amusing story. She came home after her treatments and went through some other terrible, I mean, she would go through periods of hysterical blindness. I moved home – I moved out when I went to college and I never went back until this situation. She um, she went through periods of hysterical blindness, seizures, and you know, not recognizing us and all of the things you see when things like this happen to people. And I got so frustrated, I was so beside myself because here was my sister doing poorly in school, starting to drink, hanging around with a bad crowd. I was – you know, I was 21, it was my first year in teaching. What do I know? And my mother was, she would, like, lay in bed for days and not comb her hair and so on.

In a frantic moment of what would my mother do to me if I behaved this way? I took her out of bed. I kind of put her in the shower, dressed her, brought her to a beauty parlor, through her down in a chair, told them, "I'll be back in two hours. Do whatever you have to do to fix her up." Got her out of that chair, waltzed her over to JC Penney's which was just opening up in Newburg, stood there and made her fill out an employment form, my mother retired from JC Penney's like twenty years later. She got to be a manager of a catalog department, both here in New York and in Pennsylvania. She got married a second time. But she retired, you know, like, twenty years after. Maybe twenty-five years. I don't know how many years she worked for them, but that's how she got her start at JC Penney's.

ANDERSON: And that was a trajectory, there weren't dips after that day?

APUZZO: Oh, there were some dips, but you know, it was, like, you have a responsibility, and you have to do this, and when I was a kid, what my mother would do, when I did something wrong, when I was really a child, she would say, "Virginia, come over here, pull down your pants and get on my knee." And that's how I'd get a spanking. And you'd pull down your own pants and climb on her knee and she would spank you. So all I could think of was, what would my mother do? [laugh]

ANDERSON: Do you think she would have received a different diagnosis today? Or, what's your sense of your mother's mental health?

APUZZO: My sense is – you know, I think a lot of it was her physical health. I think whatever she went through in her twenties, whatever kind of cancer that was, you know, I don't know what it was, but whatever – whatever it was, I think, caught up with her during the change – during what would be menopause – I don't know whether it was meno- I don't know what it was. Um, the sacrifices she made. The struggles she made.

She was the only one in her family never to have a divorce and when my father took off, her big pride was “I’m the only one that kept my family. I didn’t succumb to drinking. I kept my family together.” And now, she didn’t have that, you know. She didn’t have her role and she didn’t have her identity. And her children were out of the house, or in their own lives, and she was a victim, you know? She just became a victim. And until she – until she could gain her sense of self, another self, um, she struggled.

But once she got that other self, there was no stopping her. My mother died only two years ago, and she was a fighter. She was a fighter. And all I could think back to was this is – now, after she got through it, it was now that’s the woman who was pregnant and unmarried in 1940, and managed not to get an abortion, not to kill herself, not to do all of the horrible things that happened to women in 1940. She had the excuse that her husband went off to war. So...

ANDERSON: Yeah. How much – I mean, it sounds like she, in a lot of ways, was driven mad by the - in moments, not over a lifetime- by the restrictions. I mean, this is a woman’s story, you know?

APUZZO: Oh, there’s no question. There’s no question. The restrictions, the role, the imposition of roles, the responsibility, the – the sense that you have to ask for what you want.

ANDERSON: Right, and I guess my question is how much of that did you get at this age of 21, having seen-?

APUZZO: Oh, I wanted no part of it, no way.

ANDERSON: How much did this propel you to become the person that you were going to be?

APUZZO: Oh, absolutely. Oh, I didn’t need to wait for my mother to have a nervous breakdown. I just took one look at the fact that if – when I was in high school, when I’m 18, I’m going to have to either get married or get out. And, um, I thought, well, let’s see. How do I get out of here?

ANDERSON: Was there a lot of support for you going to college?

42:30

APUZZO: No, none, zero. ZERO. As a matter of fact, my parents moved up here to Salisbury – that’s when they moved. So I didn’t get – you know, I couldn’t –

ANDERSON: You were about college age at the time? You were 18?

APUZZO: I was college age – I just finished, I just finished at Cathedral High School in New York and then I – we moved up here in that summer. Well, I had a Regent’s diploma so I couldn’t – in New York State, that means, you know, you really did all your college prep stuff, so I couldn’t get a job because no one would hire a kid with a Regent’s diploma in the summer time, so I decided to go to college. I figured that would give me four more years that I wouldn’t have to get married. And uh, and I’d already been in a relationship. So, but, no-no-no-no. As soon as I knew that I was a homosexual, which was, you know, I was –

ANDERSON: Ten.

APUZZO: Ten, eleven, yeah. I knew I had to do something. There had to be a way out. For me, the way out was to be smart. Study in school, get out. Get good marks in school, you’ll go to college. Go to college, you can, you know, go to Peru. Just get out.

ANDERSON: And you figured that out on your own.

APUZZO: Oh, yeah. My sense was you can’t really – you’re going to have to give something up, and I had to give up family for that. I had to give up that – those aunts and those uncles and those cousins and all those, you know, that together sense that I had as a child. I had to get away from it, because if I stayed there, I would – there would have been the push, the pressure, to just go off and get married and, you know, you’re 18. Get married. When I told my father I wanted to go to college, I said I could take out a federal loan and I only have to pay back half. And he said, “I cheat on my income tax. I’m not gonna give you my tax form.” So I had to take out a state loan, which meant I had to pay it all back, even though I taught. But you know, I did it. So, it was OK.

ANDERSON: When – you went to SUNY Purchase, right?

APUZZO: No, I went to SUNY-New Paltz.

ANDERSON: SUNY-New Paltz, that’s right, sorry. So did you stay at home and go to classes or did you move to New Paltz?

APUZZO: Oh, no. I took out a loan. I went – I lived in the dorm. I was in the sorority.

ANDERSON: That wasn’t so far from home. It would have been possible to commute.

APUZZO: Well, it wasn’t so far from home. It wasn’t so far from home, but the only thing I got from my father for college was three dollars a week allowance. Now, gas was 25 cents a gallon and cigarettes were 25 cents

a pack. I bought – I bought a car from my father and I paid him and I decided no more smoking for me because I'd rather move than smoke. But –

ANDERSON: How did your mom feel about your going to college?

APUZZO: She thought it'd be great. She said as she drove me there, "You'll meet your husband here." She was disappointed I didn't meet my husband there.

ANDERSON: So what was SUNY New Paltz like? What year were you there? '62 – is that right?

APUZZO: Let's see. '59. I graduated at high school in '59, so '59 to '63. It was great. It was wonderful. I had a ball. I loved it. I thought I – I stepped out of the college union building, the CUB, looked down at the main building and behind it were the Mohonk Mountains, and it was fall, and I thought, "All I have to do is learn and I can stay here. All I have to do is study and I can stay here. This is fabulous. I'm away from home. I can do what I want. This is fabulous." So I had a – I had a ball. As a matter of fact, there's a group of us who graduated in '63 who are, you know, are kind of buddies through the e-mail and we meet for lunch. We'll meet for lunch in another week and a half or so.

ANDERSON: A lot of you came back to the area?

APUZZO: Uh, some of us are back to the area but some of us come to get together. And it was – it was a wonderful experience. Most of us at New Paltz were city kids, and we- we were in the country. And we were away from home, you know. We were kids that grew up in the 50s, the 40s and the 50s and you know what home was – home. You got a chance to meet people of such diverse backgrounds. The president of the college was a – was a real Afro-Asian buff. I then majored in African-Asian studies. In 1959-63. You know? I was a history major and I said, "We're not going to teach world history for the rest of our lives and American history. There's other parts of this world." And this president of the college was very big on that. So, I took courses from Arab professors and African professors and I had an Ethiopian roommate and it was terrific. Remember, I'd come out of – where diversity meant you had Irish friends. That's what diversity meant. You know, you went to – you went to Catholic school. You had, you had Irish and Italian kids, some African-American kids, but there was no diversity. But New Paltz was like stepping into the world.

That little campus, it opened up a whole world to me, and as I talked to my classmates, it did that for them, too. We came out of a very, um, a really protected shelf from our youth, and stepped into a place that said

the world is bigger and you can fit into it. You can be a part of that, you know, and here's what you have to do. You have to step out, you have to leave some things behind you, you know, and – it was terrific. I loved it.

ANDERSON: Was there activism on campus at that time?

APUZZO: Oh, well, I got into student government and I was the treasurer of student council and we had our little demonstration. Our position was no tuition, and we laid down on the thruway. [laugh]

ANDERSON: What was it? No tuition?

APUZZO: No tuition. Our position was no tuition. A group of us went and laid down on the thruway, and we did a little investigation to find out that the student activity fee was being – for athletics was being spent in some little store here in Kingston, so we had a hearing in the student council. And I just asked my friends, I said, “These are my memories. Do you remember?” The coach got so angry he picked up a chair to throw it at us. [laugh] So, we – we, you know, for kids who came out of the 40s and the 50s, we managed to uh, to rumble a little.

ANDERSON: Yeah, and that was your first experience being politically active, wasn't it?

APUZZO: You know, I always ran for class president in high school, whatever it was. Wherever there was a little, you know, a little thing to do.

ANDERSON: But did the issues for class president in high school broaden out beyond?

APUZZO: No.

ANDERSON: OK. So this is your first experience engaging with other political issues.

APUZZO: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And uh, and it was very – it was very exhilarating. It was very exhilarating.

ANDERSON: What new talents did you discover in yourself?

APUZZO: Well, I discovered for the first time that I could speak in front of a group, that I could be persuasive. I discovered that people really want to do what ennobles them. They have to be helped to see they're capable of that. You have to have them believe that they can be moved to do something bigger, better, nobler than they think of themselves. And then

when I began teaching, I taught history, and it was the Kennedy election, and it was, you know, I mean, it was that period, you know?

ANDERSON: When did you discover your politics were veering in a different direction from your parents, in high-school? Was it that early on?

APUZZO: Oh, yeah, I mean, it was – it was always – you know, when I was, like, 12 or – but not 13, I wasn't in high school yet. I went to a party – one of the toughest guys in the neighborhood, Frankie Manaco said, "You know, my cousin's having a party, you know, do you want to come? My cousin's blind." So we went to this part of this blind cousin of his, and um, there were African-American guys there. They were all blind. I was, like, if it was – 1941, '51, '52, '53. Let's say 1953, so I was 12 years old, before high school. Maybe I was a freshman in high school. So I'm 13. We go to the party and this guy asks me to dance. African-American guy. 1953. I danced with him. Of course. But I thought I'd have to tell my mother this. I mean, do you believe this? Astonishing that this – this was my life, you know? But I keep reminding myself, I was born before World War II.

ANDERSON: It was the context; this isn't a personal failing.

APUZZO: So I went home and I – and I said to my mother – she said, "Did you have a nice time at Frankie's cousin's party?" "Yes, I did." "Who was there?" I said, "There were a lot of blind people there." She said, "Did you dance?" And I said, "Yes. A guy asked me to dance. He was black." And she said, "And you danced with him?" I said, "Ma, he was blind. He doesn't know what color I am. Why should I care what color he was?" [laugh] But that's what I mean, you see? We lived in a very – a very insulated way. But I – right then, you know, there. This was a situation where I was in this situation. It's 1953, '53, and I thought, he has no idea what color I am, why should I care what color he is? And that led – when I- when I went home to discuss with my mother – that's – that was kind of the beginning of my sense of color in the world, and that the situation of a person being blind made me turn something around for myself.

When I went to high school, then I had for the first time, African-American friends. My elementary school didn't have any because school is built on neighborhoods and I lived in an Italian section – an Italian-Irish section of the Bronx, which to this day isn't integrated. So, I could feel then that my – my sense of right and wrong, my sense of why do – why do grownups say one thing and do something else? Why do we have all this brotherhood talk in school – I mean, I really believed it. That's the thing, you know? You went to school and they taught you, you know, brotherhood, you had that brotherhood. Even if though, you know, there's nobody – there was no test of brotherhood because you

lived in a neighborhood in which everybody could've been your brother, you know? But stepping out of that, my response was, What's the big deal? What's the issue here?

ANDERSON: But it was a big deal at home and in your community, so you were already swimming upstream.

APUZZO: At home and in my community, yeah. It was-

ANDERSON: What do you think the experience was like for the black kids at your high school? Do you remember the atmosphere?

APUZZO: Well, we had - yeah, we had uh, we were an archdiocesan school, which meant that the archdiocese paid the bulk of the cost of the school. We paid ten dollars a month tuition when I first started, so kids came from all over the city. So you got kids who were from different parts of the city and so housing broke down. And uh, I think, having - maybe it's my imagination, but I think having Catholicism in common and having it be a Catholic school in those days, made it a heck of a lot easier than if it were a public school with the same complexion. But I don't know, you know?

ANDERSON: But you don't remember an atmosphere of hostility?

APUZZO: No, I don't remember that, no. But remember I graduated in '59.

ANDERSON: But you were there during Brown, and a lot of public awareness about integration and race. So,...

APUZZO: But the school, the school literally was integrated.

ANDERSON: Right.

APUZZO: I mean it was - we probably had, I would say one third of the school was African-American - and I went back there to teach. I taught at Cathedral when I entered the convent.

ANDERSON: OK.

APUZZO: Which was eight years later, but uh,...

ANDERSON: Well, I guess we'll talk about how the school had changed when we talk about the convent more. Before we end, just tell me quickly about the demographics at SUNY at the time in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and what do you remember about the student makeup?

APUZZO: I – let's see. We had a lot of foreign students. We had African-American students. We mostly – you know, kids from Long Island and New York City. A few kids from upstate New York but State Universities are upstate so they'd probably go there. Of the whole crowd of us today, there was one kid that was, you know, rich. Everybody was working class, low-middle-class.

ANDERSON: Half women?

APUZZO: You know, I think it was probably close. It was probably close. You know, you live in a dormitory and then you're in a sorority, then you're – you know, you're in groups and I always was in the groups with a lot of girls. To me, it was –

ANDERSON: So the sorority was appealing in the same way that Catholic all-girls school was appealing? You knew that it would be a place where you would fit in? It wasn't about you trying to conform or be—

APUZZO: Oh, no, sororities weren't that. The sororities there were party girls. We were partying. We had parties. We'd drink beer, we'd raise hell, have a good time, party among ourselves, party with guys. But it was always just a good time. Having a good time. Singing, laughing, pranking, pranksters but it had nothing to do with where, you know, the kind of notion that sororities – we had a sorority like that but it wasn't ours.

ANDERSON: Oh, OK. Well, let's talk about the sorority in the context of sexuality when we come back. So I'm just going to pause this for a second.

APUZZO: Sure.

END OF TAPE 1

## TAPE 2

ANDERSON: So, tape 2. The topic of your sexuality is so huge. Is there a place where you think it makes sense to begin, is that – do you want to talk about coming of age in terms of knowing you were different? Knowing you were gay or whatever word that you used, all the way back to 10, high school? Do you want to start with SUNY?

APUZZO: Let me talk about something that, you know, people could relate to, I think, as least, in my generation. There was a high profile case many years ago of Christine Jorgenson, the first person to get visibility viz. a viz. a sex change. It happened that Christine Jorgenson lived on Zerega Avenue in the Bronx.

ANDERSON: No kidding.

APUZZO: And in – in my – it's very hard for me to talk about sexuality and not talk about religion, because the troubling thing to me about sexuality was – is redemption possible? I'm Italian Catholic. So the issue of redemption is very, very significant to me, and particularly when I was younger. My question was, "What am I?" and "Is it OK? Is this something that – will I go to hell for this? Is this what falls under the category of bad thoughts when I go to confession? Am I going to live a sin for the rest of my life?" And if I do – remember, I come out of the Baltimore catechism. Why did God make you? God made you to know Him, love Him, serve Him in this life and be happy with Him forever in heaven. Am I going to get there? And uh, as a child, as a youngster, 11, maybe 12, whenever Christine Jorgenson's issue came up, I would walk to Zerega Avenue to just see if I could find if that was me. Is that me?

Years later, I was doing a television show and I was in the green room with Christine Jorgenson, and uh, I was so taken with how not – how not – this was a person who had become a caricature of whatever, and so she was preoccupied with her makeup and her earrings. I was trying to tell her, "When I was very young, your case was in the paper," and I was try – I was in the process of trying to share something significant and she was really into her earrings, which were excessive. And I thought, you know, wearing very different – my experience with her is not an experience that I could share with her.

Um, but that kind of , what are you then? What are you? Took the joy out of discovering my sexuality and rejoicing in relating. It took the joy out of it. I mean, you could forget it for a minute but there was a constant – it was like, like a low-grade headache in your soul. What is this? What is it?

I can remember when I was in high school, one of the most poignant moments for me were the teachers. I went to a woman who I thought was the holiest nun. Thirteen years old, I mean, how do you figure

who's holy, you know? But I went to Sister Pierre, who I thought was the holiest nun and I said, I devised a puzzle and I took my dilemma and tried to put it in this puzzle, and I said, "If God made me with three arms, would I be expected to use each of the arms?" Asking, "Can I use what I have that I didn't go out and ask for but it's who I am?" And she said, "I don't know what you're talking about." So, she may have been the holiest but she wasn't the brightest. The moral of the story is, holy does not equal bright. [laugh] At least to me.

But I really spent so much time thinking of this. So I thought – today I would describe it as this is an attribute of me. Can I use this attribute? And that really was the over- I mean, I was obsessed with this question, for most of my sexuality was dominated by this question. It was dominated by, Will this interfere with me, with my redemption as a person as a soul? And I think that's so sad, that a youngster should have to ponder something so heavy, so young, you know, and it is essentially the weight of that, that moved me to come into the movement, and has kept me very much a believer and very much a Catholic despite all the insanity in this church. I'm not a Catholic because of the church. I'm Catholic because it is who I am. It's a part of who I am, like every other part of who I am.

ANDERSON: When and how did you reconcile it in terms of your faith?

APUZZO: Well, I went into the convent to reconcile it. At 26 years old, I-I really – you know, when you ask, you wonder what your life is supposed to be about. It's a basic question. I mean, people need to wonder that. It's part of what – part of why you have a life. What are you doing with it? And um, by the time I was 26, I had been made head of the social studies department K-12 in the district I taught in. So, OK, I finished this career, now what do I do? [laugh]

ANDERSON: Right, right. You're retired at 26.

APUZZO: I thought, well, you know, there's a reason that, you know, I'm kind of zipping through this. It must be that there's something different I should do, and the convent is always – it always had been a part of my thinking. I wanted to enter the convent when I was 16. As a matter of fact, that's how I found out I was illegitimate. I wanted to enter the Good Shepherd sisters and in those days, they worked exclusively with unwed mothers, and I came home and I told my mother I wanted to enter the Good Shepherds and in an outburst, my mother told me that, and in those days, the convent wouldn't take you if you were illegitimate. So I don't know what moved me to want to go work with unwed mothers, but-

ANDERSON: And that wasn't an obstacle ten years later for you?

- APUZZO: Well, it might have been for the Good Shepherds but it wasn't for the Sisters of Charity. Mother Seton was married and had children herself. But that question – that question has and is in some respects an abiding presence with me. Um, so I entered the convent with the notion that I needed to resolve this. And if it took twenty years to resolve it, I would stay for twenty years. If it took fifty years, I would stay for the rest of my life, but I was going to resolve this. This was the fundamental question for my life at that young age. And uh,
- ANDERSON: Let me back up for just a second.
- APUZZO: Sure.
- ANDERSON: In addition to having the realization of your homosexuality, were you also practicing or sexually active? Had you had relationships?
- APUZZO: I wasn't sexually active until I was 17, 17-18. It was probably right after – probably right after high school, right after graduation.
- ANDERSON: And then throughout college, were you – did you have relationships with women when you were in college?
- APUZZO: Yeah, I did.
- ANDERSON: OK.
- APUZZO: They all got married. I began to think that was what my life would be. I'd have a relationship and they'd go off and get married and I'd have to go to their wedding, and it was heartbreaking. You love these people and they go get married.
- ANDERSON: Right.
- APUZZO: And you have to be there, because everyone thinks you're best friends. But uh-
- ANDERSON: OK. But at 26, you had a significant amount of experience, sexually, with other women?
- APUZZO: Uh, yes. I had had two lovers over a period of time.
- ANDERSON: Yeah, OK.
- APUZZO: And, and I had one as I was going into the convent.

ANDERSON: So you really knew that this is what you were at that point.

APUZZO: Oh, there was no question of what I was, absolutely. Oh, yeah. And I went in and studied theology. I really studied theology. I didn't study religious education. I took theology courses at Manhattan College and really used my time to try to work through this, and had, you know, the stories of the *Adventures of Jenny in the Convent* are a whole fabulously hilarious wonderful thing. Because it was the time that the church was really—it was the opening up of the church. John Paul XXIII, and so things were changing in the convent, and you know, just give me a little chaos, and I can push it. [laugh] So there were wonderful things of, you know, my going and leasing a car while I'm in a habit and going home and saying I've leased a car and having them, like, "WHAT?" But that's another story. But when I – when I resolved it, when I could answer to myself that it is – that this is something I have to use to, um, it's here, it's in me for a reason and it has to be pursued. But I came out of the convent and got involved in the movement. Came out in '69.

ANDERSON: Right. What kind of theology were you reading and how did that help you?

APUZZO: Faith and unbelief. I was reading redemptive politics. Think of this time. This time in the church was activist. It was an activist time. It was a lot of situation ethics, a lot of relative-relativism, a lot of sense of place and circumstance, and a church that was willing to open itself up to people. It was opening up. It was recognizing that oppression in any form is not a good thing. It cramps the soul. And the people who were getting visibility in the church were people who were resisting and protesting and asserting and-and I was totally persuaded that that is a sanctified pursuit. That protest is necessary for change. That resistance is a good and decent thing. And so I did.

ANDERSON: So it really sparked your political activism.

APUZZO: Absolutely. Absolutely.

ANDERSON: In addition to helping you reconcile your sexuality?

APUZZO: Absolutely, absolutely. It became my politics.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

APUZZO: It became my politics. And it – it was possible for me in the community, now you're looking at community today, go back to '69 and '70, '71, '72, those 70s, and think about how you had to present the larger isms to a community that was very singular in its pursuit. That was very

singular. And I felt that I could bring a sense of something bigger, wider, broader, in a message, when I had the opportunity to bring a message.

ANDERSON: How did your family and friends react when you went into the convent at 26?

APUZZO: When I went into the convent? They thought I was crazy. I had just – the year before, I bought a brand-new Thunderbird Town Landau. As I said, I, you know, in the little world of your old teacher, I - you know, I was there, I could have stayed, I could have been principal.

ANDERSON: You were very successful.

APUZZO: And I, you know, drove in in a brand-new Thunderbird [laugh] and realized that, you know, these are not the things that – these are the things you walk away from, you know. I was no more a brand-new Thunderbird than a hole in the wall, you know. But, you know, you taste a thing, you try a thing, sometimes to know that it's not you.

ANDERSON: Did you maintain your friends from college and –

APUZZO: I - what I did was, what I did was divorce myself. I really did sever a lot of relationships, though the woman I was seeing at the time, who was still very much a part of my life in – she and her partner, came down and waited outside the convent every Saturday, just to get a glimpse of me walking wherever we'd have to go. It was, like, this sweet, sweet sadness.

ANDERSON: Did you maintain a relationship with her once you went into the convent?

APUZZO: No.

ANDERSON: No. OK.

APUZZO: I played by the rules.

ANDERSON: Contact with her? Only just this distant gazing?

APUZZO: No, I wouldn't do that, no.

ANDERSON: You talk about, in your piece and the *Lesbian Anthology* about a woman coming to your room, and you get this sense from – from the anthology that lesbianism is –

APUZZO: It's not lesbianism. It's not lesbianism.

ANDERSON: OK. Well, so there may be other...

APUZZO: My experience of it is that before I – before my group went in, because we all had professions. I was in a very small group, a very experimental group. But before that, girls went in at 16 and 17 years old. They had no – and think of when they went in. When I – when I was stationed at Cathedral, there were, there were 35 nuns in my house. I was 26. The sister next chronologically in age to me was 35 and she had been, oh, 25-20 years in the convent. These people went in very young, and they went in in what time frame? They went in before any liberation anything, you know. Some of them in the 50s and the 40s. They had no – think of a 16-year-old in the 40s, in the 50s, you know. This was pre-Archie, pre-Betty and Veronica. [laugh] And then, they're thrown into a homosocial environment. Their sexuality has never been explored. They go through all of the emotional changes in a woman's life with no outlet, no place to talk about it, no way to discuss sexuality. It – it was tragic. It was so tragic to me, when a sister said to me, "I tie my hands to the top of my bed at night for fear of committing a sin of impurity." We're talking about masturbating. And these women thought they would go to hell. I grew up thinking I would go to hell. If you – however, in a male order, you could masturbate X-number of times a month, you know.

ANDERSON: Oh, I didn't know that.

APUZZO: Neither did we. But uh, it- I wouldn't call it lesbianism.

ANDERSON: OK.

APUZZO: There – it's a frantic longing for some kind of context, some way to express this critically important part of self in an atmos – in an environment in which you can't talk about it. In those days. It's much different now.

ANDERSON: Is it?

APUZZO: Oh, yes. Yes. The Sisters of Charity has an open lesbian in the community. My Mistress of Novices has been here. She's a little 83-year-old nun, now, but she's as sharp as a tack and is a good person.

ANDERSON: So you would say that your experience was unique then in terms of knowing that you're homosexual going into the convent and then maintaining—

- APUZZO: Oh, absolutely. Having had a sexual life before I entered; the women around me, by and large, all of the ones who had been there had not.
- ANDERSON: They were different when they went in.
- APUZZO: They were – they were, you know, yeah.
- ANDERSON: But then, living a lesbian life after the convent – it seems – I mean, I guess maybe my impression is – is skewed, then, but I seemed to recall many stories of coming to know a lesbian life within the convent and leaving the convent for that reason and living a lesbian life.
- APUZZO: Oh, yes, many – right, right. I know women who did that, but I'm talking about the women – you see, I was in a house where the women were older. I was the youngest in the house. I was 26 years old. The next one was 35 and then it went up. So the women were older. So the women I came into contact with my first year there were women who when-when I had those encounters with them, um, were tragic figures to me. Very tragic, very sad, wrenched my heart to see the pain they were in. You'd see a sister not show up for mass in the morning and you'd know she probably masturbated the night before. She's – you look for her at lunchtime, she's over at St. Francis going to confession. What can a nun do that would make her have to go to confession from communion yesterday to – what? It-it was very sad, it was very sad.
- ANDERSON: Did you develop lasting relationships in the convent? You mentioned a couple of people are still in your life.
- APUZZO: Oh, yeah. Agnes is still in my life, and – yeah, several sisters are still very much. And many people left who are still in my life. Some lesbians, some not.
- ANDERSON: You went in, you knew it, but you said that you knew it was temporary.
- APUZZO: Yeah, for however long it would take.
- ANDERSON: To reconcile this question.
- APUZZO: Right, absolutely.
- ANDERSON: So, for four years, how did you know that it was time to go?
- APUZZO: It was after three years. I knew it was time to go because-
- ANDERSON: '66 to '69.

APUZZO: Right. Because I – because I resolved the issue for me. The issue for me was, this is who you are, this is what you think it means, and this is what you must do with it.

ANDERSON: And you couldn't do that work in the convent?

APUZZO: No, oh, no. Yes, I got to go speak in Cincinnati on gay rights, right.  
[laugh]

ANDERSON: What was your awareness from '66 to '69 of the growing social movement? It was not really gay liberation, although maybe you were aware of the homophile movement.

APUZZO: No, I taught, I taught Afro studies at Cathedral, the Institute of Black Studies in the Archdiocese, and um, then went up to Mount St. Vincent and taught teachers how to teach it. And I had a grant to study at Brooklyn College and was very much involved in Asian affairs there, India.

ANDERSON: And what was your source of knowledge or awareness about women's issues, women's movements or liberation?

APUZZO: At that time, I wasn't at all focused on it. I wasn't at all focused. I got focused on it when I left the convent and I went to the Gay Academic Union, and in that context, I met some fabulous women. You know, Joan Nestle, Charlotte Bunch, Betty Powell and I were lovers for ten years, um, you know, just –

ANDERSON: I'm interviewing Betty next month.

APUZZO: Oh, give her my love. It's her birthday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of June.

ANDERSON: Oh, is it?

APUZZO: Yeah.

ANDERSON: We're meeting in the first week of July.

APUZZO: Oh, she's – she is just one of my very favorite people. And so animated. And does she have a story.

ANDERSON: Yeah. How'd you know about the Gay Academic Union?

APUZZO: Somebody probably said, "Do you want to come to a meeting?" and I went there and I must say, it was – it was a place that I could see myself. I could – you know, you look – when you're trying to find yourself, you

look to see if you could find yourself in other people, and when I went to the Academic Union, I could find myself. I had never been to a gay bar, in my life. But I went to the Gay Academic Union. I went to LFL [Lesbian Feminist Liberation.] It was in the context of LFL and the Gay Academic Union that I, you know, became aware of women and women's work and the women's movement and where that was going and what that meant, and came to it with – with about as much ignorance as anybody could come to it.

And uh, met, um, in many instances, not any of the women I mentioned, but in many other instances, I met striking self-righteousness. I met women who thought they – they had defined it and that was it. And it was just so unelastic to me. There was no growth mode. You know, you couldn't, like, say, I need to learn [laugh]. It was, like, wrong. You know, it was sort of, like, whoa. Whoa. I'm going to go back to the piano bar, here. It was very – ideologues abounded.

And the – I remember one instance at LFL which infuriated me and it was in the 70s, and oh, what is her name? You know her. This is what happens when you get a little older. Her partner was Jonathan what's-his-name. Dworkin. Andrea Dworkin. Andrea Dorkin was there and we were on a panel, and they were in LFL, and there was this group called Fort Tryon Dykes, I think. I think. And um, Andrea got up to speak, and I so heard – I don't know what she looks like now, but she was kind of a large woman and she had overalls on.

ANDERSON: I think that's how she's looked for the last thirty years.

APUZZO: Yeah. And, you know, she had a lot of hair and she really had a small voice, and she began to speak and somebody in the back of the room starting asking her about sleeping with pigs. You sleep with a pig, or you sleep with a – I mean, it was really – and I was – it was, like, at that moment, it was, like, what the hell is going on here? I really had this sense of outrage that you think you can be so right that you can cut – you think you can be so for women that you can cut another woman in half?

And it really was a very defining moment for me, that I really could not deal with that kind of militancy, for me. It wouldn't work for me. Not what I wanted. Not what made me feel loved and a part of a community and engaged. I think you need to feel you can make mistakes in a group and that you need to learn, you need to grow. I don't think you can enter a group and say, "I'm all grown and I'm just here to be one of the growsns." [laugh]

So I had a lot of trouble with that and – and I had a lot of trouble with women when I went into politics, mainstream politics. I had a lot of trouble when I wore a dress to campaign. But I campaigned in 1978. Not in Brooklyn Heights. In Fort Green, in Clinton Hill, in Boerum Hill.

Um, and people dress up to go to church there today. So, you do what you need to do in order to meet people where people are.

But I had a lot of support. I had tremendous support from a lot of women in the movement, and the –

ANDERSON: It seems like you found the gay and lesbian movement right away when you came out of the convent, GAU and places like that. What about feminism and the women's movement? What was your relationship?

APUZZO: My relationship with feminism and the women's movement came through the New York State Women's Political Caucus, the Manhattan Women's Political Caucus, the National Women's Political Caucus. In 1976, I lobbied the democratic platform committee for what was supposed to be NOW's four demands: right to choose, daycare, ERA, and lesbian and gay rights. I saw first-hand the duplicity around the commitment to lesbian and gay rights. I listened when some of the monuments in the feminist movement said we got three of four, that's not bad. Well, I was the fourth, and that ain't good. I was in the fourth group. And I – I spoke to them after. I spoke to the leadership of the National Women's Political Caucus and some of the NOW women and said, exactly. I said, "You know, I worked with you. I worked my heart out on abortion rights and on daycare. I felt like they were my issues. They are my issues. I fought like hell on ERA. But when it came to lesbian and gay rights, you know"-

ANDERSON: You were discarded.

APUZZO: We were, like, you know, well, we got three out of four ain't bad. And I, so I was very personal – it was just my own personal feeling. I felt very, uh, disenfranchised by some of my coalition experiences. But when I – when I chose to run for office, the – all of the women's political caucus groups were tremendously supportive. I learned my politics at the knee of those women. Um, Koryne Horbel who was head of the National Women's Political, Carolyn Reed who organized household workers in New York state, you know, Mary Freedlander in New York, Bella. These – these are the women who came to fundraisers, who supported me, an open lesbian running in Brooklyn in 1978. You know, it was, like, hello. And that's where I found – that's where I found collegiality. I found it in politics. I found it around "Let's go for this, let's get behind so-and-so. Let's move."

ANDERSON: And the feminism of the early 1970s – did that resonate with you, or was it something that you were involved with? CR groups or any of the actions, or even of the ideology? Was that something you related to?

APUZZO: The – yeah, we did actions, we did – I was engaged in some of that, and particularly through Lesbian Feminist Liberation. LFL. We did a lot of that stuff. And I – and I for the most part, LFL was a really terrific experience for me. We organized – I remember we organized a regional conference and we, (dog barking) I can't remember what it came out of. It came out of some effort, and it came to me that we should have a regional conference and bring all these women together and raise some money for women's projects. Uh, women – projects that could move women forward in a way and, you know, I wish I had some of the notes on that because some of the projects are still around today. You know. Jan Oxenburg was around. She's the producer for some of these television shows today. She was just getting involved in filming and some of the women from Olivia. I mean, it was just – it was – all of these things were new and we were able to do a little something to help some of these little fledgling projects move forward. So those kinds of things engaged me a great deal.

ANDERSON: Was it a label where – that you identified with? Feminist?

APUZZO: Lesbian-feminist. You had to have lesbian.

ANDERSON: It did.

APUZZO: Yeah, I never felt like if I went to a feminist – let me be very candid. I felt like if I were a lesbian, I needed to have a guitar. It didn't matter, you know? You were fine if you had a guitar. If you played a song, did a little folk song, that was great. But if you were in the power piece of it, if you were interested in lesbian feminist power, then you were going to embarrass them. But if you sang a song and everybody could sing in – that's real nice. And I – I had that experience several times.

ANDERSON: Not uncommon.

APUZZO: No, not uncommon at all. I think I was a little brash or a little, a little too straightforward or whatever. And always felt just a little left out.

ANDERSON: Yeah. So the gay and lesbian movement felt like more a natural fit or a home to you?

APUZZO: Absolutely. Yeah. And when AIDS came along, it was – I was head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, so, you know, there it was. And AIDS was then and is now a woman's issue.

ANDERSON: Absolutely.

APUZZO: But it wasn't seen that way.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

APUZZO: You were – you were dealing with men, you know. Why are you still dealing with men? That kind of rigidity and, I think, narrow perspective, um, has always offended me.

ANDERSON: So the separatism of lesbian feminism which you say you felt comfortable with and identified with, lesbian feminism, the separatism piece, though, was not comfortable for you?

APUZZO: No. I was not comfortable with the separatists. It just didn't do it for me. I met people who were angrier than they were mobile. More angry than mobilized. And it was the anger, it was the belligerence, the suspicion, the – that troubled me. It just didn't make me feel comfortable, and I felt I was always at odds, um, with that attitude in many people that I came into contact with. Um, so I think, you know, you have to find your niche. You have to find what works for you. Where it works for you. After a lifetime of discomfort, I wasn't about to identify with a situation that gave me more discomfort. I don't think that's – I don't think that's good mental health. [laugh]

ANDERSON: So, after the convent, did you have gay male friends or colleagues before – before organizational ties through the Task Force or what have you, but was that part of your social world?

APUZZO: That was my social world.

ANDERSON: It was.

APUZZO: Yeah. I didn't have any gay male friends before – after I came out of the convent right away. I was – I was – totally women, totally involved with women. Friends who were still in the convent, friends who had left the convent, um, lesbians. And in the Gay Academic Union, I actually – I actually made the motion to separate the women from the men, which I've – they ended up doing that and I think was a really bad move, and I've apologized to Jim Levin, who was opposing the motion, many times. You know, and we've remained friends through the years and I've said to him, virtually every time I've been with him, "Jim, I was wrong to do that." He argued frantically against that. You know, this was a – this was a wonderful group, I mean, Marty Duberman was in this group. Um, Bruce Voller. The women who were the literary giants in the lesbian galaxy today, these women were presenting papers at Gay Academic Union conventions and conferences. And why we ever thought we could do better separate than together, but...

ANDERSON: Well, what do you remember from the time? What was your motivation at the time? What were your frustrations?

APUZZO: My feeling was, that I became persuaded that the women had a real need to pursue the opportunity to have an organization on their own, and my experience with LFL was such a good one, uh, such a productive one, such an energizing one that I thought that since many women who I respected were interested in this separation, that that politically, it would be something to lend some support to. And I did. And I don't think it made the organization stronger. I think it made it weaker.

ANDERSON: How did LFL end?

APUZZO: I don't think it ended. It seemed to just, you know, -

ANDERSON: Fizzle out?

APUZZO: Dribble out. It needed a space. I'm not sure it ever got the space. I just don't know.

ANDERSON: So what years would your involvement with the group have been?

APUZZO: Well, uh, probably certainly through '78 when I ran. Probably ten years. Probably from '70 to '80. Certainly when I ran, they were very much a part of supporting me and the years before that, they were supportive. And then, in '80, when I went to the Fund for Human Dignity, I'm sure that I remained in contact with the individuals who were still there, and then the Task Force was in New York, so I'm sure we just continued to have – all through getting the bill through, yeah. We worked with LFL getting the bill through. Betty St. Terra and some of those women. So, you know, it would seem to me that in the early 80s, it was still and entity.

ANDERSON: Your involvement in lesbian life in the 70s. Was it limited to organizations like the Academic Union or LFL, or were you then introduced to the bars or softball or lesbian culture or other kinds of-?

APUZZO: I went to—the Duchess was a place, a good place. It was a terrific place. It was a bar and uh, I had not – I had not been to it. I'd been to the piano bar across the street which was Marie's Crisis Café.

ANDERSON: It's still there.

APUZZO: It was largely male and uh, Betty Powell and I would go there and Marie's Crisis, and when Betty and I went to Europe, was the early 70s, and I remember, like a week or so before, we went to Marie's Crisis and

sang songs, sitting around the bar, and they all wished us bon voyage. And that point, I had not been into the Duchess yet. So whenever Betty and I went to Europe, we maybe went in '71. I just have no idea. But when we came back, a guy was painting our house. An Irish guy was painting our house, a gay guy, and he asked if we'd been to the Duchess, and we hadn't. I hadn't. I don't think Betty had.

And so, one afternoon, he took me to the Duchess and we walked in. He walked in with me. I mean, I didn't know that men weren't allowed in. I was allowed in across the street, why wouldn't they be allowed in here? You know? And this is – this huge guy stood at the door, you know, these bouncers, and he said, "Are you gay?" I said, "Yeah." And that was my first introduction. I went in there, it was this dark, dingy place, didn't look at all happy, nobody really talked to anybody, and I thought, "Why do people come here? They can go across the street and sing?" [laugh]

But it became – it became a hangout and it's a shame so many things happened at that place that brought women together, and the drinks were watered down, and yeah, there was a bouncer and yeah, it probably gave money to the mob, but it was a place for women. You can just turn that off for a second...

ANDERSON: How did you and Betty meet?

43:00
-------

APUZZO: Betty taught at Cathedral High School when I was in the convent. She was the French teacher. Ms. Kelly. Ms. Betty Kelly. Thin, um, very proper, very prim. And a terrific teacher. Fabulous teacher. And of course, I was teaching black studies. So I would say to her, "Why don't you come up and see what I'm doing?" You know? And she would say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And she got married while we were – while I was there, and I thought, well, there goes Betty Powell – there goes Betty Kelly. Um, but uh, we met while I was at Cathedral. When I left there, I think she ended up at Brooklyn College when I was there. We may have come at the same time. She may have come right after me, but I was thrilled to see her. And we became fast friends, you know? Teaching and we'd talk – Betty talks very ra – do you know her?

ANDERSON: Uh-hm.

APUZZO: She talks very rapidly and very effusively and, oh, I just thought, gee, what a honey. And we just became friends. And I knew she'd been married. I knew her husband Bill. And I'll never forget, one day, I – it was right after Roberta Flack's song, "First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" came out. Man, I don't know what I was thinking, because I'm not aggressive. I called her up and I said, "Did you hear this Roberta Flack song?" I said, "Every time I hear it, I think of you." Well, hello. Listen to the words, jerk. Before you open your mouth. And uh, -

ANDERSON: So that was your big gallant come-on, huh?

APUZZO: No. I didn't say it as a come-on. I didn't say it as a come-on. I just said it because it was, like, whoop, it just came out of my mouth. But I didn't realize I said anything crazy then. But we went to – one time we went - I went up to her house and Betty came on to me, and it was like – she'll tell you the story if you ask her – I leapt off the couch and I said, "Oh, I don't think you want to do this. [laugh] I don't think you want to do this. I – I don't think." She assured me she did. But, uh, it was wonderful. I adore Betty. She will always be one of my most favorite people in the universe.

ANDERSON: So what year was this that you started your relationship?

APUZZO: Um, probably '70 to '80, '70 to some – in there. The 70s. Betty and I spent the 70s together. We grew up together in the 70s.

ANDERSON: And what were the challenges for the two of you as an interracial couple?

APUZZO: P-u-lease, p-u-lease, where we lived. That's why we moved to Brooklyn. We went to Dean Street where there were still boarding houses and where it was a very integrated neighborhood. Um, we, uh, Betty found the apartment. James Denmark was going to use it, an artist was going to use it but it wasn't big enough for him, so he told us about it and we moved in. It happened that the landlord was an integrated gay male couple, older, retired. And we—our experience as an interracial couple—and we went to Europe together, and I realized that if I were in Italy, I could look like an Italian if I didn't open my mouth. If I was in Germany, I could like a German if I didn't open my mouth. I could look like a French person if I didn't open my mouth. But Betty had no anonymity. Wherever she went, there she was. And wherever we went, it was clear. Women – white and black women did not socialize together.

ANDERSON: Right. So it was clear that you were a couple?

APUZZO: It was clear we were a couple, no matter where we went. No matter where we went. We didn't have to say a word. We were a couple. And we were – Betty was the – the president of the board of directors of the National Gay Task Force at the time, it was called that, and I was – I was head of the Gay Rights National Lobby. The two national organizations had each of us as chair of the board of directors, in one apartment. Well, Gay Rights National Lobby became the Human Rights Campaign Fund. So we –

ANDERSON: So you were a powerhouse duo?

APUZZO: Well, we were. We had – we had a lot of – a lot of punch to us. And we tried to use it in a way that was effective. We did a lot of - for those days, a lot of television together. Um, we did a lot of speaking out. We went to the Houston's Women Conference together. We were delegates together.

ANDERSON: And did you feel hostility from the women's community or the gay and lesbian community or was the racism only outside – when you traveled, your neighborhood.

APUZZO: Well, the homophobia was the homophobia and the racism was outside. I didn't feel – I certainly didn't feel the homophobia in the community. I felt, you know, I felt we um, I felt we were very comfortable together in the community.

ANDERSON: Even at Houston where there was so much struggle over lesbian issues?

APUZZO: Well-

ANDERSON: What was your experience at Houston like?

APUZZO: My experience with Houston was very, um, I was so pissed off that Carol Belamy was so tight-assed, you know? Just tight-assed. And I ended up fighting with her for years over, you know, what I felt was, we lesbians embarrass her. You know? She would say – we had one argument once in Brooklyn where I said – she said, “What about my life? What about my mother?” I said, “What? I don't have a mother? I don't have a life?” [laugh] I have a life and I have a mother. But I guess she was at the – she was in a different place, you know? But I felt like that mentality dominated. Even though Karen Burgston and Carol headed up our delegation, you know. Karen who was out and Carol who – I don't know what her life brings her today – I doubt that she's out today. But uh, the fact is that I still felt we had a lid on us, even though – and that – and that has made me angry with people who don't come out. You know, it's like, you know, you become a bigger obstacle than somebody who wasn't threatened.

But uh, I had a wonderful moment for myself at Houston. I don't know if – it's a small news piece, that a prostitute in, I believe, Madison, Wisconsin, was raped, and the agreement with Carol and everybody else at the, you know, the group, the feminist group at the conference was that this was our agenda and that's all we'll put in and we won't let any other resolutions up. Well, I just felt so strongly that the rape of a prostitute is a rape, period, period, that I moved outside the

agenda. And somewhere I have a picture of Carol arguing with me [laugh] about this. But we got a resolution out about that.

But, you know, that's what I mean, you know, you want to get something through so much, and I've seen it a million times in politics. You want to get something through so badly that you – you become so narrow in your focus that you can allow something, an issue of injustice, to fall by the wayside because you don't want to ruin your little testimony to justice, which – hello – you know, before you get it up, it's contaminated.

ANDERSON: And it's just so often a story of lesbians within the women's movement. Or women of color. I mean, it's... And you're at Brooklyn College during most of the 70s?

APUZZO: Uh, yeah. I came out of the convent. I'd already been hired by Brooklyn College. I had a grant to study there and then they hired me. And I remained affiliated with Brooklyn for 15 years. Betty and I taught together.

ANDERSON: You were teaching history? What were you teaching?

APUZZO: I was teaching the Politics of Urban Education, History and Philosophy of Education, blah-blah-blah. And uh, -

ANDERSON: Had a good experience at Brooklyn?

APUZZO: I had a wonderful experience. Team – I had a young group that we team taught together.

ANDERSON: You and Betty?

APUZZO: Betty and I team taught together. Yeah, we were – we taught together, I'm sure, several times. But there was another group of us that worked together and um, and it was very exciting. Secondary education, English and social studies. I did social studies, my partner did the English, and for all we know, it's still the curriculum that you have to deal with today. Things need to change.

ANDERSON: Yeah. And it was a comfortable place to be an out-lesbian?

APUZZO: I decided that it was going to be – listen. Irena Polizarri. You know the name Irena Polizarri? She was on the Board of Education in New York City. She was my dean. She hired me when I was in a habit and watched me come out of the convent, come out as a lesbian, and uh, at one point I had my hair, probably as short as it is now, and I met her, I had wire rim glasses on, and I looked at her and I said, "I'm gonna blow up your

library.” [laugh] She’s just the kind of person who would, like, have a nervous breakdown. But she – she was the person who stood in the way for Harvey Milk School and I actually engineered a meeting for Emery Hettrick and Damien Martin who put the school together to meet with her and, uh, she was just so – she was the archdiocese candidate on the Board of Ed. She was very gracious, very intransigent. So yes, Brooklyn. I made – I made Brooklyn a comfortable place. Betty and I were out. We did television. We just were ourselves there. And um, I made it work.

ANDERSON: And you continued your appointment there, even though you had already started working for the Task Force.

APUZZO: I took a – no, I took – I took a public service lea – let me see. Yes, I continued working there for a while, and when I – let me see. I took a public service leave to be assistant commissioner of health for the City of New York, and then – and then one other - Administrative Trials and Hearings. I was executive director there. And after about 15 years, I left Brooklyn College. I don’t know what year it was, whatever, but I was there for about 15 years, and enjoyed the work, enjoyed the fact that we made it – we made it a safe space, just by being – just being good at what we did. We were good at what we did, and took the space. It was women taking space. [laugh]

ANDERSON: Was women’s studies established yet at Brooklyn?

APUZZO: I think it was just starting and in a very separate area.

ANDERSON: OK. You weren’t involved with that. Um, we’re about out of time, so I think we’re going to stop there and just pick up with the Task Force for our next tape.

APUZZO: OK.

END TAPE 2

## TAPE 3

ANDERSON: So, this is June 3 at Ginny's house in the morning. And, let's go back to a couple of things from yesterday. Today, we're going to focus on politics and your involvement in nonprofit organizations and agitations as well as working within the administrations that you have. But a couple of things I want to go back to from yesterday. One is just a quick comment that you made about being tomboyish and that being a source of tension between your mother and you about dressing girlie and acting girlie and all that kind of stuff. So, I'm just wondering if you could carry that through as a thread in terms of – did that then translate into a butch identity for you as an adult or how did that carry into your adult life?

APUZZO: Well, one of the things that I found difficult to accept was the assumptions that are made around that. Yeah, I was a tomboy and I loved being a tomboy. I loved – and it taught me wonderful things. It –

ANDERSON: Let me pause one second. Sorry...OK. We're starting over because we now have mics. So, why don't you start again in terms of your response to my question about tomboyish identity and –

APUZZO: The – the experience as a tomboy – I'm sorry. Now we're all set.

ANDERSON: OK. Now we're done.

APUZZO: The experience as a tomboy was a good experience for me in many respects. I mean, I learned to play in a team, which, as a manager, ultimately in my life – I became a manager, is very much committed to a team approach. Very much making a team of people who worked with me. Um, and see – the values of a team are more important to me. And I- and I really felt that team sports were fun, subverting your own ambition for a team effort was exciting to me and the collegiality that you feel on a team and I didn't have that experience playing with the girls. I found it, I found it, very different and not comfortable for me.

What I did find when I would try to play with the girls as a kid was that often girls would say, "My mother doesn't want me to play with you. You're a bad influence. She thinks you're a bad influence." I had no idea what that meant. A bad influence. But I guess I felt a lot of rejection, particularly around – you know, I just assumed it was because I was a tomboy, girls, mothers had a problem with that. And I'm talking when I was very young. I'm not talking about 17. I'm talking about a girl, a little girl. But I got a great deal out of the experiences and as I got older, I guess I have just carried myself in a way that was more assertive, more, um, definitive in people's eyes and I don't know why that becomes more male-identified as people look at you and so, you

know. I try to turn it into – I try to turn it into something positive in my life and brought it to many issues that I think worked.

ANDERSON: Did it ever translate into a butch identity for you?

APUZZO: You know, I guess you'd have to ask the women [laugh] I've been with. I mean, I don't know. I've never – I think I've asked a woman for a date, you know, maybe twice in my life, and once, I was turned down. So, I mean, I've never really aggressed in a relationship. And as I mentioned with Betty yesterday, you know, duh, I called up and tell her this beautiful love song reminded me of her and didn't – it didn't dawn on me that I was making a move. Um, but I've – I've never, you know, perceived myself as being sexually aggressive with women or being able to aggress in a social sexual context.

ANDERSON: And in terms of the way that roles and things happened in the lesbian community in the 60s and early 70s, that wasn't pressure that you felt about needing to choose one or the other in order to find dates, in order to fit in or socialize?

APUZZO: No, I had – I had pretty monogamous relationships. I mean, you know, Betty and I came together and through the 70s, were really together, and I think we are both strong, assertive women, so I don't know. I mean, I don't know. I'm sure somebody looking at me would say, "Oh, she's such a butch." Well, I don't know if I'm butch or not. And I don't know that it mattered to me. And I don't know if it mattered to my partners.

ANDERSON: Let's go back and talk about feminism then. Since butch and fem identities weren't important to you, then you didn't have that conflict with feminism like a lot of lesbians did and do. But you mentioned that you want to go back and talk about some aspects of feminism from yesterday.

APUZZO: Yeah. I guess – and I touched on this, so maybe I'm being redundant, but it seems to me that my experience with some of the women that I rubbed shoulders with in the movement, um, it was never a happy experience. I always felt like they were opposed to me because I chose to work with men as well. Now, some of them worked with men but they were very reluctant – they were very – they had an attitude in my eyes about the men, and I had negative experiences with two men: my father and another male in my family. But I didn't assume that all men would provide me with a negative experience. I mean, yeah, you had tough and tumble but I had a tough and tumble when I was on the spitball team with them, too. And, you know, I learned to hold my own. I guess what I resisted was the notion of gender equality but with a moral superiority on the part of some women that I met. I don't see how you can pursue

5:50
------

equality and have an attitude of moral superiority. Equality means equal. It doesn't mean "and I'm a little better." And that's the sense I had and I always felt alienated from women.

I mean, when I was reluctantly put forward as the executive director of the National Gay Task Force, called that at the time, it was because the candidate of many feminists on the board really did a very bad job and made a major public faux pas in the context of AIDS and was basically thrown off. And when people turned to me and the men particularly supported me, the women were opposed to me.

ANDERSON: Why?

APUZZO: I think they felt that I had undermined this woman who, there was no way that I could have undermined her, I mean, she did it very well all by herself, and because the men supported me, so I had a sense of always pulling this group of really talented, good women. I mean, they weren't – I don't see them as evil. The Harridans. I see them as women who really had the sense that I was somehow politically contaminated. You know, toxic waste was what I thought. And there was a piece of that that carried over from- "My mother doesn't want me to play with you because you're a bad influence." You know, there was just a little taste of that that continued. There was just a little too much that you're not being a woman enough. And I guess – I guess I felt like, you know, I don't have to prove to you that I'm a woman. I don't have to prove that to anyone. And I don't know. Maybe that in and of itself makes me a feminist.

ANDERSON: And the root of the conflict, your understanding at the time, was that it was about your alliance with gay men? There wasn't anything else about your ideology, your style, or-?

APUZZO: My style – I don't know. My style – maybe my style was, you know, problematic, but it just strikes me that if we're open to women, all women, if we – if we choose to call ourselves inclusive, then my question is, what – why do you have a kind of moral superiority and what is it that makes a feminist "better than" – you know?

ANDERSON: Can you give a couple of other examples of the moral superiority that you felt?

APUZZO: Oh, yeah, I mean, I – you know, I had many, many experiences, lobbying issues in coalition where I felt like we carried, I carried all of the issues but my issues were not carried by the other women, and it was as if I was supposed to understand that this is embarrassing to them. It was as if I was supposed to understand that, you know, "not now, not now, not yet, not yet." And all I could think of was Martin Luther King.

“Not yet, not yet.” You know, Birmingham Jail. “Not yet, not now. You don’t understand.” Well, you know, I didn’t understand. And I thought, you know, it really just felt like more of the same, you’re not – you’re not being a lady. I don’t know what the hell a lady is.

ANDERSON: Well, that’s what I meant in terms of style, not just, you know-

APUZZO: Yes. Yeah, maybe it was style, maybe it was a sense of, you know, you’re – you’re somehow going to make it more difficult for us and you should understand that you have to wait. I don’t understand it. And I guess I felt like some of the feminists that I came into contact with had this – had a tacit understanding going with some of the feminists crowd that that was OK and somehow I didn’t read the memo. I missed the memo that said it was OK that I wait in line, and—

ANDERSON: Were there writers, thinkers, or leaders in the feminist movement at the time that you did agree with, that you did look to for a roadmap or inspiration?

APUZZO: I’m sure. I guess I looked to poetry a lot when I’m in situations like that, when I look to find boundaries broken, when I look to kind of get over very strict structures, you know, it’s not— even now you know, I’d to go Audre and Rich and read and look for that impatience and look for that – that fire and passion and the OK to go beyond what’s considered appropriate. I found a lot of comfort and support in that. Certainly Barbara Ehrenreich continues to hold up, you know, even over the prison situation and the women who have emerged today, you know, just in this last month in this horrible situation in Iraq, the notion that feminism has to redefine itself because gender doesn’t equal compassion or lack of compassion.

So that theme has been a source of comfort to me. That because you have been oppressed, it doesn’t make you right. It makes you having been oppressed and you shouldn’t be and you need to relieve yourself of that but then, you don’t have the right to create boundaries and categories for other people. You know, I don’t mean to be overstating this, because certainly there have been feminists who have opened themselves in a loving way and a supportive way, um, and have always been there in a supportive way but I’ve had my hands full in some situations.

ANDERSON: What about the current state of feminists politics or the women’s movement?

APUZZO: What about it?

ANDERSON: Well, would you – would you say that there is currently – is the feminist movement something that's current or something that's in the past?

APUZZO: Let me tell you where I've seen what excites me about women working together in Uganda and in South Africa. I went there when the president went there and to see these women building new homes themselves. I mean, you don't find men. I don't know where the men are. I mean, in Uganda, I think that many of them are killed and maimed. Ten years of Idi Amin and everything else is a horror, but to see women building with their bare hands, you know, their homes, and the micro-economics that's happening where a group of women get together and really transform a village and transform an economy and transform their sense of working – what working together means. That was very inspiring to me. That was very exciting to me, to see that movement in the world.

And you know, you have to look at people like Charlotte Bunch and say, you know, here's somebody who's been here and out there, talking and moving and pushing and doing it with brilliance and love for as long as I can remember, you know, as long as I can remember, Charlotte. So, yeah, there are women whose ideas and whose actions have inspired me and certainly Charlotte is somebody who has and when I stepped out into the world and saw these places, and where this has come.

Just listen to women talking, for example, in the Israeli-Palestine situation. The women's voices here are so clear and so – such a moral imperative from them.

But here, locally, I – I'm uninspired. You know, which may not be a very loving thing to reflect, but at this moment, I'm uninspired.

ANDERSON: OK. Let's back up a little bit. I want – because we're going to talk about politics today primarily, I want to just talk a little bit about how you became politicized. You talked about the convent and your experiences there, what your life path would be once you left, and working for the oppressed. But what – tell me about some of your experiences getting politicized. What were the issues? What were the feelings? How did your priorities get put in place in those years? That you would then know that this is – this is where I'm headed in my life. You said you did not come from a radical family or from a politically charged environment.

APUZZO: No-no-no-no. I was a history major in college and so, you know, and majored in Afro-Asian background, so you're seeing how the world is moving and how the world is evolving and you're seeing the extraordinary arrogance of our perspective in this country, particularly in the early 60s toward the world and the – the civil rights movement gives you a vivid picture of injustice around you and when you see that,

to me, it just seems that you have to respond. Once you see it and it registers, you have a – you're consciousness moves you.

Getting involved – I got, you know, my first, my first involvement was the 19- - maybe it was in preparation for the 1976 election. Prior to that, lobbying the platform committee. And in those days, it went all over the country and had hearings.

18:35

ANDERSON: How did you make that leap from civil rights/ Afro-Asian studies to organizing the gay and lesbian plank for the Democratic Party?

APUZZO: Yeah, I'm trying to – you know, the truth is, I really don't know how it happened. It just, like, one thing followed another. I volunteered to coordinate the gay rights plank, I guess as a result of the fomenting around me. Here I am in the Gay Academic Union, I'm at LFL, and you know, we're looking for things and a lot of people are very much opposed to going the straight route of politics, they're much more activist and confrontational, and I find, um, the activist and the confrontational exciting, exhilarating, but I also am very aware of the theory of the "F"—the theory of the fallacy and the instrument, [laugh] you know, that you can't just use your hammer for everything. You've got to, like, have a repertoire of things. That if you want real change, you've got to have a repertoire to get it. You just can't hammer the same way. It's like expecting, you know, that if you smack your kid, you're going to get discipline. You know, I had that experience. It didn't discipline me, you know.

So, my – when I saw the opportunity to try to develop a repertoire myself of being active, being confrontational, doing demonstrations but also making the system recognize me, making the system take this issue seriously, if need be, using yourself to embarrass the system. And so, when the opportunity came to volunteer to lobby for the gay and lesbian rights plank, I took it. But it was an incredible learning experience for me, because I went all over the country and we worked with local groups to present their proposal to the platform committee and we stayed behind and lobbied the platform committee everywhere they went. Follow up.

But what I did, everywhere I went, was read all of the papers. In those days, every organization from ACORN to Global Warming in the 70s had position papers. And what I did, because you know, you're in a foreign – you're in a state, you finish your work, I went home and read them and I kept them. And I'd, you know, this'd make sense, and then I'd go to, you know, the environmentalists and I'd say, you know, we need your support on this. This kind of stuff. And really become committed to these issues. I mean, I'd – it was a crash course in some of the most progressive issues around. And these were the people who were the spokespeople for these issues. And sitting down with them – most of them didn't want anything to do with us. If you got them to say

one sentence in their presentation, you know, you were – it was a home run.

But I learned a tremendous amount in that experience and for me, it helped me develop a political agenda, so to speak. So in 1978, when I ran for the state assembly, and don't ask me how I decided to run for the state assembly – I have no idea. I have no idea. When I decided to run for the state assembly—

ANDERSON: Representing what district?

APUZZO: The 57<sup>th</sup> assembly district in Brooklyn, which had the Hassidic community up in – in Williamsburg, Clinton Hill, Fort Green, Boerum Hill, a little piece of Brooklyn Heights, Navy – we used to call it the Navy Yard, yeah, whatever that is – a little bit of Red Hook. But when I did that, I went into that campaign with a fully – a full platform of disability rights, and the – and my campaign office had some of the leaders of the disability movement in New York City volunteering for me. I had a platform on a variety of other issues and it was the result of seeing that you can't just be a gay rights candidate. Now, today, of course, that makes sense. But in 1978, there was no blueprint for how to do this. How do you be an out-lesbian running for the state assembly? What does the state assembly do? How can you really impact people's lives? How do those issues translate to the state level? And that stuff, the stuff of how to get it done was exciting to me.

Now, how did I do in the election? Well, I did pretty well. There were four candidates, four candidates including the incumbent who was the chairperson of the banking committee. If you know anything about government, the banking committee, no matter what, is important and they are supported by the banks. So, you know, talk about climbing an uphill battle. But, here, of the four of us who ran, Harvey was the incumbent, Harvey Strellson. Willmanette Montgomery is a state senator. Roger Green became a state assemblyman, and I became whatever I became. You know. This is not exactly, you know, it was – it was terrific.

And the interesting thing for the three of us – not the incumbent – was, I must say, at the end of that experience and since in my work in Albany, I had a wonderful relationship with the other two. We never bad-mouthed one another. We didn't – and we never had a sit-down where we said we would do this. We approached one another with respect, with an understanding that we had many things in common, and with the fact that this was a competition. And it was really – it was a wonderful experience. You don't see that today a great deal. And you certainly don't – you see pulling one another apart in a way that then makes it more difficult for each person to continue to give what they can give in this context. So that was a good experience for me. And running for office. But you know, I said subsequently I spent ten years in the

Mario Cuomo administration and I must say I got infinitely more done than I would have had I been sent to the state assembly which can't get anything through the senate.

ANDERSON: Where does LAMBDA Independent Democrats come into this?

APUZZO: Myself. My dear, dear friend, I mean who's my beloved brother Peter Vogel. Gary Dean who remains a dear person in my life. Myself. I think, Berg – what was his name. He was a Navy fellow who came out in the Navy – and I can't remember his first name. Kappy Berg, I think. It was a nickname kind of a name. We all lived close. Gary lived across the street. Berg lived in this direction across the street, and Peter – but as a result of my campaign, we put together LAMBDA Independent Democrats – it was either a result of my campaign or Gary Dean's. Gary Dean ran the year before, '77, yeah, '77 for city council, at-large city council delegate. In those days, we had an at-large, and he had the liberal party endorsement, and he did very well, because it's a borough-wide race. And it may have been as a result of his race and then me going into a race that we pulled the LAMBDA Independent Democrats together. And I think they're celebrating their 27<sup>th</sup> year or something.

Now, we pulled it together and Peter and Gary and I were the kind of founding parents of it, and Gary and Peter loved each other but they'd usually get into arguments and when we got into arguments and when we got into arguments, by that time, Denise Alexander was involved and several other – Lance Ringel, and if we had a conflict, I used to cook a very big meal and tell them we were going to sit there and eat until we resolved the conflict, you know, which is kind of like my grandmother did, you know. Everybody's going to sit down and we're going to eat and we're not getting up 'till this is finished. But it was very – it was a team – it took elements of team and family and activism and put it together and I loved it.

ANDERSON: Were there any gender politics between the men and women in the organization? Was that a source of tension?

APUZZO: Not a great deal. I mean, Lance Ringel – I mean, the guys were very bright and were willing to be taught. And certainly, Denise Alexander coming into the group as an African-American woman was – and a mother – was very, very nonchalant about making sure that if there was an issue that was racist – race related, she could just – just plain poker and put people – you know, let people know where she was coming from on it, and they, in my eyes, were very willing to learn. Um, as the group got bigger, you know, there were more conflicts. But I can't say that gender conflicts were a problem in this particular group while I was there. I mean, it may have devolved over the years.

ANDERSON: Was it a primarily white organization with the exception of Denise or did you have an effort to be multiracial?

APUZZO: Yeah, we made a real effort - my campaign had certain platforms in Spanish. I had - I believe I had a pamphlet in Spanish. I mean, we made a real outreach effort. We knew that we were responsible to do that. And, yes, we had - actually we had, in our little executive committee, I think Doug - Doug Rivera and Denise Alexander were both on our executive committee, because they were vital people that happened to be - one happened to be Spanish and one happened to be African-American and we recognized that those perspectives were very important to the organization, particularly in a borough like Brooklyn, which was so diverse. And because many of those who came in were displacing—you know, this is Brooklyn, the beginning of the gentrification of Brooklyn. Betty and I moved there because, you know, it was a neighborhood that an interracial couple could be comfortable in. So, you know, we had a real - I think we had a real opportunity with LAMBDA to -

ANDERSON: Did you stay involved with LAMBDA?

APUZZO: As long as I was in Brooklyn. Oh, yeah. When I was —as long as I lived in Brooklyn, I was involved with LAMBDA. And then I went back and spoke at their big anniversary.

ANDERSON: Is there anything else about your politicization that you want to talk about before we go into talking specifically about the Task Force? How you became politicized and what your priorities were?

APUZZO: I guess the thing that I said most in those early years was, “I’m not here to make it OK to be gay, period. I’m here to make it OK to be gay, comma.” And I would say that over and over again. It’s not just about how to be gay. It’s not just to be a market niche. It’s not just - and I would - I would see, because, you know, you go to a march and you hear, we are - we are - what the heck is it they say?

ANDERSON: Here?

APUZZO: We are everywhere. We are everyone, we are everywhere. At least, that’s what they used to say. And it occurred to me if we really are everyone, and if we in our community could truly become agents for change, bringing with us the perspectives of our diversity, we would be an extraordinary force for change in society. If that were the commitment. And I used to - I used to make the point: Gay pride is not about gay smug, and there’s a big difference. And I used to see a lot of gay smug.

ANDERSON: And you said that in your piece in the anthology.

APUZZO: Yeah. It's not about gay smug. It's about pride. It's about where pride comes from and what happens when you get it. It's not, from my point of view, a monolithic thing that comes up out of you. It's something that branches you out and blossoms you. You know what I'm trying to say?

ANDERSON: I do, but that's not where the movement was at in the 1970s.

APUZZO: No, but – but you know what? My mission in that place and in that time was to bring that message. And to bring that message to men, and to make it something that they could stand up and applaud. And I recognize that when they stood up and applauded, they were probably just being entertained. But you know, you have to begin somewhere.

ANDERSON: So talk about the challenge of bringing that kind of message to a movement that was reluctant to go in multiple directions at once. You can talk about it in general terms, in terms of activism, and more grassroots direct action stuff, or we can jump right into the Task Force if you want.

APUZZO: Well, you see, I think that's the function of leadership. The function of leadership isn't to say, "Oh, what does the community think? Maybe I'll say that." The function of leadership is to say, "What is the vision for where we can be and what we can become? And how can we put that in front of people and show them that that's what empowerment is?" That that's where you go with what you're feeling and experiencing. That that's the value of that—the path to understanding is an outcome of what you've experienced in your oppression. And that if you don't go there, then you're saying, "Let's commit our life to make it OK to be gay." You know? I used to say I'm in the movement to stomp out Chablis, you know? It's like [laugh] – and that's exactly what that meant to me. It was like there's this vapid white wine objective. Not interesting. At the end of it, where would I be?

ANDERSON: So, how was your message received?

APUZZO: Well let me – I don't know how it was received as much as how it is an absolute constant. I don't remember ever not bringing that message. Ever. No matter what the topic was. If I couldn't bring that message, I didn't speak. If that message was not welcomed, then neither was I. And you can't live in an interracial relationship and not see the racism. You can't be a woman and not experience sexism. You can't come out of working class family and –and uh, an ethnic group that was discriminated against and not understand some of these issues.

So, that's where my – that's where my politicization, uh, took place. And to me, to get up and sing a one-note song, there's no point to it. To hum one song, issue, one- you know, one theme is a waste. And your value to a principle once you get into government is to – is to demonstrate that you see a wider vision. It makes you more – of more value and therefore you can have a greater impact.

For example, my relationship with Mario Cuomo. A man I love. I love the governor. Warts and all, I love him. He was a man who as a boss, I never had to worry that he'd ask me to do something that had the slightest ethical compromise to it. I could disagree with him emphatically and it was OK.

37:00

He would – we had the best AIDS policy in the country, and a lot of that was our relationship. And a lot of that was my relationship with really terrific men who would help me deal with some of these issues and then find a way – my understanding of the governor, their understanding of a legal issue, and then my bringing it to the governor and getting him to move. And that was a collaborative effort. It was a collaborative effort over ten years in the Cuomo administration. Because from the beginning, I was on the Task Force and so I became a major spokesperson on the AIDS issue. And so, going to the governor, I became his vice-chair, which was the governor's person on the AIDS advisory council. I carried the governor's portfolio on that council.

And I was very proud of the policy. But the policy was an equation of an enlightened mind on the part of the governor, a compassionate heart, and activism, an activist being in a position of power, and having the confidence of my boss. And relationships with men all over the country who, and from various quarters could raise issues and help me translate them so that I could put it into the context of public policy. And that's an equation. And that's an equation for getting things done, whether it's AIDS or anything else.

And I guess the bosses that I had, when I worked, I was able, in Consumer Protection, to do the very first surveys on the cost of AZT. We brought boroughs, welcome in and threatened to subpoena them on research and developing and why these drugs should be so expensive. They were orphan drugs. They were orphan drugs that were on your shelf. And we got the price down as a result of doing it in this state. And this state brought that price down, tremendously.

Funeral homes. They weren't burying the dead. I got my boss at Consumer Protection and I to change that policy. Insurance. When they were doing insurance discrimination. I sat with the superintendent of the insurance department and we got insurance to change.

It was the governor. It was understanding the activist need, the activist demand and bringing it, you know, wedding that. And there are just dozens and dozens and dozens of issues. But I think one of the most important was persuading the governor, and I wrote this in a memo to him, that the way the physical landscape changed in the nineteenth

century because of health issues, the social landscape would change in the twentieth century because of AIDS. And because he was bright enough to understand that, it opened up a whole area of possibilities in terms of getting the state to do things.

Now I don't know how we got to this point. You asked me some question that brought me here. But the point is, the evolution. And see, what I said to you before, I think I got more done having lost that election and then getting into government than had I been there. One person can't change public policy in the state assembly. It ain't gonna happen. But one person working with the governor with a bridge to the community and a bridge to my colleagues in government – one of the things I used to say was for decades, we banged at the wall of government, having no idea what was on the other side. And when I got there, I got an understanding of what was on the other side. How do you make it work? How do you get it to be responsive? And that's something that I think elective office doesn't share with the community.

Appointed office gives you the opportunity to do that stuff behind the scenes. See, I think an elected official has a vested interest in going out and saying, "I did this. Elect me again." An appointed official has a different opportunity. Different constraints but different opportunity. First, I didn't have to worry about raising money. Secondly, if I worked for somebody with whom I have a relationship, every time they do something, you get them to do something that is a good change, they get credit for it. It then inspires them to listen when you need something else.

So my boss, my Consumer Protection boss, Ritchie Kessel, he was a press hound. He loved it. And I'd say to Macy, (unclear) he's say, "Oh, I don't want to talk about that." And he began being very homophobic. It was "Ginny, I love you but, you know." And he did, and he was. He was a Long Island boy who, you know was his little homophobic self. You know, he'd go, you know. But he did it. And every time he did it, and he got rewarded for it, he was more willing to do it again. And anytime he didn't want to touch it because it looked like it was a problem, he'd let me do it. He never said no to me. Never said no to me because it accrued to him.

Similarly with housing. There are any number of – when I was executive deputy commissioner of housing in community development, we were able to get – what is the name of it – Rivington? It's a big AIDS residential facility. We got that as a result of me being at housing, working with my commissioner and with the governor. We were able to – I mean, a big, multimillion dollar thing. The community center.

ANDERSON: Gay and Lesbian Community Center?

APUZZO: Gay and Lesbian Community Center. The first \$200,000, we got from Ornstein. And the problem was getting Irving Cooperberg to pick it up.

It took him two years to write the letter to get the money to do it. But I – you know, when I say you can get an awful lot done as an appointed official, and there’s an awful lot more you can bring back to the community because your interest isn’t like, “I have to be elected again. I have to do this and so I can’t tell you how it works.” Which started when I was at Consumer Protection, and Lee Hudson, another woman I just love, fabulous gal, Lee – she was Koch’s liaison to the gay community. I was Cuomo’s liaison to the gay community. But I never agreed that that would be my job. I never wanted to be the gay representative in government. I wanted to have a real job and do that for no money, so that in addition to my job, I did this. So I had that portfolio. But this is why I’m important to you here, Governor. I’m keeping this going.

Um, and Lee and I went out. We dated for a while, and while we were dating, we had this – and we put together what we called the Breakfast Club. And we had the leaders of various organizations come and meet in my office at Consumer Protection at 7:30 and we’d meet among ourselves and our commitment was, what do we need to do for the community? Our principals don’t matter here, meaning the people we work for. What needs to be done and how can we get it done, and what’s our strategy. And so we had LAMBDA Legal Defense, Tim Sweeney, Tom Stoddard, myself, um, David Rothenberg, I just – my mind is a blank. But the various political clubs. You know, we just – we had a real good group.

And then once a month, we would have the Breakfast Forum, and I would get a state official like the superintendent for insurance, the head of banking, the commissioner of the health department – to come and speak to a group that were around the table, having coffee and breakfast in a very nice restaurant and then we would get the interaction, and we’d cull from that an agenda that I would then be able to go back to this commissioner, or this superintendent, and pursue, once I got the governor engaged in it.

And it was more – I mean, it was more - I don’t understand why they don’t do it today, because it’s a first, it keeps everybody talking in the community. The leadership keeps talking. And they get a sense that this is a team, you’re a team. You know, you can go and have your little competitive, you know, organizational futile fiefdom nonsense someplace else, but here, we’re a team. And I think that leadership needs to be able to do that. Somebody has to, like, step out on a limb and say, “We’re all getting together and we’ll going to make this work, and this is what we can do for each other and for the issues.”

ANDERSON: What were some of the challenges of going from outside to inside in terms of -?

APUZZO: Well, that's a really great question, because to my knowledge, no one – other people worked in government, and then came out and worked in the LGBT community. No one had worked as a visible activist outside and then went into government in a, in a position, you know, an executive position. So the first thing is, it was rough. I mean, when I first – when I first got, um, my first day in state service, I walked in the elevator and I looked and people carried the Nick News, which I don't think is in existence in Albany anymore, and on the front cover was a picture of me, "Lesbian Ex-Nun Wins Top State Job." I'm under everybody's arm in the elevator going up. And I'm, like, bummed out. "Lesbian Ex-Nun Wins Top State Job."

ANDERSON: Which position was this? Civil service?

APUZZO: No, no. This was Executive Deputy – Executive Deputy of Consumer Protection.

ANDERSON: OK. And this is, like, '80, 198-?

APUZZO: -5.

ANDERSON: '85.

APUZZO: Well, now I go in and I see, you don't even have to introduce yourself. There you are on the newspaper. Right? You know, there's nothing left for me to say. [laughs] So, Ritchie as I said, whom I love, but he is a work in progress. My office was right next door to Richard's office, and he – his best friend was Jeff, the PR guy, because of course, Ritchie was a press hound, a PR guy was his guy. So my office, I had an adjoining office to his, and it was, like, my first week and he was doing a press conference on item pricing. So they're having a press conference in Ritchie's office, and my door's open, and the press, uh, guy, Jeff, comes by and "I'm just going to close this door." I said, "Why?" He said, "Oh, when the press comes into the press room, they're going to – they'll come in here and they'll use your phone." "Oh," I said, "Will they?" I said, "OK." I had a coronary. This little SOB was trying to put me in a closet and I'm his boss. Now, look at the arrogance. I am his boss, and he is closing me up in a closet.

So after the press conference was over, I said to him, "Jeff, we don't know one another. But take a look at me. Do I look like somebody who you would walk in my office and pick up my phone? And tell me, what's so exciting about item pricing that they'd all rush to their editors?" I said, "Close the door. I have something to say to you." And I went up one side of his head and down the other. I said, "Who the – you – the arrogance of you to think that you can put me in the closet?" And I said to him, "You are a Jewish man. Haven't – hasn't your experience

as a Jewish person taught you anything? That you think you can come to your boss and put me in a closet because I might be embarrassing to you? Because I'm not quite your idea of what I ought to be?" I mean, I just – this guy walked out of there, you know, about six inches shorter.

ANDERSON: Did he cry?

APUZZO: Actually, he did. He cried. Did I say that before?

ANDERSON: No, it just sounded like – it just sounded like he was going to cry.

APUZZO: He wept. He was – he wept. I thought maybe I mentioned it in some article.

ANDERSON: No, you didn't.

APUZZO: Because he – "I'm sorry." I said, "Let me tell you something. Sorry doesn't mean a thing to me. Sorry doesn't matter. What matters is the attitude that makes you think it's OK to do that. Do you tell fag jokes? Am I a dyke? Is that who I am? When you go home, you tell your wife you got a dyke boss?" I said, "I'm your boss, and I'm a dyke." I said, "But I'm more than that. You're more than the jerk you just showed me you were." He – but that's what it was like.

It was, like, going into government and having to prove that you were more than a one-trick pony. And so, it became clear to me that I had to be very good at what I did. That's how I knew I could get tenure at Brooklyn College, be really good. Come out before you get tenure and then be damned good at what you do. Or, be damned good and then get your tenure. My philosophy – and could be totally wrong – but my philosophy was, if you were indispensable, they're going to have to deal with you as who you are. If you can really be good – now, maybe that's oppression, you know, why should I have to be really good? I mean, there are a lot of mediocre people in the world. Why can't we just be mediocre? I don't know. Maybe that is the oppression.

But I never had a boss except at the Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Labor, but whether it was housing or consumer affairs or the governor, I basically was able to do whatever I wanted. I found some way to get it done. And I think it was because I just put an equation together that worked for them as well as for the community. And I said to the governor – I said, "I will serve you best by serving my community best, and I will serve my community best by serving you best." I said, "This is going to be this kind of a thing."

So I'll tell you a funny story. At the end of my first week, the governor called me down to his office in New York. And I walked in, his office is big. I walked in, and he said, "You got more press than I did this week, Apuzzo." I said, "I'm really sorry about, Governor." I mean,

you know, I didn't talk to anybody, yeah, I was, like, a little cowering there. So I said, "That headline. So embarrassing." He picked it up. He had it on his desk and he said, "Why? This is a good headline." Now, picture Mario Cuomo. "This is a good headline," he said. I said, "Why?" He said, "'Lesbian Ex-Nun Wins Top State Job.' A bad headline would be 'Lesbian Ex-Nun Steals Top State Job,' he said. "And worse would be 'Lesbian Ex-Nun Hustles Top State Job.'"

So, you know, that became the tenor of our relationship, and I loved him dearly, and love him dearly. He made it possible for me. This is a guy who's so steeped in his Catholicism, who's so, um, he's just such a complex guy who really wants to be the noblest person he knows. That's what he wants to be. And he took a chance on an activist, bringing me to government, putting me into a position that had nothing to do with gay issues and the circumstances made it something to do with gay issues – AIDS – and he made it possible for me to end up at the White House. The experience he gave me. The level of responsibility he gave me. The learning he allowed me to do was priceless to me. And, I think he invested in me so that I could do for the community. It was important to him that I succeed. And it remained important.

When they called him from the White House to get a recommendation, I said, "Please"- because Mario Cuomo was a little moody, you know. I mean, if he happened to be in a bad mood that day, it'd be like calling Martin and asking him what do you think of your granddaughter? Ma. But the president's personnel office, deputy director, called me and said "We just spoke to Mario Cuomo." And I thought, my God. And they said, "This guy must love you, because he just talked very lovingly." And I realized then, he invested in me for the pur – he mined me so that I would go and bring that experience. And he's not generous with his praise, but he was, and I have the gratitude to him for helping me do some things on behalf of the community.

ANDERSON: How did you become a Cuomo appointee?

APUZZO: Oh, well. When Ed Koch and Mario Cuomo ran for governor, the whole community supported Ed Koch. Now this is before he became the demon, you know, this is in whatever year. I don't know what year. But you know, Peter and I, my friend Peter Vogel and I decided we were for Mario Cuomo.

ANDERSON: And so, LAMBDA supported Cuomo.

APUZZO: Right.

ANDERSON: Or you just as individuals-?

APUZZO: As individuals we did and then we went to – we went to our club and persuaded them. And then, Mario Cuomo came to speak. Now, you gotta know, Mario Cuomo is, like, golden voice but he wasn't in those days. In those days, he wore a vest, he had round glasses. He looked like, oh! And he talked – it was so boring. Oh, God, it's hard – anybody who will be looking at this, who hears Mario Cuomo in the last 10-15 years, will say, "She's crazy. That woman is, you know, on drugs."

ANDERSON: Yeah, he's extremely articulate and intelligent.

APUZZO: But he was dull. He was intelligent and dull. And he came to the – the club and, you know, my recollection was that he-he did not – we were not swooning. But he said all the right things. And you know, Peter and I and Gary, we really, like, started the club and so we had a fair amount of sway and we got his endorsement. And when they lost in whatever the process was, we really brought people around to support Mario Cuomo. And when he was elected, I was offered a position in his administration. It was – it was 1980. It was virtually the same time – and I'll go through my diaries to make this clearer.

It was at the very same time that I was offered the job at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. And I felt that my time, that the time in my life was to be the activist. And I had a good enough relationship with the governor and Peter had a good enough relationship, and Peter and I were so close that we were like, politically, we were very close, and personally.

So I told the governor – I turned down the opportunity but said that at a later date, I'd like to be able to come back, and I was grateful that I did that because AIDS hit, and I was able to do what I was able to do there, and then in November of some year, my lover walked out on me, my father had a stroke, and my cousin was diagnosed with AIDS. The last Apuzzo. Male Apuzzo. Which, you know, if you're an Italian family, the last male Apuzzo was important. So I decided to come closer to home and I called the governor and a week later, they offered me a job.

ANDERSON: We'll stop there.

END OF TAPE 3

TAPE 4

ANDERSON: OK. We're –

APUZZO: Is this – did I screw this up?

ANDERSON: No.

APUZZO: I didn't?

ANDERSON: Um, do you want to pick up at that moment?

APUZZO: I forgot the moment.

ANDERSON: 1985, I think, where you – your father has a stroke, Mari Cuomo and so you're ready to go to work for his administration. Do you want to – we still haven't talked about the Task Force at all, and the Cuomo stories were coming out of our conversation about moving from outside politics to inside, which, probably there's some other themes there about making that transition that we could pick up on, too.

APUZZO: Well, help me with the questions, because it's getting blurry to me.

ANDERSON: It is. There's a lot – there's a lot that we've been talking about. So, let's – let's go back and just cover chronology first. Let's talk about the Task Force and how you got involved, I think what was first, as a board member? But then your transition to leadership into the Task Force and your years as executive director.

APUZZO: OK.

ANDERSON: So, just talk about how you got involved with the Task Force and your time there.

APUZZO: OK. All right. My relationship with the Task Force, I guess, was always there. I used to cook when Betty would have board meeting, I would cook and serve the board, because my responsibilities were to the Gay Rights National Lobby, so we kind of supported one another in that and they'd have board meetings at the house and they'd have caucus meetings at the house and in '76, I – because I was working at the college, I had more time than most and I volunteered to, as I mentioned, the platform project, which put me in contact with activists all over the country, and um, and in contact with the staff and I guess I retained the relationship, whether I was on the board or not, frankly, I just can't remember. But in 1980 when I pursued the platform, the same platform project and we got the plank in, which was a very big thing. This was

the largest political party in the world affirming lesbian-gay rights, and it wasn't without conflict. I mean, there was a great deal of conflict because –

ANDERSON: Let's stay with that then. Let's talk about the plank and the difference between '76 and '80 and-

APUZZO: Well, by 1980, we had had more lesbian-gay delegates and we put together a caucus of lesbian and gay delegates and I was co-chair along with Bill Krause from San Francisco. And in this little snapshot is, or was in my opinion, the classic difference between New York and San Francisco politics. San Francisco folks were committed to Kennedy as their candidate because Carter as the incumbent was being challenged, and I was committed to Carter. I was committed to Carter because I was committed to the issue. I used to say, "I'm a delegate for the issue." When I went around the country and before they had to pick delegates, I would say, "You know, it's not about Kennedy, it's not about Carter. It's with the issue. It's about getting this issue the visibility it needs." was – I said to Peter "You know, you're gonna have to pick a candidate." I said, "No. Let a candidate pick me, or it doesn't happen." Be clear. My candidate is the issue.

So Peter – Peter was in New York and he was working with the various campaigns, and I was on the road working with the black caucus. And Peter called me, I don't know where – I probably was in Texas, and he said, "The Carter people want you." I said, "Fine." I just want to get there for the issue. So, when we finally selected chairs and co-chairs of this caucus, San Francisco was Kennedy, I was a Carter person. Carter – the Kennedy delegation was bigger because, you know, Kennedy was exciting and Carter was – but I knew, I knew Reagan could win that election. I knew it. And the LA people sat on their hands. And to this day, when I ever see my LA base, my LA friends, they'll always say, "Apuzzo, you were right." David Nixnel will tell you, you know, Apuzzo was right. Bobby – Diane Abbott and Bobby – um, I can't think of her last name. They were a couple at the time. A big powerful couple in MECCLA and they would say to me subsequently, you were right. How did we ever – they said, "This guy, this guy, the governor of California is not going to be president of the United States." And I said, "Watch." And honest to God, I was terrified of Reagan. I was – he did not strike me as an affable guy. He struck me as, you know, a demon behind a smile.

And here we need to get Carter elected, you know. And the Carter people – I worked with Stu Izenstat and Ann Wexler. And I was the Carter person. We were up to the compromise and San Francisco wanted clearly the better plank. But it would have been voted down, because once you get to the platform, the way it used to be set up, the incumbent has a tremendous amount of weight. People are not going to

bet against the incumbent, you know, at the convention. And it wouldn't have passed the convention floor. So I – I finally said to Bill in a showdown you want to go with your plank? Because if it gets voted down, it's your responsibility. I'll go with it but I'm telling you, as a Carter person, I'm telling you I have their assurance they'll go for this. We'll get first plank. Yours will be an honorable defeat. Mine will be a less honorable victory, but it'll be a victory, and there will be honor in it.

ANDERSON: What were the differences between the – do you remember?

APUZZO: I don't remember but, you know, history records it someplace. I mean, so, he told me, "Fine, we'll do it your way." Well, you know, his heart wasn't in it, and there was a lot of rancor as a result of it. But I would rather be able to bring home, for the purpose of one making those delegates, those more conservative delegates at that convention and at that platform committee commit – fully commit to something. That was my point of view. Fully commit to something. What will you fully commit to? How can we get from here to there? No, you're not going to get a home run. Sometimes you have to bunt. You either bunt or strike out. So we got the plank in and that enabled us to galvanize community people to get involved in the election. How can you get involved when you haven't – when you bring a defeat home? Oh, we had an honorable defeat. Well, that's not going to galvanize people to come out and vote. We have a victory. That's going to get people to feel like they're invested in this and get involved and defeat this guy Reagan.

Well, you know, the rest is history. Carter lost. I had taken a leave from Brooklyn College and my leave would go on for so many months. Had Carter won, I would have gone to the administration but I spent some time unemployed for a while and then was asked to take the executive directorship of the Fund For Human Dignity, which was NGLTF's 501c3. The education wing. And I did that. And so that brought me closer to the Task Force because a) it was their sister organization but b) it funded projects. So I was now able to fashion an agenda for the Task Force by virtue of having the money.

So I went in two directions. One was violence. And I chose violence with the help of a lot of people who sat down and worked with me. I chose violence because it's a local issue. I believed, because of my experience in civil rights that Americans didn't become not racist when they saw little children being hosed down in Mississippi, but they did say, "That's not me. I wouldn't do that. I don't want to be associated with that." Violence helps to move away from that ism a little bit.

And the first thing I felt we needed to do was to get some degree of security for our people so they wouldn't feel like if they walked – being gay in an area is a, you know, a life-threatening issue. How do you make the prejudice vivid? You hold up the way the anti-defamation

league held up and said, “So many synagogues were burnt every year. So many, you know,” Or the NAACP said, “So many black churches have been defaced.” It becomes vivid to a public that is apathetic and it makes them less apathetic and that – that group that is, you know, discriminatory, they say, “Well, I’m not that discriminating.” They want to disown that level. So I wanted that to happen.

So I put forward some money that we had raised in the Fund for Human Dignity for the antigay violence project. And we funded the first two local antigay violence projects. The Chelsea one and CUAV (Communities United Against Violence) in San Francisco. And then we went and set up because you see – I’m gonna have to divert here. When people came to work for me in the community, whether it was Lance, or Jeff Levy, I made them buy the book by Benis Benechin, *The Planning of Change* because change is an equation. What model are you going to use? What? What model? I’m going to demonstrate. No, no, no. There’s a model. You’re going to – what model of change are you going after? Where are the people that you want to change? What has to be done to get them to change? So I’m committed to that approach to getting change.

So when we did the CUAV and the Chelsea, the next thing I was interested in is creating an infrastructure. You create a local presence, then you create an infrastructure in the organization, and that’s when we funded the Antigay Violence Hotline. Because then we trained people to deal with crisis over the phone. Now, we had an infrastructure. We knew this, that we had people that were volunteers. It was all set up. The grace of God that that was there when AIDS came. Because then I converted it. By that time, I was at the Task Force and I converted it to the first in the world AIDS hot line, where you could call and get information. So much so, that subsequently when the National Public – Public Health Administration went to set up its AIDS Hotline in Washington, it came and sat – they came and sat with us to see how we did it. And we trained them, at the Task Force.

So, you see what I’m talking about, the value of not just plopping money down and having that – but to create an infrastructure and one that is versatile enough to serve as an infrastructure as your crisis changes. You understand? And that’s, you know, the Fund for Human Dignity projects were my entrée into helping establish an agenda at the Task Force. While that was happening, the head of the Task Force was, you know, really fumbling.

ANDERSON: Who was that at the time?

APUZZO: Lucia Baleska. And it came to a head when she told what she thought was a joke at an AIDS conference in Houston, and, you know, some of the men had already lost friends or had friends being sick or were – I mean, they were already galvanized around this and the joke was not

funny. And it showed a real insensitivity and that was enough to boot her out virtually right there. They never – they came home with the commitment to get rid of her. The board met in an emergency session.

And that's where the conflict about Apuzzo – but my attitude was, don't take me. You know, I mean, I really was not like, I'm dying for this job. Please give it to me. It was, like, you know, I can go back to Brooklyn College and I have the Fund for Human Dignity and P.S., I have the purse strings, you know. So, um, that's fine with me if you don't hire me. But Bruce Voller was very committed and the head of the *Advocate*, David Goodstein was there and heard the joke and was, like, they make a change or we're – the press was after them. And the press subsequently went after Lucia big time.

So, I got to the Task Force despite the several women really just not working with me. They just – they were, like, belligerent and angry and, you know, it was a real – I'm not going to arm wrestle with you. And my attitude was, I'm not going to arm wrestle with you.

ANDERSON: Did they feel like we should - shouldn't be –

APUZZO: They felt like Lucia got picked on. Lucia should – I don't know. I can't say what they felt like. I could say what I felt like, and what I felt like was, you know, we're stuck with you. There's nothing much we can do about it, and – but we're not going to love it. And my attitude was, I'm not arm wrestling, you know. And so, my approach, which probably wasn't loving, was I can go right over this board out to the community, and that's exactly what I did. I became, in my opinion, the first executive director that went to Main Street in this country. I mean, I can't think of three states I wasn't in, and I went – I was all over the country, really, talking and being with people and my – what was I bad at? I was bad at raising money. I could not – I could do it if I didn't work for the organization. But if I worked – it was, like, pay me. But anyway, AIDS-

ANDERSON: And your twin priorities during your directorship were still violence and AIDS? Those were your- the messages that you were taking to Main Street?

APUZZO: Well, violence was – no, it was AIDS under the heading of health because anytime I talked about AIDS, I put it in the larger context. As a matter of fact, I spoke, and I said, "AIDS – the face of AIDS is the face of racism. The face of AIDS is the face of homelessness. The face of AIDS is drug addiction. The war on drugs but with a slingshot. You know, the face of AIDS is – is – it is not gay. It's not about gay and homophobia. It's about all these other things." It gave me – I mean, I used the opportunity to take those issues that I talked about before and

17:10
-------

wrap it into this and found in gay men a greater willingness to hear that now, because you could see it.

And so when I had access as I did to, um, to the head of the deputy of HHS, Ed Brandt, who came in to the Reagan administration being a Southern Republican and who left sending Jeff Levy and I copies of what he perceived the AIDS budget should be in a plain brown wrapper. But the relationship that we built and you know, when I said, and we went up the wall of government and had no idea what was on the other side? Well, what's on the other side are people. Ordinary people, and the capacity to build with them some common ground that makes them want to work with you is a critical, critical element in the equation to create change.

Ed Brandt was a person. He was just a person. He was a guy who was smart and he found himself working with Margaret Heckler who was less than she could have been as Secretary of Health in Human Services in those years. And he got so frustrated and was so profoundly affected by Jeff Levy who worked for me as my Washington person and myself that the man was transformed around the issue of AIDS. Transformed. He left the job because he felt they just weren't doing the job on AIDS. We literally changed his person. And in doing so – but in the process, I was able to say to him, I'm not just here about it, I'm here about health, health in my community. We need to have lesbian health issues recognized, and as a result of that, we put in New York the very first regional meeting of HHS on lesbian health issues.

And when I went to Social Security, and spoke to the head of Social Security, a woman by the name of McStein was her last name, Commissioner McStein, I said, "It's a crime that I haven't spoken to you before on other issues, that AIDS brings me here. We have children. We have these issues that social – disability issues, and it's – this is – we are part of the constituency that you're supposed to be responsive to." And to me, getting social security disability for people with AIDS out of the first Reagan administration was, to me, one of the great – an accomplish - which I share with Jeff Levy who did a superb job working for me. And I must tell you, I took no amount of flack particularly from some of those women on the board when I fired an African-American man who wasn't doing the job and hired Jeff Levy, a white guy in Washington.

I fired a guy, oh, what was his name? Mel Booser. Mel Booser was an African-American guy, we put him up for vice president, the first gay vice president candidate at the Democratic Convention but we were in an AIDS crisis and we needed somebody getting the job done, and Mel wasn't doing it, and so I fired him. And of course, firing an African-American male, if you thought I didn't have any feminist credentials before, clearly I've just proven it. But I hired Jeff and I'll tell ya, I would hire Jeff in any job I ever had. He's done a fabulous job. He went

on to be the deputy at – under Clinton in the AIDS office at the White House.

ANDERSON: I'll shut off for the lawnmower. There we go.

APUZZO: But that was a – that was a major coup, getting that in the first Reagan administration, and using the opportunity to get other issues in front of policy makers.

ANDERSON: What was it like being a woman at the Task Force? In those years? In the 80s?

APUZZO: It was actually good for the issue, because you know, the issue when we – when we pressed for a congressional hearing, we had to work very hard to get a congressional hearing. It was a very good picture to have a woman, particularly one with a little gray hair and grannie glasses talking about this issue. Um, and it – I think it helped in the community to say to a community that had some longstanding divisions between men and women that this was the right thing, this was about loving our brothers, and we might have differences, but this is a crisis, this is a war. We must be there for them, and we were. Blood Sisters. One of the first organizations. To give blood, you know, when gay men couldn't. When they were discriminating against gay men. I mean, it was a beautiful gesture of, we're here. We'll stand in your place, as terrible as the blood policy was. But it was a beautiful loving gesture.

What was it like? It was – you know, I learned to fight with the boys when I was very young, and I learned how boys fight. They basically have an argument with you and then they – somebody wins and you walk away and you come back and you do the next thing. That's how boys fight. I like that. That works for me. Because if I have a fight with you today and we duke it out, whatever the issues are, and tomorrow we have to meet on another issue, that's fine with me. I don't want to have to wonder whether you're still fighting with me three days from now and I'm in a school yard and, you know, nobody's talking to me. That's not how it works. That's not how we get the job done. So, you know – I – I – we batted each other around but I know how to handle myself, fighting with the boys, and basically for me, it was a very loving fisticuffs. [laugh] It's kind of, like, you know, fists. You know, and they'd swing and sometimes they'd hit and sometimes it'd be below the belt and sometimes I'd swing and if it was really bad, I'd knee'em.

But, you know, but I basically am very blessed to have received a lot of love from the community of men. I've had my fights with them, I've had my arguments with them, but I found that they've been fair with me and they've been loving with me and I have tried to be fair and loving back. And, I do feel like there are things that bother me a great deal about the gay male community. But by and large, I've – I've gotten a lot

out of my relationship with many of the men, and by that, I mean a lot of love and affection and caring. And they've been there for me, you know, in ways that have been very loving and I appreciate that.

ANDERSON: Do you want to say more about your relationship with women in the organization?

APUZZO: My staff – I had a lot of women working for me on staff and that was – that was a good relationship. My staff – my relationship with women on the board was not good. As a matter of fact, it was only in the last five years – Barbara Love was on the board and maybe five, maybe seven – within the last little bunch of years, um, Barbara Love had the integrity and the good stuff to come to me and say, “You know, I was part of that group of women that gave you a hard time and I was wrong and you were right, and I’m sorry.” And um, that meant a lot to me, because I don’t – I didn’t see how they were right. They needed someone to get the job done and I got the job done. And that should’ve been what was the most important thing to them. I didn’t ignore women’s issues. I used my access to health care issues to support lesbian health issues and broke some significant barriers there. And violence was not a gay male issue. A lot of lesbians got beat up. So, I – you know, I did the best job I could. I probably could’ve done better had we had a better relationship but, you know.

ANDERSON: Two questions about the Task Force: One is when did they add lesbian to the name of the organization? And were you there?

APUZZO: I was on the board and I think I either seconded the motion or made the motion, but I was part of the motion that changed the name. When I left, after my tenure as director, I became a member of the board for a while and, uh-

ANDERSON: Do you remember – can you say anything about that choice to add lesbian to the name?

APUZZO: Well, it was, like, about time. [laugh] It was, like, hello. You know. All these feminists – why didn’t they do it? They were on the board, you know.

ANDERSON: Had it come up before and been rejected?

APUZZO: I don’t know. I wasn’t on the board. You know, I went from my director’s meetings and my executive director’s meetings. But let me say about the board, that there were some board – women board members that I really love, that were really sweethearts. And one of them that comes to mind, and I’m sure there was more than one, but

Frances Henckle was a sweetie. I mean, she tried to, like, balance between – and I think for a while, she was co-chair. She tried to balance between, you know, people were really are, like, being negative and I was, like, OK, Frances, do one of them want to run the organization because it's fine with me. Don't play hardball with me, because it's a hardball, you know. And I would just – I'd walk away, you know. Because at that point, I could have gone to any other organization. And – and I had a track record. I could do it, and Francis had a, like— and I must say, and I'm so glad that you came back to this because – because Frances did a noble job of trying to keep this tension at a minimum and generate some positivity and I'm sure there are other women, but I have just forgotten.

I'd have to look over notes to see who they were and I don't want to give the impression, you know, that it was male-female, because Francis clearly was someone who worked beautifully with men and who loved Jeff and still loves Jeff Levy, and thought he was a great choice.

ANDERSON: So when lesbian was added to the name of the organization, it was without conflict. It was –

APUZZO: No. I didn't hear any – I didn't hear any. I mean, I don't recall a scintilla of reluctance.

ANDERSON: A couple of things. One is, um, your family's reaction to you holding such a visible and gay position.

APUZZO: They hated it, you know, it was embarrassing to my family. What was interesting was, you know, all the AIDS stuff gave me a tremendous amount of visibility in mainstream press and when my cousin who was an IV drug user was diagnosed with AIDS, you know, the family called me and – because, you know, it was, like, a gay disease to them. They had all the –the ignorances that I was out trying to work to dissolve. And to this day, many people in my family have never been told that Billy died of AIDS. They said he died of cancer or pneumonia or whatever the hell the euphemism was at the time. His own family said that. So, uh, you know. It's right when they say start at home. That's where the ignorance is.

30:30

My family was not in favor. My mother was very embarrassed by it. But you know, I used to speak to members of the community about however long it took us to decide to come out, we had a coming out process. But when we come out, we dump it on them, and we're not there for any of the process it takes them. Think of the self-hate that we've experienced and then – then we go through some process with or without help, internally or with other people and then we go – boop! We come out. We're liberated. Now, we're out, they're out. No process. No

process. No support. No help. Which is why PFLAG is such an important organization and does such a terrific job.

ANDERSON: Did any of your family members get involved with PFLAG?

APUZZO: My mother and father once came to a PFLAG dinner in New York together. I have a picture of us, the three of us, in the group of all the parents sitting there. They both came. It was after their divorce. They both came to the event. Either I was getting an award or I was keynote speaking or something like that and I asked them to come. I asked them to come.

Um, my mother came to one of the Fund for Human Dignity – we did the first big dinners in New York, the Fund for Human Dignity, the big dress-up dinners, before big dress-up dinners were done. We did it at the Plaza, and the governor came and spoke, and my mother and sister came to that. They sat with Matilda Crim and some other luminaries, and I think, uh, you know, unfortunately a lot of times our parents need to see us legitimized by other people before they'll embrace us and you know, when the governor came and, you know, "Ginny, Ginny, Ginny," you know, when it was clear we had a relationship, I guess someplace in my mother's head, it was like, well, the governor thinks it's OK. [laugh] I don't know what. But, you know, it's a process.

ANDERSON: Yeah. Let's just jump ahead a little bit to you coming back to the Task Force, and then we'll go back to Cuomo and Clinton in the next hour. Um, tell me about your- your decision to return in 1999 to the Task Force and the endowed chair named in your honor.

APUZZO: Well, I – Carrie and Urvashi came to see me at the White House. Carrie– what's Carrie's last name? Carrie who was the chair – who was the head of the Task Force. Carrie- Oh, my god. This is so terrible to forget names. Carrie –

ANDERSON: It must be on record somewhere.

APUZZO: Yeah, yeah. She was the executive director before Urvashi. Carrie and Urv both came to see me and of course, I know Urv since she's, like, a child. She was this little cub reporter on – on the Boston paper. And I always just loved her. She was a sweetie and I – I watched her grow and you know, get such stature and be such a major player in the community and beyond. Um, and they came to see me and they-they made me an offer. And, you know, I mulled it over. I really did not want to work anymore. I wanted to be home. I wanted to be home because, um, when my father died in March or February, I was at the White House –

ANDERSON: Was that in '99?

APUZZO: Whatever year – I was at the White House and when you don't have a good relationship with someone for most of your life and uh, you must understand, particularly when it's a parent, if they die, you have that bad relationship forever. You can't fix it. So, it's – it was important for me to be there. My sister called me and said, you know, "You have to come home." Well, I finished up a few things because the White House is not a place you walk out of. It's not – you just don't walk out the door, particularly when you had a job like mine. So as soon as I could, I left, and came home but my father had fallen into a coma. He was still alive, but he was in a coma, and um, he died.

And my mother was in her eighties, you know, 81 or whatever, you know, eighties, and um, and I didn't want to be too busy to be there when my mother died. She had already had cancer, lung cancer. The survival rate for lung cancer is about 14 percent for five years. She had exceeded her five years, so I knew, she knew she was living on borrowed time. She had gotten frail and I just thought, this is crazy.

I need – this is about life. This is about what matters in life, and I was able to forgive my father for the things I felt he needed to be forgiven and I asked him in his coma to forgive me for harshness and for judgment and for failing to see that he was so young to be encumbered with family and so ill-prepared for the job of parent.

But I didn't want that for my mother. So I went back to the White House and I indicated that I was going to leave, and they were terrific. They offered me every configuration, but you can't have 2000 people working for you and be responsible to get the trains running – literally, your job is to keep the trains running in every – every context. That's what my job was, from the planes to the computers, to the budget, to personnel, to raises, the firings, whatever. That was my job. Uh, you can't do that four days a week. I couldn't do it in seven. So, there's no way you can do it, and I'm compulsive about my job. Whatever it is. I've got to do it. So I said, "No, I'm going to leave." It was time. And I felt personally in my soul it was time.

And then Urv and Carrie came and said, "Look, we promised to be there through the election. And come and join us. We'll be a good team." Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And we'll establish a chair in your name. and I – I was clear that I wanted to work from home by and large and so we worked out what I do and I went back for the first time. After I left, I never went back, never went to the offices, never, you know. You leave, you leave. Um, and so, um, I went back and it was – it was cool. We did a lot of work around the election about the analysis of the LGBT vote capability and got a lot of that out, using my access, um, to the media. And then Carrie left and created, you know, a little bit of a crisis, and then Urv left and, you know, there I was. And that was the one thing I didn't want to do. I did not want to have to do that. Um, and

so, I stayed through the transition but I – it really was important for me and for my life to leave, and, uh, it was good. It was a good thing to go back and to do what I could do, but it was also a good thing to leave.

ANDERSON: So, how long were you at the Task Force this time around? I know you went in '99, but would you say you stayed a year, or two?

APUZZO: Fourteen – a year, 14 months, I don't know. I'm sure they will tell you. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The chair was for a year and then I stayed a little longer because people left and then the policy – oh, the political director left. I mean, they just, they had this, like, organization could've gone down in that hole because of, you know, you just can't have that transition, particularly when your competition is Elizabeth Birch in HRCF and, you know, you can't – you can't say this organization has much more of a soul and is committed to run— you gotta run it. You got to turn on the lights and keep the electricity going. So.

ANDERSON: Did your return there feel like a homecoming? Was the Task Force recognizable to you or very different to you?

APUZZO: It was very different. It was very, very different and yet very much the same. It was, um, you know, it was – it was very hard to go back to watching people – it's always hard to go back because the wheel that they're inventing is a different wheel, and you've got to see it as that. You can't go back and say, "Oh, this is what the wheel looks like." It's like being American in Iraq. Oh, this is how democracy looks, Iraq. No, no, no. That's how your democracy looks, America. And you – you know, there's a natural inclination if you see – oh, that's a wheel they're making. We've already made that wheel. Wrong. They're making their own wheel.

And so refraining is the best skill. Stepping back and waiting to be asked is the best skill, because you don't come out of the White House and think that you enter a group and every – you know, you can just say something. You have to know that your words will carry something with them that may be doesn't need to be heard. So I, for me, it was a matter of stepping back and letting the process work and letting the people who were there have confidence in carrying on their job and not trying to think that you knew how to do it and you opened your mouth and whatever.

So that was – that was difficult. Um, but I recognized that that was the better contribution to try to make instead of saying, "OK. This is how we have to do it."

ANDERSON: Well, I imagine it wasn't only your position at the White House, but also the reverence in terms of you being a former director, the chair

named in your ho – I mean, your long history with the Task Force also gave you a seniority and a-

APUZZO: Which I think is a card that is a very dangerous one to have. And so, I think you have to really respect what is being built at the moment, you know. You can't say, "I don't recognize this. This is-" You just can't do that, because had someone done that to me, you know, when I was struggling and we were – we were kind of in a wilderness. We were on a frontier, you know, it would have undermined my confidence. It might have delayed anything I could have done. So, you know.

ANDERSON: Were there also challenges going from the culture of the administration that you had been in from inside politics, going back outside to a grass roots gay and lesbian organization?

APUZZO: Oh, yeah.

ANDERSON: What were some of those?

APUZZO: Oh, everything is in shorthand at the White House. Things move at a pace that is unrecognizable if you're not there. Whole things are skipped over and presumed, because everybody speaks a common language. In an organization like the Task Force, process is religion. It's – holy orders. And in the White House process, particularly among your colleagues, when you all know you have to get this done, you just get it done, and you can't bring that attitude into an environment in which process is important and really – it helps people identify their roles. Their role gets – gets contoured in the course of that process. Um, they relate to each other and they find the footing to relate to one another and they sustain that relationship through the process. They grow through that process. So you can't just think, "Well, this is an emergency. We have to do it this way." Um, and because I was there before, and because I was in a different place and came back, I really felt like, get your foot off the accelerator, put your foot on the brakes, and it's not that they're slower, it's that it's a different – it's a different context, and that's everything.

It was like going into a different culture, and you must go to a culture with respect for where it is, and not, you know. (both voices) So maybe all those feminists taught me something, right? [laugh]

ANDERSON: Did you show up with that in mind or is that something you learned as you were going back there?

APUZZO: I knew it before I was going – I knew going in that – I mean, I had been there, known, and it's not that they were in the same place, it's just that not-for-profit is a different culture. It's a – it's got a different objective.

Getting it done is not always the objective. Sometimes failing or going for the – going for what isn't directly seen is the bulls' eye to me is the better goal.

ANDERSON: Which culture suits you better? Your talents?

APUZZO: The culture I'm living in now suits me best. But, uh, -

ANDERSON: Where were you more effective?

APUZZO: I think – but, you know, you're the least appropriate judge of yourself but I think the time of my life that I was an activist, that was – I did that too. Coming into government, I was very effective in government and I was a – I brought to government a sense of what community activism, whether it's building houses in community development corporations or consumer advocate culture. I knew that culture and so in government, I had better vision than my colleagues, because activists, no matter what the issue, the activists on the outside – I had been given their glasses, you know, their perspective, and now I was in government and I had that perspective and having the two perspectives enabled me to work better in government. Going back to not-for-profit world, I could probably do better there because I know what's on the other side of that wall. So I probably could have and was offered very lucrative positions in lobbying and stuff like that – it's not my time in life to do that. This is my time in life to do something else.

ANDERSON: Let's break there.

APUZZO: OK.

END TAPE 4

## TAPE 5

ANDERSON: The Cuomo administration. Let's back up to that point. When you decided that you were ready to work for Cuomo and the different positions you had there.

APUZZO: Well, I mentioned when I decided to work for him and when my father had his first stroke, my father had several strokes and he had a very long decline, many years over my career, actually. He created the punctuations in my career. But that was about '85 and I went to work for the governor at Consumer Protection for maybe seven years and then Housing for a couple of years. I was Number 2 at Housing.

And then became president of the Civil Service Commission and commissioner of - on the Civil Service Commission, president of the commission itself and the Department of Civil Service. Which deserves a little conversation. It is - the civil service has jurisdiction over 350,000 in the state of New York. One hundred fifty thousand state workers, 350,000 municipal workers throughout the state. It's the oldest civil service commission in the country and rules basically with the force of law, it's a very powerful position. And it really is the personnel department for the largest workforce.

And I was shocked that the governor would give me that position, and of course, it requires senate confirmation, so I had to go through the confirmation process. And it's an interesting story, uh, because the most conservative senators were Italian but being Italian, as I went around to them, you know, they would, like, reluctantly support. It was, like, how do you vote against an Italian? [laugh] I created a little dilemma for them. But it was - it was a very interesting process and in the last analysis, I had the unanimous senate approval and it was really a wonderful experience, because so many people who wouldn't have rooted for a lesbian, you know, for the hell of it ended up on, you know, rooting for me on the staff, really there into the wee hours of the morning while they were debating and these things get put off and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

So it was a - it was a good experience, but what is important (phone ringing) - what was important was that the governor had promised that if he were reelected, he would - he would do domestic partners in New York State for New York State workers. And, of course, when he was defeated, he went into the funk and basically the day after the election, he handed the government over to Pataki and all of the things that were pending. So I wanted to get this domestic partners. I felt like he made a promise to the community and he made a promise to me and, so there were three people involved in getting this done.

One was office of employer relations. The other was BMBOMB - Management, Budget - but I found this arcane little piece that said the civil service commissioner - and the civil service commissioner and I

found this little thing that the civil service commissioner can do it since all the workers, you know, are under your jurisdiction and I got council's way to get around it and said, basically, if it's not done the way it was promised to be done, I will do it myself, and then I want to see somebody argue with me that we shouldn't have it if the commitment was done.

So there was a little bit of hardball there, but, the governor then said, "Well, you know, the unions have to support it." The unions. Well, I went to – I went to the most conservative union in the workforce and that is the prison guards. Now, I went to the prison guards because prison guards are rotated through the state in their earliest, you know, initiation into state work. They also have one of the highest rates of divorce. Since I knew they had the highest rates of divorce and that prison work was hard on family life, chances are they had a lot of domestic partners who were heterosexual.

So I went to that union and I – the guy happened to be an Italian guy who was the head of the union, a real tough guy, can't remember his name now, but he was a toughie. But we hit it off. We just hit it off and we spoke each other's language and I got, uh, I got his approval and I went back and I said, "This is the toughest union. We got them. We can get everybody else." And subsequently got everybody else and got it through.

So it was in the waning moments of the Cuomo administration that I got domestic partners passed. Domestic – yeah, domestic partners passed in state workers. And that was – that was a big thing. And Barbara and I never took advantage of it until this last year, because she had coverage in her job. But this last year, I applied for domestic partners.

ANDERSON: You had – your positions seemed to be, um, let me put this a different way. You worked in Housing, Civil Service, and Consumer Affairs. What are the continuities between those three job titles, given that the fields are so different and you came out of gay and lesbian organizing though with a varied platform?

APUZZO: Well, consumer action is an advocacy job. Your advocating, so there was brilliance in the governor putting me there. When I – when he – when he gave me the job of Deputy Commissioner, Executive Deputy Commissioner of Housing and Community Development, first of all, it's a much bigger agency. It's one of the super-agencies. And B, it's got a huge budget. A lot of federal money for housing. And a lot of opportunity to do, to listen to activists, because Community Development – they're all local activists. They're advocates. So that, you know, housing works – for part of our constituency.

So he called me up at home and said, "I've got a new job for you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Executive Deputy Commissioner of

Housing.” I said, “Housing? I don’t know anything about housing.” He said, “You live in a house? You know about housing.” He had a great sense of humor. But uh, I went and there, the continuity is management. You are responsible for the operations of the agency.

The other thing was, the commissioner was immature, so the Deputy Executive Commissioner is the governor’s person there. You get the trains running. You keep it running. And if it doesn’t right, he’s gonna call you because he doesn’t speak to his commissioners. Mario Cuomo never had a cabinet meeting, and he didn’t happen to like the commissioner there. He just didn’t like him and he had good reason. But I got along well with him and, and so, it was management and working with advocates.

And then, civil service. I honestly don’t know why. I think he wanted to make me a commissioner. He had a woman there who was Italian who had strong support in the Italian-American community. Um, it called for balance and reason ability and keeping, you know, the unions and the, you know, all that kind of stuff. And, and he just wanted me to do it. So, I think he probably thought he would get the Italian-American community off his neck when he basically fired an old, really somebody who had been – Gambino – I forget her first name, Josephine Gambino — and, uh, and put me in. So, you know, the commonalities, I guess are, you know, what I said.

ANDERSON: Was there a steep learning curve then in terms of housing issues, then civil service?

APUZZO: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. There was incredible – but, you know, I use the people who – I used people who were there who did the job who knew the job, because I always believed first-rate people want first-rate people around them. So where there were good people, I didn’t care whether they were political people and they weren’t with us or whatever.

When I went to the White House, I didn’t bring one person with me. I could’ve fired all the political people there and brought in new people. I didn’t bring anybody in. I walked in, said “Everybody’s got their job. This is what I need to know.” Um, so I – I used the people who were there. The people had been there years and years and I – I went to them and sought their guidance and counseling. Sought their expertise. And they gave it. For the most part, they were very delighted that somebody said, “Hey, I don’t know what I’m doing. [laugh] Help me out here.”

And particularly in Housing, Myron Hause, who remains a dear friend. This guy started out in the mailroom after the war and worked his way up to Deputy Commissioner of Housing for um, all of the buildings, the state housing buildings. He was – he tutored me through and his guidance was always without an agenda. He would say, if you wanted, if you wanted it to come down this way, then, you know, and – and it was that kind of relationship with the people who were there,

10:55

particularly in housing and civil service, that worked a great deal for me. And then when I went to the White House.

Labor – I was at Labor for a year and if I had had to stay at the Department of Labor for a year and two weeks, I would have come home. Because I went there because Bob Reich was there. He was the – he was the secretary. But I was there in the last year of Clinton’s first term, thereabouts, and um, Bob Reich was out campaigning for the president. And then, when he came back, he left. And what’s-her-name came in. Um, Alexis (cough). Alexis Herman came as Secretary, and frankly, I couldn’t stand her. I thought she was terrible at the job. Just terrible. Just an absolute total prima donna. You know? I mean, she was Madam Secretary and Bob was, you know, Bob. She had people working for her who were jerks. And it was, like, I said, “I’m going home, you know. I’m leaving.” And then I got a call to go to the White House.

ANDERSON: Back up to your, um, to getting appointed to the – to Labor. How did that happen? You had a personal relationship with Robert Reich?

APUZZO: Well I happened to have – when Mario Cuomo in the earlier administrations did wonderful things, he had management seminars and brought in people from the Kennedy School to teach his upper level management people. And I applied and he sent me to a thing for – with – that Bob Reich taught at, and I went to several others, but his was very significant to me. (This was not planned. Now go away. Go on.) And, um, I was just very taken with Bob and very taken with his enthusiasm and intelligence and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Um, but Housing was – not Housing, I’m sorry. I’m distracted by the cat. Why don’t you put the cat in that little room?

ANDERSON: OK.

APUZZO: Anyway, I was at Civil Service. You see, after the governor lost, I still had a job. I relinquished my job as commissioner of the department but retained a term of office for seven years on the Civil Service Commission. I could have stayed there at a rate of \$70,000 a year for two days a month work. Not bad offer. Well, it’s dreadful. I mean, how do you justify getting \$70,000 a year for working two days a month? They didn’t want you in the office. You only went up for the two, maybe three day commission meeting, and then you were outvoted by the two republicans who were on. So, you could make your case to the press, which I did, on issues but basically, it was a – Why was I doing this? What was it giving me in my life? What was I contributing? Nothing.

So I had been approached to see if I was interested in the Clinton administration. I had been in – I said I was interested and, you know,

you have something? Otherwise, I have a job. I don't need to get out, but I'm not happy. So the opportunity to work for Bob Reich was very, very appealing to me and I was offered the Associate Deputy Secretary position which put me on the executive staff and Bob was out and so I worked for a person who was a total moron. I mean, this person was a moron. And- and I hated it.

And when Alexis Herman was appointed after Bob left, it just got worse. It just got worse. She brought in people who were terrible. Finally, they appointed Kitty Higgins, who had been at the White House, to the deputy secretary position and I worked with her for a while, and I loved her. She was a sweetie. But by that time, I was, like, OK, I've had enough of the craziness here. I'm going home. And um, I ended up being called to the White House and thought I was going to get the job of Director of Personnel for the White House. The Office of Personnel. Which made sense. Civil Service. Personnel.

ANDERSON: Labor.

APUZZO: Labor – yeah, you know, I thought, well that makes sense. You know, I'll try that out. So I went for an interview with John Podesta and talked to him, and talked to a couple of other people. And then, one day, Erskine Bowles, this was like a week later, Erskine Bowles who was the chief of staff of the White House, called me and asked me if I would come down to the White House and I said, "Yeah." And so he said to me – and by this time, a memo, an action memo had gone to the President indicating that they want him to sign off for him to appoint me Director of Personnel. So I thought, you know, this is just pro forma, Director of Personnel. What's the President going to say? It's Personnel.

Well, I go to Erskine Bowles, he calls me in and he says he wants to talk to me about this job, and the kind of job and the pressure that'd be on and the people who'll be trying to pressure me and you know, you have to be able to stand up to Sandy Berger and to – and I'm – I said to him, you know, "What job are we talking about?" And he said, "Assistant to the President for Management and Administration." And I said, "That's not the job. Is that the job? I thought it was Director of Personnel." And he said, "No, no. This is a much better job." I was, like, oh? "What do you do? What does this job entail?" "Well, there's the military office and that's all of the communications, Da-da-da." And he starts naming. I said, "I don't want that job. I don't want that job." And he said, "Well, promise me you'll think about it." And I said, "I'll think about it but I don't want that job."

ANDERSON: Why didn't you want that job?

APUZZO: Everything that could go wrong is your responsibility. OK? Everything that could go wrong. Everything with the press operation. You have no

idea what is involved. Every time the President moves, there's a whole press corps. Now the press has to billed for that movement. So let's say two hundred people are going on this press thing? Andrea Mitchell steps off and doesn't take the third leg, that whole billing gets affected for every – because you have to divide the cost between all the – that's just this little small piece of this humongous operation. Anything and everything that can go wrong emanates from that office because it is basically the operations office.

So I went back and I talked to some friends in government and I said, they said, "Well are you going to be Director of Personnel?" And I said, "I don't know. Erskine talked about Assistant to the President." "Oh, Assistant to the President for what?" "Management." "Oh, you don't want that job. Nobody can do that job. That is not a job – no." Well, the more people said to me, it's an impossible job, well then I got interested in it. The Apuzzo neurosis. You know, the more they said, "This is impossible, this is not possible, and you have to work with the military, the highest ranking gay person is in charge of – the lesbian is in charge of the office of military – White House office of the military. This is, like, a problem." So I – I thought, well, you know, I could do that. [laugh]

So, uh, Erskine called me back and I said, "You know, everybody said, says to me that this is an impossible job and so it interests me." And I went back to speak to Podesta and we made a couple of understandings, and um, and I took the job. And had a great staff, wonderful staff, young – people that made you believe in America. Young kids that were – worked their hearts out and-and cared deeply and you get in an elevator and you hear a Bronx accent and a Southern accent and a Western accent and a New England accent, and here you are, you're in this little 18 acres called the White House, and – and this group – you're surrounded by a group of young people who desperately care about their job, for the President. And it's not Bill Clinton so much as the President. It's an amazing, amazing experience. And one that inspired me a great deal. I loved my staff. I loved them. I-I just – they were young, they were committed, they were smart, they struggled.

Some of them knew the president from Arkansas. Ashley Reins who's getting married. Ms. Ashley Reins. Her dearest friend was Monica Lewinski, and this all happened before I got there, but it wasn't out yet, you see? There was no scandal. And-and she knew the President, because Monica had told her and – but I didn't know it, and I watched these people get subpoenaed and have to incur legal things and watch a young kid, 24 years old, try to be fair to her relationship with her friend and her relationship with her President. It was – it was an amazing experience, and then watching young people be so devastated by what this man – that he lied. And-and to have them – to be able to say to them, "OK, we're meeting in this room. Nothing that happens in this room goes out of this room, but be angry. Tell it. Say it. Get it out.

Because we got a job to do for the American people when you're done." And they got it out, and some of them wept. I mean, they were there heart and soul. So it was a – it was a terrific –

And the military, getting to know the military and getting- you know, getting to be me with my director office from military who is a colonel, who's one step below a general, and having my – I had a section who worked for me who were marines. The marines did helicopter HMX – helicopters. You know, colonel, one step below a general. Dealt with these guys. Was assigned a director to take me, when we went to Africa around. I knew nothing was going to happen to me, because these guys would die for you. I mean that's just how they were. Um, the women in the military – fabulous. Fabulous. I mean, I just met some wonderful people and had a sense of – of professionalism that they were capable of in highly technical areas. All the communications around the White House and secret communications are done by these folks. Army personnel.

So, I had a marvelous experience as a manager with, um, in some respects, the cream of the crop, of folks to work with. And to end your career in that way is – was really extraordinary to me.

ANDERSON: Sexuality was a non-issue, especially in terms of the military relationships?

APUZZO: Sexuality was not an issue. The military threw me a party. If I showed you some of the gifts that the military, the different services gave me - they're upstairs, I have— it really moves me. Upstairs I have a shadow box – military's big on shadow boxes – and in it, they have my badge from Camp David, a buckle from Air Force One, uh, different things, a flag on top that's folded military style that flew over Camp David, because Camp David was my jurisdiction, too, on Memorial Day before I left, and badges from all of the people that worked – it really – and in the middle, this plaque that says, "To Virginia Apuzzo, Assistant to the President for Management and Administration, a Crusader for Human Dignity." This is from military personnel.

So, I met them and grew to respect and love and have enormous regard for their professional contribution. And they met me as a lesbian and as a manager. And that little thing about "crusader for human dignity" or whatever, it's like that, it was an acknowledgment. We saw you, and we want you to know we care about you in that capacity. It was very moving.

ANDERSON: How long were you there before the Lewinski scandal broke?

24:25
-------

APUZZO: Probably a year. And the Lewinski scandal broke and, um, because most of the people who worked for me were part of the permanent government, they were either military or civil service. I had maybe 35

people work for me who were political. But of 2000 people who worked for you, that's not a big political staff. And of course, you had to keep all of the civil servants in line and you had Y2K coming.

See, Y2K, all the computer stuff was mine to deal with. All that – all that stuff around getting those computers up and getting ready for Y2K and of course, I can't download a file personally. But I know about infrastructure and I know about architecture and I know what a fire wall is. And there was much work to be done and we could not afford delays. We were on such timelines that I had monthly goals to reach and then I would throw parties for the civil servant staff who were working, the computer staff, and celebrate one more milestone as we moved toward – we'd have a pizza party, we would have coffee and cake, we'd have this and have that, and most of them had never been into the office of the Assistant to the President before and they'd worked there for, you know, thirty years. But they never – there was never any flow. It was just horizontal.

But team, the notion of a team is something that I carried and it worked for – it worked for me, because they did the work.

ANDERSON: Tell me about the culture of working in the White House, both pre- and post Lewinski and other Clinton scandals.

APUZZO: First of all, one of the questions I asked John Podesta before I got the job was, will I end up needing a lawyer, and he said, "Probably." And I ended up needing a lawyer. I was subpoenaed and uh, I-I didn't need a lawyer for two out of three of the investigations, but the third one, which I will tell you about, because it's – historically, it's significant. Um, but there was, like, graveyard humor. Extraordinary work, hard work, long hours, um, cavalier attitude about rules.

People really – I've watched this in my career. People come to believe that they are what they do. So you'd get some little jackass who had some little title thinking, for example, the mess was also my jurisdiction. I noticed that people had like \$1200 bills in the White House mess. Well, from my point of view, that's an unsecured loan from the American public, and it doesn't go. You didn't pay your mess bill for three months. Who are you? Why do you think this is appropriate?

And when you enforce the rules, they really think they don't have to do them. Well, it made for an interesting experience. One of which was, Todd Stern. Todd Stern is part owner of the Chicago basketball team, whatever they're called, you know? Michael Jordan. He knows them. He's a wealthy guy. He was an Assistant to the President. He had this humongous bill after I sent out notice after notice after notice saying the system was going to change in sixty days. You have this much time. Blah-blah-blah. Because informed consent was part of it. They must be informed, or it's not informed. It's notification. And so I informed them,

informed them, informed them. The guy doesn't pay his bill. I cut him off from the mess. Not allowed in. He writes me something that you could've put in the newspaper. It was, like, "Who the fuck do you think you are" kind of note. And "We'll see about this" and "We'll see where you end up." And I was, like, "Who is this maniac?" Well, it caused such a disruption, but I wasn't going to back off.

These – similarly, any guy who wants to – and the men did this. This is where you know, you get a little – because men think – the men in that situation, by the time they arrive there, their sense of power really is for themselves. They don't have a sense that they are empowered to do something. They feel they have power. They become power. So, some of these guys would want a plane to go – you know, "I'm going to Europe. I need one of the planes to go to Europe." "Get a commercial ticket. You don't need a plane." "Oh, well I do. I need to work." "Fine. First class, but you're going on a plane." I mean, this would – this caused World War III with them. You know? "But I always had a plane before." "That's before. This is now. It's not the rules." We had very clear rules. This is what they are.

And the culture is that people believe, and you can see it. It's just – it's so – it's palpable, that because they're at the White House, they don't have a sense that they have a greater responsibility, that you are now – you can encumber and burden the work that you're supposed to be doing by misusing this power. They have the sense it's OK. Just take a car to go anywhere and you have a military person driving you in a nice new car and you want to go to lunch. Wrong. Can't do it. But they had been doing it for a while. So the-the culture-

ANDERSON: This was not unique to the Clinton administration?

APUZZO: Oh, no. Oh, God. I can tell you where all the bodies are buried in the Bush administration right now, if I had to, because I know what the vulnerabilities are. And the first thing a good manager does is manage your vulnerabilities. Go where they are, ferret them out, always think worst case scenario, which is why Bush is Bush league, because if you had a whiff of this prison [scandal], the first thing I would have done is get me all those pictures. I want to look at them now.

But the White House is very dangerous for that reason, in that – that there is a sense that I can do anything, I can do it in my name, and I'm working for the most powerful person in the world and so some of that power belongs to me, and it's the worst possible scenario.

And you have so many young people there that they don't – they don't have the training to know that this – you are in such a vulnerable spot. You must be more careful than if you worked for county government in terms of vulnerability. And it's one thing I've pounded over and over again and underscored through my staff that we are so

vulnerable, any little deviation will look like favoritism and then our rules go down the tubes. You can't make exceptions.

And we didn't – we ran a very tight ship. And that was good. God knows the Clinton administration, of all places, ran a tight ship and it gave him comfort. He did not have to feel that anybody in my shop was playing fast and loose with how things were done. If I said it's "X", it's "X". It's not half an "X", it's not 2X, it's "X." And that was – that gave me a sense of pride in my people and in our work.

ANDERSON: And then what changed, in terms of the culture of the White House after Lewinski?

APUZZO: Defensive. I mean, they went into a foxhole kind of mentality. They had been besieged before but this was really, you know, um, feeling besieged. The Republicans felt so empowered, so – such moral crap. And I went down— before the president came clean, I went down to Erskine Bowles and I said to him, that I felt that the problem with the White House was there was too much testosterone. That it was just infused with a sense of testosterone, and what it needed was humility. That humility was really a strength. And that for the good of the country, the President has to be spoken to in terms of humility. People understand humility. They respond to humility. They don't respond to defensiveness. And he said he agreed with me. He said, "I agree with you."

So when the President was under great siege, I used some of my connections to the convent, because all things are circles, and got a resolution from, you know, how does it overlap? Jeanie Gramic I called, some other nuns, and there was a convention of nuns, the National Association of Religious blah-blah, whatever, and got a resolution out in support of the President. And it was nice to do because it seemed to me we missed the biggest lesson that that mistake could have taught us, which is people can be great. People can also be foolish and that's the sum of a human being. It's the sum of the person. It's not just are you good in this, are you good in that?

It's – there is a person in there. There are vulnerabilities in all of us and when you think you've got Iraq, blow job, OK. The prison scandal. Blow job. I mean, come on, America. This is – this is what – let's get it straight. And the juxtaposition of the two administrations with Iraq. Eight hundred people dead who are American. Thousands dead who are Iraqi. The prison, 147 billion dollars. Blow job. Come on? What am I missing here? And we missed that. We missed seeing that it represents all of the distortion about sexuality in this country. All of the notion that somehow, to be good is to not have a sexuality, or – he was dumb. It was stupid. I'm not making an excuse for him, but what an opportunity lost for everybody else to say, you know, the best of us have great vulnerabilities and we will have them till the day we die. And we will

fuck up. And we have to be bigger than one fuck-up and you're dead. That's been something I've been opposed to all my life.

ANDERSON: What was your relationship with Clinton like?

APUZZO: People in the White House want to spend a lot of time with the President. They want – they look for face time. They look for every opportunity to be with the President. They look – and I think – in the convent, there was a concept called custody of the eyes. You don't seek attention. You don't encumber a person with your presence. You do your job and you're available. Um, one of the things I'm sure that the C Collection [Sophia Smith Collection] would like is a letter that the President wrote me when I left, and in it, the President of the United States writes a bunch of nice things. But then he said, "Hilary and I wish you and Barbara every" blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. You know, it's the President of the United States wishing this lesbian couple blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

The President was very kind to me. I mean, he was in the middle of, you know, all of the crap happening to him. On the night of my party, he made a speech about Kosovo to the national – you know, before the country. Two minutes before he walked in, he was in my party, gave me a big hug and kisses and said hi to everybody.

And when my father died, he was wonderful. Caught me, grabbed me in the hall. You know, I saw him coming. Most people, when they see the President coming, they walk so they – I see the President, go the other direction, because you know, I don't really have anything to say to him. "Hi, how are you?" What am I going to say to the President? I got a job to do. Everything is going fine. I keep you out of trouble. You'll have all the money you need. Nobody will do anything wrong.

And it really is – you know, similarly with the Governor. I mean, unless the Governor spoke to me, I didn't go out of my way to speak to the Governor, because he's got other things to do than to entertain me. And having been somebody who has been in positions in which, sometimes I just want to be quiet. I don't want somebody running up to me, asking me what do I think about this, or what do I – I don't care. Give me a minute.

So, my relationship with the President was, I think, um, a good one. He was very sweet to me. When my father died, when I wanted to leave, when – any encounter I had with him, he was warm. We rode together, the two of us, in his car the night he went to the Human Rights Campaign Fund dinner, and that was very sweet. He didn't have to do that. I could've been someplace else, wherever. But he said, "Come on. Let's go in my car tonight." You know. He was very warm. I went to the movie in the White House. I was invited there to see one of the worst films I've ever seen in life, and sat right behind him and he served me popcorn. And it was very sweet. It was very – very sweet, very nice.

But if I wanted to say something, uh, I would tell – if I wanted to say something or get it to the President, I would write it to him. Or I would tell John or Erskine, because I needed to be able to say “No” to people. And I needed not – for the President not to get me so that he could ask me to do something, because if Sandy Berger asked him – if you got to the President and you asked him something, the answer would be “yes.” You understand how it works? Clinton does not know how to say “no.” So if I got to him, he’d say, “I just told Sandy he needed this. Could you do it?” And you know, you don’t say, “No” to the President. But if you’re not supposed to do it, you have to say “no.”

So my thing was, like, I had limited – I kept my distance and I kept my – I kept what I considered to be an appropriate relationship in every way. I did not want to be put in a situation where I would be asked to do something that he said “yes” to somebody to that I would have to say “no” to. So I would rather say “no” to John Podesta and say, “You know, it ain’t happening, John,” than to look the President in the eye and say, “Mr. President. I can’t do that.” I’d have to do it. But I found a better way to do it.

But I have affection for the man and I – my – the story I want to tell you about Hillary is a very interesting story, and –

ANDERSON: OK. Go ahead.

APUZZO: And to my knowledge it hasn’t been printed anywhere. I certainly haven’t talked about it a great deal, but um, the number of scandals that – you know, I was before the special prosecutor and all of their people and I walked in alone. With no lawyer, by myself. I said whatever question you have, ask me. And uh, spent a good deal of time there being grilled by a whole field of them – FBI, whatever. And then, this was after I left. I was no longer there. Then the Congressional Committee on Governance, I think, wanted me to testify before them and I said, “No. However, if you want to interview me, you come here to my house. You can come.” So up come three – three – one Democrat, two Republicans, and we sit there and they ask me all their questions and I answer them, fine, I’ll be available as long as you want. That’s fine. Then, I get subpoenaed – not subpoenaed, I get served by Larry Clayman in Judicial Watch. Are you familiar with that organization? Conservative, right wing.

ANDERSON: Yeah. Was this in 2000?

APUZZO: The e-mail scandal.

ANDERSON: Yep. I saw something about that.

APUZZO:

Now here's the e-mail scandal. We were doing all the Y2K stuff, so when the engineers – and this is so involved, and remember, I don't download. I had Barbara help me download your request for the form which I looked at and didn't fill out. But I'm, like, computer – but I do know the structure stuff. So my counsel – I had a counsel who I also made the head of the Office of Administration, which is all this e-mail stuff, so he was my counsel and the head of – and he came to me and he said, "We've discovered in all of the dilapidated computer stuff that whole pieces of memory have dropped out." Well, you know what that means to me? Evidence has not been collected. I said, "You go back. You get the technicians to tell you exactly what the problem is and by the end of business today, I want a memo describing the problem from me to John Podesta. Spell it all out and exactly what the problem is."

He went, he did, end of day. I personally signed the memo and walked in over to Podesta and said, "The copy to counsel" because counsel was supposed to be sending e-mails to Congress for their investigation. I subsequently assigned my counsel, who's head of OA, to deal directly with Podesta because, don't ask me about e-mails. I don't use my own e-mail. But he was – and he was also a lawyer, so he would know all the legal implications. Assigned him full-time to solve that problem.

Now, I'm out – and I'm subpoenaed around the e-mail scandal? So I think, "This is crazy. I'm really furious about this." But I said, "I didn't have a lawyer before and I don't want a lawyer now." I get a call from Justice Department, telling me I might want to get a lawyer on this. This is scaring me. I thought, what could I possibly have done wrong? Within twelve hours of discovering the problem, I had a full explanation and assigned someone to deal directly with John Podesta, sent the copy over to counsel, what the hell else could I do?

Well, Justice said, "You know, it's a matter of your sexuality." Well, that's all I had to hear. I said, "What about my sexuality?" "Well, you and the First Lady." "WHAT me and the First Lady?" "They're going to suggest you had an affair with the First Lady." I'm, like, "WHAT?" "Well, it's" – and this is what is being communicated. Well, I was berserk. Berserk. First of all, in all of the investigations, individual's sexuality was never an issue. Nobody who testified in any of those scandals ever had their own sexuality become the issue. My sexuality becomes an issue because I happened to be a lesbian? Never mind you hate Hillary Clinton? You picked me to be the person?

Well, P.S. I got a lawyer. Didn't know him. Got him myself. Paid for him myself. And we're entitled to be compensated for it. I never submitted a bill for it because I didn't want anybody to say, blah-blah-blah. I met the guy for the first time in Philadelphia at 10 o'clock in the morning and all I could smell was vodka on him. I thought, Oh, my God. Ten o'clock in the morning. Who is this guy? So I spend the day with him. It cost me about \$7000 and then I went down to testify.

And I must tell you, I was a nervous wreck, because I have a very bad temper and if this guy does something to me, I'm going to be ballistic. I'm going to go – and all they kept saying was, “Stay calm, stay calm, just stay calm.” So I go down, and the judge is Royce something, or Judge Royce, but Royce is in part of his name and the guy looks like – round head, round body, big guy. And he's very conservative. Clayman is this beady-eyed little putz who is sleazy, and he begins this – and – you're in a jury – you're in a witness stand in federal court. Starts interrogating me. And, uh, he starts with computers. And all I can think of is, you just go ahead. You just try the Hillary-Apuzzo thing. You just try that. And he said something about computers and I said, I said, I'm a real luddite. This guy says, “What's a luddite?” I'm like –

ANDERSON: So you just incriminated yourself right there.

APUZZO: Right. So I – so I – well, I basically described him. [laugh] You know, very conservative, blah-blah-blah. And I give this explanation of the luddites. And from that point on, the man was mine. I mean, I had him. Because – and then he said, “Well what do you-?” I said, “Well, I never met a computer I didn't hate.” So I turned to the judge and I said, “I never met a computer that I didn't want to kick.” Well, the judge, for some reason, must have been a computer illiterate himself because he went hysterical. From that point on, Clayman would ask me a question and look at the judge while I answered. He'd ask me a ques – and it happened, whatever I said, that was cute or whatever inflection was in my voice or a Bronx twang, I don't know what it was, but this judge just would say, “Oh, hurry along. You've already asked her that question.”

And when he got to – to the line of questioning that – he said, “You had a blue pass? You could get into the residence?” “Yes,” I said. He said, “And we understand that, you know you had a party in the” – “yes.” “The First Lady. And the President through a party in the residence upstairs. Well, your blue pass gave you access.” “Yes.” “And how often were you, uh, over at the residence?” I said, “Well, the residence is everything outside of the West Wing.” Now it happens – Oh, I think I answered him, like, hundreds of times. And then, in answering him, I said, “Well, do you know what the residence is? Everything outside of the West Wing is a residence. For example, the military office is in what is called the residence. I am head of the White House military office. I have an office in the residence. But it's not in the residence, it's in the residence.”

Then I did – and he said, “And you went to – you were on a plane with the First Lady.” “Yes. I went up to New York with the First Lady to a fundraiser and a speech to the gay community.” “Well, how many people were on the plane with you?” Well, I said, “I think five.” And the innuendo was starting to come out. And then he said, “And you went to

the gay pride parade with the First Lady?" I said, "Gay pride? I wasn't even at the gay pride event." So, blah-blah-blah. We get through that. He does not go near the innuendo, and I was just waiting for him, and I got through fine. The President's lawyer who is the one he hired privately was there whose name I can't remember now, came over to me and said, "You did terrific." All I want to do is get out of there. I come home and I say to Barbara, "Can you believe this guy said that I went with the First Lady to the gay pride parade?" I said, "I wasn't even at the parade." She said, "Did you tell them that?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "You were the grand marshal." "Oh, my God," I said. "I perjured myself. I can't believe this. I was the gra – you're right. I have a big sign up there that says, Ginny Apuzzo, grand marshal of the parade." I said, "You know, parades. You walk in a parade. You're in the crowd. I was in a car. I was at the front. The First Lady was 70 blocks behind me." I was, like, I wasn't at the parade. I said, "I didn't even feel I was at the parade because I was in a car." In a parade, you walk.

Well, the next morning, I had to call up my lawyer who had to call up Clayman, who had to get the judge to clear up this little thing. But, you know, it's like, you can be so buzzed by an allegation that goes back to something that you think you've long left behind as a source of vulnerability for yourself. And yet, there it is. It pops up and some little pipsqueak jackass can trip that switch on you, and you're right there and ready, in that posture, ready to – and you can get – you can get pretty unwound by it. When he said, "And you were there with her." And I was, like, you know, anyway.

ANDERSON: Can you say more about the culture around Hillary Clinton?

APUZZO: The culture around Hillary at the White House was very female, um, very protective, overprotective, very insistent. The most difficult group to deal with in terms of "you can't do that." What do you mean, we can't? Because the First Lady is not the President, that's why. The people elected the President. This is the First Lady. The Vice President was imposs- I ended up not supporting Al Gore. I supported Bill Bradley in the primary because – because Al Gore and his people were just dreadful. And uh, I mean, he wasn't dreadful. He just wanted – he wanted the white caps, the marine white caps because he thought he was entitled to this. Well, we had three suicides. The marines had 2000 missions and not a single accident. And the way you have that is to not expand the mission. You keep the mission what it needs to be. Suddenly the white caps are supposed now serve the Vice President? That's twice as much work. I had three suicides because of overwork in the military component. That's terrible, and I wasn't about to exceed the given mission.

And the Vice President's Ron – whatever his last name is – Ron – I can't think of it. I mean, I had a knock-down, drag-out with him. I had a

knock-down drag-out because I wanted to reform the intern program. Before Monica Lewinski, I walked in, took one look at this intern program and said, "This is a mess." Went to Erskine Bowles and said, "This is not an intern program. This – these are workers who aren't being paid. We are not educating them. We are putting them to work. And if you don't have a seat and the place for the person to do a job, you don't have the person, and why are they over in the White House? Why are we letting 19-year-olds over in the White House? Twenty-year-olds over in the White House when people who have worked for ten years don't have a blue pass?" So, I – I swam upstream and got that done. Really, they should've hated me, because I just said, you know, not happening. And the Vice President's office was terrible. They had no space. They wanted 39 interns. Hello? And the attitude was, "Don't ox my gore." Oh, yes, we're all for your reform, but don't ox my gore. Don't gore my ox, rather.

ANDERSON: And what was the attitude generally in the whole administration about Hillary? What kind of -?

APUZZO: Women really cared about her deeply. I mean, there was no question at all that we all really felt that she was a powerful presence and a powerful force for the President. And I must tell you, when she traveled, women in Africa adore her. Adore her. I mean, I saw some of the most heartwarming scenes among African women that the Pres – that Hillary had seen before and had been with before and the love was magnificent. I mean, she is a very compelling force and, um, and I think, I think a force for good. I'm not part of the Hillary cult. I mean, I don't believe in cults. I think she's another human being. And she has many faults and she has a magnificent array of assets. And I have great affection for her and I think she will be a marvelous senator. I think she is a marvelous senator. But, um, you know, she's in a – she's in a tough situation. People are going to expect her to walk on water, and she doesn't.

The White House, you know, the men were fearfully aware of her presence and the women loved her. And I'm not sure anybody said, "No." "No, Hillary, you can't do that." She pretty much got what she wanted and um, I think, used it for good. Although some of the women around her were really, like, they were, like, little cult – it was very cultish. It was very – I mean, I – you know, some of the younger women, it was very, very cultish. I'll leave it at that.

ANDERSON: OK. Let's talk about Hillary a little bit but also, tell me more about – um, let's talk a little bit about sexuality. The headline, of course, when you were appointed was, "Highest Ranking Out Gay Official in the White House" and my – my assumption is that you couldn't have been the only out-gay official, or in the closet, gay or lesbian official in that

administration. So, tell me about the culture around that and about other gay men and lesbians and how comfortable it was.

APUZZO:

I'll tell ya. I had the toughest time with the gay guy at – who was supposed to be dealing with community stuff. Because he was too busy trying to build a career and not – the issue wasn't his candidate, you know? The President was his candidate. And so, when I got there, I had some help putting together an agenda. What we could do in every agency, policy wise, from the White House, to try to get an agenda for the GLBT community, you know. Being able to use, um, well, I mean, I can give it to you. It can be a document that you can have. But for a variety of agencies, here's something that's in our power to get done. We don't need Congress for – it's really a thing of working it through. And we have enough gay people in these – in these departments to get it – you know, to have it nurtured through from within.

So then, I said, Richard – Socarites, it was Richard Socarites – I said, “Richard, now, what we need to do is call – you need to call together a meeting of all of us who are LGBT people from all the agencies, like the breakfast club, and let's see what we can get going, how we can move forward.” Well, Richard was so afraid of stepping out of line, and doing something that would hurt his career, that we couldn't get it moving, and that was his job. So, I had it printed up for him. I gave it to him. We circulated it to the group. But he wouldn't move his rear end on this point. And to me, in a sense, it's the value of having worked for the community first. And then going in, so that you know that the issue is always – the issue is always here on your plate. It's always part of what you have to move forward on.

And that's what I found with a lot of – some of the GLBT people that I came into contact with who were in positions to change. Some, not all, some. They were very interested in making sure that they continued to cultivate people whose political interests could run contrary to-to the communities. And that's a problem, you know? And I think – first of all, I was in a luxurious position. It's the end of my career, you know. I knew that I wasn't going to be interested, no matter what, working in anything. I had been working on behalf of the community as an issue all my life. You know, 35 years of this.

Um, and he – you know, may have not come out not too long ago. He needed to be pushed. You know, I kind of approached his godfathers on the outside to try to push him from the outside to move. But my assessment, and it may, it may not be a fair one, but my observation and assessment is that we need to be sure that the people we have on the inside are willing to carry the agenda forward, and not think they're one of the guys.

And this reminds me of a story that I've told before but I think is very important. Ellen Konovitz was the head of personnel in the Cuomo administration. There were a lot of boys on the executive floor there. A

lot of boys. And the Governor is a macho guy. And one night, Ellen Konovitz and I were sitting late in her office waiting for confirmation and, um, she was talking about some of the problems she was having with some of the men dealing with her. Straight woman. And I'd known Ellen for years, and I said to her, "You know, Ellen, the biggest mistake we can make, you as a Jewish female, me as a lesbian, is that we can think we're one of the guys. We're not. We are outsiders. We will always be outsiders. And if we forget we're outsiders, we-we've lost the reason that we're here." You know? And that's something you really have to bear in mind. And when you get to the White House, the desire to be the in, I'm here, isn't this wonderful, I'm part of the – it's bullshit. Because if you get there and you just want to be one of the guys, your mission – you don't have a mission there. You're there without a mission. Why would you be in that place without a mission?

So, that was – that was difficult, and not find there an activist willingness, a willingness to be an activist, when you really could do it.

ANDERSON: What's your assessment of how many of you made it to the inside?

APUZZO: Oh, there were a fair number of us, I would think. But it ended up being three of us, four of us who were out. Um, and, you know, I don't think our sexuality was a big issue at the Clinton – It really wasn't. I mean, I never felt, like, because I'm a lesbian, you know. I never felt that way. I felt like – and most people needed to come to me for something. So I wasn't ever in a petitioning position. I was usually protecting them in some way or providing something. So, you know, I never had the sense that I had to approach them hat in hand for anything, so maybe that's why I never felt it. But I didn't feel that it was not part of what, you know, I felt the culture was there.

ANDERSON: What about all the allegations about Hillary's sexuality and, in particular, this liaison with you. Was it the first time that you'd heard about that allegation? When you were subpoenaed?

APUZZO: It was insanity. It was like saying, you know, "Why are you beating your one-year-old?" It was just the most absurd thing you could think of. And, uh, yeah, it was the first time I heard that. But what didn't surprise me is that the lesbian issue would be something that would provide them with an opportunity to engage me, and my level of resentment was fierce on it.

ANDERSON: Uh-hm. And what about the allegation about Hillary's sexuality? There are always innuendoes.

APUZZO: I think she's a strong woman and, you know, strong women have to deal with that all the time. Uh, my feeling is that that's the biggest weapon

that they have, that if you're strong, we're going to accuse you of being a dyke and maybe you won't be so strong then. And you know, we've got to diffuse that, you know. You've gotta just say, screw it. I'm strong.

ANDERSON: Is your position at the White House one of the things you're most proud of?

APUZZO: Um, I probably am most proud of social security disability for people with AIDS. I think that's something that dealt with people's lives immediately and importantly and – and I think if Jeff and I weren't there, it might not have happened. We had a relationship. We used it in a positive way. And it was a good – it was a good thing. I think it's historic. I think it, uh, I think – I'm very proud of the work I did with AIDS. Very proud of it. I feel like it was, um, it was miraculous that I was able to do it, you know. I'm very proud of the learning that took place between myself and the military. I think that was so important, so meaningful to me, to historically be an out-lesbian in charge of the White House Office of Military Affairs. Um,-

ANDERSON: Certainly doesn't seem to loom on our horizon again?

APUZZO: Not soon.

ANDERSON: Not soon.

APUZZO: But, um, I guess, uh, I-I tried in each of these places to –to keep my center, keep my core, try to uh, try to be able to like the person I met at the end of the day when I looked in the mirror. And be – you know, be able to be proud of what I did. Um, these things came at a tremendous personal cost, as they always do. Um, it's taken me several years to come down, back, find my, find the quiet center of me and I'm so grateful that unlike many of my comrades, I've lived long enough to be able to have this time to be. I've done. Now I have to be. And I've done with a ferocious enthusiasm but that consumes a lot of the being of you.

So, this is a very important time in my life for me. It, um, it-it gives me some time to think back on my life and to reflect on the kinds of real reasons for your life. You know, what has it been about for me? And um, and what do I do with what I have now that, for example, my friend Peter never got to be. He died while he was in his forties. I have – all across the country, I knew the community and I watched them die. Those are real deaths and real losses in my life. And um, and it was hard, and it was tragic, and it was unnecessary. And-and the lesson is that they didn't like the messenger so they didn't want to listen to the message. And people died. And people are still dying. It didn't have to be this, and we were right. We were right. We were right about

something that we said would affect the world. Go back and look at testimony, and you'll see. We said it.

We said it would cripple whole institutions and that it would ravish the third world countries, and it is. You go to Uganda, which I did, and you know what the biggest job is? Making coffins. Coffins. This is the biggest employment. Coffins. It's AIDS. They went from Idi Amin to AIDS. But, um, you know, it's been fun.

ANDERSON: What do you think is next for you?

APUZZO: Are you looking for a verb? [laugh]

ANDERSON: Goals.

APUZZO: My goal. My goal is to – my goal is to find a center, and be in touch with the center and feel – I-I don't want to be on my deathbed and say I wish I – I wish I had done this. I wish I had made the time for this. I wish I realized how important this or that was. I want to do that now.

ANDERSON: Do you have regrets then about some of the choices that you already have made?

APUZZO: No.

ANDERSON: No.

APUZZO: I don't have regrets because what I did when I left the convent was open my life up. I decided in part to become like a cork, you know on-on water, and I've been led to so – you know, things happened to put me in places that I was able to do some things and move on to do something, and I could have never assessed at the beginning of my career that I would do this or do that or do the other thing. But time puts you in a situation and your experiences put you in a situation and hopefully, your principles or the things that are the constants in your life give you the engine that you need to get you where you need to go, you know.

I am very grateful for there being a movement. Very grateful to that. It saved my life. I would have been one of those people who might have well have thrown myself off a bridge or done something that represented utter despair. But for a movement. And, um, it has been a privilege to serve the movement in any capacity that I had. And um, and it's – it's meant a lot to me.

ANDERSON: If you were back in the senior strategist's chair at the Fund, what direction do you think you would be taking the movement now?

APUZZO: First, I'd get rid of this president. First, I'd get rid of this president and then I would, um, I believe look for – I would decide what- what strategy I would use for change. What-what do I want to accomplish? What coalitions can I make that can affect the kind of change that I've decided is – optimizes our opportunities. Optimizes them. And, um, I would look to what I could do in coalition. I'm so afraid that we will celebrate being a market niche. Celebrate ShowTime having a "Queer Beer" or whatever the hell the name is. "L" or whatever it is. I-I think those are fine, but those are little stepoffs. They are not where we need to be.

I can't – I can't get excited unless I see that vision that represents real social change and what this community could do in this country and in this world. Because now it's a small world. Now there's a movement all over the world. We're going to piss it away on being a market niche?

ANDERSON: What about gay marriage? We're pissing it away on that?

APUZZO: You know, I think the rights that accrue are significant and I think they're – we're entitled to it. I just – I have trouble with using old sacks for new wine. I don't know. This protecting marriage. They destroyed it all by themselves. This – you got a 50 percent or more divorce rate? Who's destroying marriage. And because they say we can't do it, it makes us want to do it all the more. And I understand that. But here's an institution that basically comes out of property and ownership and certainly not equality for women.

ANDERSON: Right.

APUZZO: And I just personally wonder why we don't- why we don't go for the rights and devise something that does not have a title on it that has meant really subservience for hundreds and hundreds of years. And it – it was a function of property. It was a function of ownership. It was a function of controlling women. And so, you know, I want to celebrate for people who- who are leading the frontier but I also want to caveat it. You know, I think it's – it's certainly not the end of the line in terms of what –what we can do, and um, but I think it's very tempting. It's very tempting when there's momentum to say, this can move. Let's go here. This'll be hard to move and we can't bring a victory home. I understand that. I-I see the strategy there. But I-I worry that the pressure on our not-for-profits, which is really what guides the direction of the movement is so great that people don't have the time and wherewithal to step back and say, "Let's graft it out. Let's-let's create a whole agenda here and let's look at each category and each one of them should have a different model for change, and we should be moving that along in a coordinated fashion, and this can't work just like this. It's got to have a different approach. I'm not sure that's happening. And I'm – it troubles me

because I think, uh, when we then fall into a Bush period, we then jump on the first thing that comes by, and marriage has come by and we're there.

ANDERSON: And what do you think is getting left out? What would your priorities – what would you have us be looking at in terms of alternative priorities?

APUZZO: Well, I think you go back to some simple things. Safety, security, a job, a good job, a job that al – that doesn't have glass or cellophane or lavender ceilings. I think you – you look for what your definition is and how in coalition you can move the whole issue of social justice forward. There is much to be gained and, um, not everybody want to jump on a marriage bandwagon, and don't lose your coalition partners who need you for something now. You know, who need you. You – you sometimes have to go and serve. Um, my-my thing is I tend to look at how you can make institutional change so that you're not relying on the kindness of strangers. You know? Where it's institutionalized, you get through that period, that dark period. It's harder to push back on something that you have than it is to, you know. So, I don't know, I don't know. I mean, I guess – I guess that's the vein I'd be looking at but I haven't thought about it.

ANDERSON: Yes. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you want to make sure gets said?

APUZZO: Oh, I think there are probably a lot of things. A life is a – is a – there really so much of it is in the silence, you know. I would venture to say if we looked at your tapes and we-we monitored the things that people said and then we really monitored or mined the silences and where they were, there's probably just as much there. Um, mine has been a terrific life for me. I've enjoyed it. It's had its – it's had its hard times, its sadnesses and heartbreaks but all in all, I've enjoyed it. I've had a good time and they're going to have to take me kicking and screaming out of this life, 'cause I ain't – I ain't willing to give up easily. I can't think of anything else.

ANDERSON: OK. Well, if you read the transcript and want to fill in some of the silences...

APUZZO: I have to read all this? I-yi-yi.

ANDERSON: Then you can do that then. I'm going to turn this off.

END OF TAPE 5

TAPE 6

ANDERSON: OK. We'll start here.

APUZZO: Yeah, this is the room I-I built because we always wanted an extra room and this is what I built when – when I retired and uh, it's kind of my little mind and body center. It's where we eat, we workout, where I communicate with people and try to communicate with myself.

ANDERSON: It's a beautiful setting.

APUZZO: Got a – it's got a little meditation center up on top, off the sauna.

ANDERSON: And gorgeous views.

APUZZO: Gorgeous views and gorgeous sounds. That is a – that broke. I used to think that if I, if you have running water and a fireplace, you'll never need a therapist. Let's walk around the front of the house so we don't have to run through the laundry room.

ANDERSON: OK. So, this is the front of Ginny & Barbara's house.

APUZZO: The house – the house was built in 1790 and it's our pride and joy. We love it. We love being home. We think every day at home is a gift. Having spent so much time away.

ANDERSON: Uh-hm. When did you start living here full-time again?

APUZZO: Well, not – when I came home from Washington.

ANDERSON: So, '99-2000?

APUZZO: Yeah.

ANDERSON: 'Cause you really worked from home on the Task Force.

APUZZO: Yes. Right. I tried to, over the years, to create – all of this was all brush and woods and I tried to, over the years, clear it and create little spaces. That's one of my favorites because you can see that from the bedroom – that little area there. This is an old space. The driveway, I'm told, used to be the original road to Kingston...this tree – I at one point bought my mother a house and there was one of these trees and I took a little, um, sapling that fell off the tree and rooted in her yard and brought that home and put it in a pot and grew and now it's becoming a tree. It has a little more meaning since I've lost my mother that I have a piece of that

tree here. Barbara's not here. She was here but her car's gone so she's off and running. She could have walked around with us. So she –

This is – this is a garden that's special because on my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, we threw a great big party with a big tent and had sixty of my favorite people come, and I told them no presents but if they wanted to, they could bring a perineal plant, and people just brought whatever they wanted to, and we put it in here, so each of these plants represent people who came to bring me wishes, and I get their wishes every time it bloom. And every time we weed, I wish they were here to help me. But Barbara does most of the work. But uh, that was – that was a little revelation to get that – get that.

ANDERSON: It's starting to sprinkle. So we head into the house or is there something else?

APUZZO: Well, let's look at the waterfall.

ANDERSON: OK. There's the waterfall.

APUZZO: When I – when I bought this place, I never even saw this because all this was woods. I didn't know it was there.

ANDERSON: Now we're coming into the house.

APUZZO: Do you need more light?

ANDERSON: No, it's fine, really. Readjust. Living room. Fire place. Faces of people. And the house was build in 17-what?

APUZZO: 1790. The main part of the house was built in 1790.

ANDERSON: Oh, we just passed by great photographs. Just get a couple of these photographs.

APUZZO: That's Barbara.

ANDERSON: Barbara and you.

APUZZO: And my – this is at my going away party that the president and First Lady threw. This is the night, the president – when I went with the president to the Human Rights Campaign Dinner (unclear). This is when - the first time I went out with Barbara. She knew I liked Diet Cherry Coke, so we went over to her house. My friend Carol who introduced us and I went over to her house and she, um, I said, she said, can I get you anything? And I said, "I'd love a Coke. Do you have a Coke?" She said, "Yeah, in that thing." I opened it up and she had filled the entire thing

with Diet Cherry Coke. I turned to Carol and said, "I think she likes me." This is me on a tractor. That's one of the happiest moments of my life. I love being on big machinery.

ANDERSON: (unclear) Great kitchen. What do you have to say about the floor in here?

APUZZO: The floor. Well, the floor is said to come out of a colonial tavern that Washington and his troops danced on, so while I don't have a house Washington slept in, I do very daily walk on the floor that Washington danced on.

ANDERSON: OK. Anything else we should pan?

APUZZO: No. You've already gotten outside, looks like it. I don't know if my bedroom would be of any interest.

ANDERSON: No, that's OK. You can keep some things to yourself...screen in porch. Dog on porch.

APUZZO: We have a back field I'm working on.

ANDERSON: Yeah, you can see the back field from here. OK. We're just gonna get this, too.

APUZZO: Madeleine Albright's signature.

ANDERSON: Right Madeleine Albright's signature. OK.

APUZZO: This is just cool.

END TAPE 6

Transcribed by Luanne Jette.

Edited for accuracy and clarity by Kelly Anderson.

© Sophia Smith Collection 2004