

Shanisa Rodriguez
Madison Leblanc
Interview with Betsy Parsons

<p>Okay unless we are going it's November 18th 2016 I am Betsy Parsons I give my consent for this interview to be used in whatever way you want to use it. You always want to record consent.</p>	<p>Introduction, Consent, Date, Time</p>
<p>No, yes exactly, Um, I am Shanisa Rodriguez, S- h- a- n- i- s- a R- o- d- r- I- g- u- e- z. We are at the Glickman Library at the Portland campus of USM.</p>	<p>Introduction, Location, Interviewer</p>
<p>My name Madison Lablanc, M-a-d-i-s-o-n L-a-b-l-a-n-c and our interviewee today Betsy Parsons. Please introduce yourself and spell your name.</p>	<p>Introduction, Location, Interviewer</p>
<p>Yes, I am Betsy Parson B-e-t-s-y P-a-r-s-o-n-s ok once we're going it's November 18 2016 and I Betsy Parsons give my consent for this interview to be used in whatever way you want to use it. You always want to record consent.</p>	<p>Date, Time, Consent, Interviewee</p>
<p>M: Sorry I'm a little horse. As you know you can stop this interview anytime, it is voluntary and you can refuse to answer questions and you don't know. We know that you have a lot of things that you wanted to talk about, you get interested in discussing with us today so would you start off?</p>	<p>Conditions of Consent</p>
<p>B: I think I'd like to be kind of guided and directed to what you think is going to be most</p>	<p>Introduction</p>

useful to you so have at it.

S: So what was your childhood like for you growing up?

B: As a child I think I had a singularly fortunate childhood. I grew up in a small Midwestern town in a family that had enough, my parents were college educated and were people who are very involved in community service, my father was a teacher and my mom, high school teacher and so they were very you know engaged in a service orientation, and you know it's small town but it was in an era in the nineteen sixties and seventies from little towns like that across the United States were you know... The industries were rolling the jobs were, there they were relatively prosperous not wealthy but people have enough you know the same times today are just you know devastation areas and my little hometown has been slowly slowly dying for decades but it was a great place to grow up. We, my siblings and I got the best years of that of that town you know people lived modestly but they kept things up because they were able to and you know my parents are native Mainers they met here at Orono in English class, and you know they migrated to the Midwest really to for the last stage of my father's training and so they always intended to live in a small town or rural area because they thought that would be good for raising children and in our case they were right so. So we, you know, we grew up in a lot of kindness and generosity. People were they were grateful for the kind of care that they got

Childhood

Midwestern Origins

College Educated Parents

Small town 1960's/1970's

Relative Prosperity

Parents - Native Mainers

Kind & Generous Family

and, and so I think really it was a rather sunny up bringing it really wasn't until I started teaching in public school that I began to be a lot more aware and I had some awareness in school of you know kids were in rough circumstances but it really wasn't until I came here to Maine to be a teacher and began teaching the Portland High School. In those days in the setting was nineteen seventy-seven you know Portland High was almost all white and it-it-it was most of the population was coming out of generational poverty so I mean that wasn't universally true at the school but it was a you know a heavy proportion of students and so those students really taught me a lot. More about how tough it can be to grow up without enough support and with a lot of basically it's not being that you know so that was some important part of my own learning but I came to it after, you know being fully educated myself and at least formally you know educated and having lots of opportunities you know. I had a graduate degree when I started and as I say it and come out of this situation a very loving home parents who loved each other and loved us and took care of us so they were also we were pretty church family we we were white anglo-saxon Protestants in a time in place where that represented a lot of privilege and you know we were mostly pretty oblivious to that privilege but... I don't I guess I'll just leave it there.

M: So you grew up in a very religious...

B: I'm having trouble hearing you need to

1977 - She begins teaching at Portland High

Students almost all white - Poor students

Religious Family

White Anglo-Saxon Protestants

Religion, Question

M: You grew up in very religious family so how do you feel that has played a role in your life?

B: Interesting question and I actually I'm not sure we describe my family is super religious but we were you know we were in church every Sunday but you must remember that this isn't a time in a place where that was normal. I mean almost everybody was a church every Sunday you know that was just part of small-town Midwestern life so that I would say I was in a congregation that know it was the period of the civil rights but the African-American civil rights granted I just learned only recently that couple of years before my parents moved us to this little town that the town fathers and it was always the town father's right who were all white of course and anyway the town fathers decided that they wanted to build a city pool a municipal. You know a municipally funded pool for the town's children and since they they word out their fundraising and because referend and was known to be a really good motivational speaker and you know persuasive in fundraising effort they approached him and went to visit him in his study and and had this whole lovely conversation about this great thing that we're going to do for the town's children and then sort of toward the end somebody let it slip that of course it was only going to be for white children and I know this is 1958, ok 1958 and Reverend Stanton, but that was just basically the end of the conversation. He said if you segregate that pool said not only will I not personally give one dime to help the effort

Religious background, Church

Small town - Midwestern

Race in a small town

1958 - Pool for White children

nor say one word and supported, he said I will personally call every one of you out by name from the pulpit now in that time in place to be called out from a pulpit especially of a large church and this was the biggest Church in town or the biggest Protestant churches should say that was a threat that carried some weight you know. People did not want to be disgraced In front of you know and it's full time you have to keep living together right, and so that was a really powerful warning and I think they were quite stunned but you know he I guess where I'm going with that story is just that I was raised in this ethos of you know we didn't always fully live out the idea of equality but I was taught from my earliest years that equality is what's right and that you use sacrifice forward and speak up for it and is a matter of faith. It's a matter of following the teachings in that case of Jesus so. Did that answer what your question about.

S: So what got you into teaching?

B: Oh you know I come from a long line of teachers on both sides of my family. We are just public educators and and clergy for you know a number of generations back so I think it always seems like a I mean I just always loved learning. I mean I was one of those kids who played school when I wasn't in school you know seriously so I mean I just thought it was really really fun and really interesting and a way to always be growing so it seemed like a really natural thing to do with so many teachers in my family and we were certainly a family that respected teachers and teaching and really with and I would say almost to the

Her minister challenged that racism

Childhood lesson: Equality is right
Speaking up is right

Family history of public educators
Clergy

Loved learning

point of revering teacher it wasn't. I know these days you know you're hear terrible things in the media about teachers and teaching and I think that's a lot of hooey. I think it's a great way to spend a life and has been very satisfying to me so yeah I mean I was drawn to it for those kind of internal reasons and I do remember you know when I was right where you are, you know junior, senior in college I remember a professor that I especially respected being a little bit disappointed that I was going to be a k-12 teacher. She really wanted me to go into higher Ed and and I felt as if I had that choice and you know I felt that I could but it would interested in me was what happens to the brain between the ages of 14 and 18 when I just think that is a totally endlessly fascinating period of life and I wanted to be with people in that age group and I wanted to be with the kind of the excitement of that huge intellectual transformation that kids are going through those years but everything else about them is changing too but what really interests me is what's going on there. In their minds you know and how you create exciting and nourishing learning, learning environments for you know for where they are so that was just a joyful thing for me to contemplate doing and I really honestly never thought about doing anything else so I know it's a little strange because most people at least consider if you are you like a few variations of they might do. I just never did... I just wanted to be a teacher from my earliest memories you know I did. Well my mom is a wonderful teacher and I think that you know that was part of actually truthfully my father

Love of teaching

In college, discouraged from teaching K-12

Fascinated by ages 14-18

is also a wonderful teacher in his own way you know he was a moment but for instance then when I was six years old I asked him. Dad then why are there clouds? and instead of answering a question he marched me into the kitchen and pour glass of water halfway full and took a pencil and type string around it and stuck the string down into the water and then had me mark every day like the water level you know. And so what it is of course giving an experiential way to begin understanding about the water cycle and he just kept asking questions, he didn't give me any answers so I think that's good teaching. And so I was fortunate that I had two parents who were you know who came with a lot of wonderful, loving teaching skills.

M: What was your coming-out experience like?

B: Well I was a late bloomer... you know in retrospect I can see any number of indicators really from like age 4 on you know that that had I had any vocabulary any imagery any you know. There were no images, no language, nothing about sexual orientation in my growing-up world so had a had any of that information I think I would have known a lot sooner yeah that I that I should be seeking a mate and the other half of the population from what I've been taught to expect so I didn't actually start coming out to myself to about 30 and but after of course. I was a season public school teacher and that I think had iI been aware where in college, I would not have dared to go into possible teaching so I'm actually really grateful you know that the that

Always wanted to be a teacher

Parents - Teachers

Experimental learning

As a child no language to talk about sexual orientation

Starting coming out at 30

Believed she would not have been a teacher if she was out 32 years aho

the profession that meant so much to me was not closed to me by virtue of this ignorance from but a present didn't mean that you know at age 30 years this crisis as what I do in my world I'm 62 years old now so we're talking 32 years ago and at that time there was no way to be an LGBT public school teacher and not be immediately fired and not just fired but it's a career-ending firing you know you're blackballed everywhere you'll never get another job as professional. You will lose your home is your faith community lose in many cases your family it was really complete devastation in those types that the prospect of being out as a public school teacher and so it really wasn't even something you could consider you know so so for me coming out was both and then coming out to myself and of course coming out as a complicated term right. You know you come out to yourself then there are all these stages of coming out to other people and and the fact is that it doesn't ever end as long as you're alive and breathing when you're still coming out. So soon in my case coming out to myself was both wonderful and beautiful. In the finally realized you know that I'm in love with the person I should be in love with right, the right man I had just thought I was this straight single woman who hadn't met the right man and right and finally here's this relationship where it you know this is what I always thought it would be like you know with the right quote "man" right. Well it was the right woman right. But who would have known I have no way to know that really sooner so but again looking back I can I can certainly see any number of you know pivotal

Would be fired if out

Would lose home and community

Process of coming out

points where if, I had had the level of awareness and understanding that we all have today I would certainly you know that that I belong to the LGBT community and and then I, you know should be dating women and that ultimately life partner would be a woman that I would yeah but hindsight is 20/20 in them I mean it turns out I was wildly love through all of high school but you know neither of us we were in those days you could be quote “best friends” and it was a high tolerance level for people to have best friends and nobody questioned it. I mean today I think we would have been you know really harassed, but we worked we weren't we were just left completely alone and people to sit along with their best friends so anyway so there was that beautiful and lovely side kind of. You know you know the song simple gifts we you come around right for me you know falling in love at 30 was coming around right finally right but at the same time it was fraught with all of these just devastating threats you know to my life and my safety it was nineteen eighty-four. Charlie Howard was murdered just as I was entering this relationship I had to really think about what I meant to be part of the gay community when gay people were being killed and nothing was happening to their killers basically it wasn't even considered a hate crime to kill an LGBT person in those days and the punishments were exceptionally light so that the message really was you know, the lives of gay people are not worth much and you can pretty much do what you want you know with impunity and so of course to this little waspy girl growing up in the safe environment little Midwestern town

“In love” with best friend

where everybody found her parents and her family were just wonderful. But it made the idea of living with that kind of threat and danger every day in my life was um you know deeply so sobering and and fearsome it was fearsome two years into my relationship the supreme court in Bowers be hard with ruled that essentially the effect of the ruling was that police could break into your home and into your bedroom and arrest you for being who you are with your partner I mean this was just unimaginable to me how could somebody to find my love as crying who was I hurting you know it was a really it was very very damaging and it made my partner and me have to live in lots of fear we live completely closeted for more than a decade ultimately that resulted in a lot of tension between us because I really knew that I couldn't live the rest of my life that way she wasn't going there you know so did end the relationship eventually. But yeah it it was just very hard to figure out how to be authentic in in my personal being and still be able to claim the professional life that I had prepared for that I was devoted too, that I was very good at and then just to try to walk the planet with some sense of sanity and safety I would really say that the contrast between the first 30 years of my life in the 32 or so since just on the just on the question alone how safe are you in the world is those two parts of my life are very different you know I would say I've spent a great deal of time in these decades since coming out to myself rebuilding a sense of safety and working hard to achieve the rights that would provide more safety but it's a slow process and I can say that I've never had a

1984 - Charlie Howard murder

Same year as her 1st relationship

Police could arrest you in home

Sense of fear

Never fully secure

single day of ever feeling is secure in the world as I did for the first 30 years. You know and I have accepted the fact that is how it's going to be you know it's just that finally is you know I know I will no longer have fear going to have to kind of fear that women have you know like dark parking lots and I don't go into alleyway so you know that but that's about being female right like what women have to be concerned about society but you know I have reclaimed the schools for myself as environments where I will not be afraid and and it's certainly true in life and my movements around Portland and around our state you know I'm always aware I'm very very aware when i'm in a part of the state where LGBT people are less save it I noticed it but I no longer it doesn't affect me psychologically the way that I used to. You know I know that I have to be a little bit more careful but I don't I don't feel actually unsafe and threatened the whole time that I'm there now as I travel around the country there are there are parts of the United States were frankly I don't know because you know is so comfortable maybe there because I've learned to love the sense of more freedom that I have here you know and so life is short and I decided that I want to spend my life where I can enjoy this sense of freedom and security so I don't have any interest in living anywhere in the South, and I'm not a big city person obviously you know i'm going to school in big cities but for me that was always a very temporary... Okay i'll put up with this just for the sake of getting this degree and as soon as I can get out of here this city is really stress me.. So I know there are some cities in the

Fear

Safety / Lack of Safety

No longer feels unsafe

A sense of freedom / Security in the Northeast

Urban versus Small Town

south where I could you know feel more safe but both by virtue of physical appointment and and also you know just the urban versus small-town ethos I am more comfortable here so, so it's interesting because it does I'm a guess I would have to say that it being an LGBT person does in certain ways limit where I'm going to live I have my several siblings and they have lived all over the world and you know I have to take into account certain things that they don't and but today I'm not sure what the question was did I answer it?

S: So you say you're part of a bunch of movements and mean I've read a couple, tell me a bit about them?

B: Listen sure yeah in fact I brought along a little binder, sure that might help I can't leave it with you and but you can take a look. Listen, the gay lesbian and straight education network is a national organization actually that has regional chapters and has a headquarters in New York and it was founded in the early nineteen nineties excuse me. By young Kevin Jennings and some some of his friends who really believe that there needed to be an organized approach to dealing with the level of anti-gay anti-lgbt hate language and harassment in schools and so k-12 schools so it's a nest this national nonprofit that serves k to 12 schools and Maine has two chapters were based here in Portland, and the other one based in Ellsworth so the Portland one is called listen southern Maine and the else with was called Downey's Glissa those chapters were found at the same time the kind of the

GLSEN

Founded 1990's

National non-profit K-12

2 Chapters in Maine

preparatory work was in late and they were actually kind of formalized dealing with all the paperwork and everything and early '96 and both very small groups of volunteers who you can probably imagine in Maine you know we became dear dear friends you know. We walked the whole road together since 1996 and have been through lots of you know the heart struggles together and really rely on each other so it's a is it both chapters have always been LGBT and straight people together which is a model that really works for me and one of the most important things that the chapters have done is to support the Gay-Straight-Trans Alliance student movement you know this movement of clubs in schools that are students organized and student led to push back against hate language and harassment in their school environment to try to make schools safer place or more affirming place for everybody, and they they just do great really beautiful compassionate, courageous work in their schools and when. I love that it's really about student empowerment you know and so what the GLSEN chapters have done in Maine at least is to most of our energy has been devoted to trying to support the students to the point where now that the very first GSA a in Maine we were calling them gay straight alliance at that time and later we asked schools to start including transgender as part of their names so that we could be really clear to school communities about the trans population getting support and respect and so the very first three of these clubs in Maine schools were you know to exist a club instead of faculty advisor and so it was founding

Maine Chapters founded in 1996

GSTA

Safer Schools

Student Empowerment

Gay Straight Alliance

Trans inclusion

massive GLSEN chapters who were the faculty advisors of those first three Betsy Smith and Wainfleet she was a math teacher there and you probably know her name is the longtime director of equality Maine. She, she was the executive director of Equality Maine for 11 years and through many of our big referendum struggles but before that she was she was teaching math and when fleeing that was the first GSTA in Maine and they learned about it by going to an independent school conference in Massachusetts where some of the early Massachusetts GSA-GSTA's we're just getting off the ground and so Concord Academy where Kevin Jennings had been the founder of listen and some other schools like that had these clubs and wait for the game loans that we should do that so they did and and that was about in 97, I think and then in 98 undeserving high school Danny's listen help to support new GSA and which was the first one to public high school at ranches around highschool and then cooled, Lynn is still the science department chair at MDI high school but she was the original faculty advisor and she was also one of the founders of down explicit and then right on our heels during students asked me to do it. Here in Portland and I said yes and so you know so there were the three of us who have all been involved in finding these GLSEN chapters you know who also assisted students who approached us about getting something going in terms of a GSTA movement in Maine it was really challenging a really fun work and I continue to you know I I'm, I'm carefully watched and did everything I could to merger the growth of GSTA's, and other schools and

Equality Maine

GSTA

GSA

GLSEN

there were during students who helped me do that and then ultimately students from other schools to help you know there was a little kind of a little core of students regionally all belong to their GSTA who would go anywhere to help another school start one and and so. So we did a lot of driving around the state to various schools but also places where schools where students were conferencing together to help seed more GST's and you know eventually we the movement. I retired from this work almost two years ago but I'm size to live a hand and I mean last night I was at a regional meeting of GSTA days to hear how things were going after the election, it's rough but anyway so I sort of watched and helped hold and support the growth of this movement along with others on the words of the others and chapters and you know when I stopped keeping track of all of the GST is in the state there were about 70 of them yeah in most of them were in high schools all of them were in high schools but now we're seeing you know a real...an-an early sprouting of wonderful middle school GSTA I'm very excited about that because the the rate of violence against LGBT work I should I guess I should say the rate of violence based on anti-lgbt bias in middle schools is much more severe than high school. The assault, that LGBT students report in Middle School on the GLSEN national school climate survey that's a biannual studied it is really good data nationwide middle school students report a 40-percent assault rate and that's double the high schools are rate of twenty percent so you know it's really a serious serious issue in, in middle level schools and so I'm just so

Sending GST's around the state

70 GST Alliances in Maine now

Middle School GSTA

Rates of Assault Middle Schools versus High Schools

thrilled that you know for such a long time the adults have been so resistant “Oh you can’t sexualize them too early” it’s like whoa get a life people you know. I mean LGBT people are no longer invisible and kids first because some kids are growing up in LGBT families thank you in the second place nobody doesn’t know that LGBT people exist right and also to pretend that somehow you can’t let kids know that LGBT. That sexual orientation is a part of their identities are going to have to figure out about themselves and general identity also you know the idea that someone has to be kept a secret from them until they’re in some way of age is to me just nuts and it. It creates this very difficult period in a in the youngster’s coming of age in which that that kid is too vulnerable right they don’t have the psychological tools yet to deal with some of the kind of hate and harassment that’s going to come at them and yet they may, they may know they identify as part of the LGBT community I wonder or they may simply be straight identified previews harassed on the basis of perceived qualities or just other kids being mean mindlessly mean, right which we know what happens so it’s terrible to me that the middle level groups are you know they’re being established their surviving they’re being supported by some of their administrators here in the Greater Portland area. And you know they’re not having to live as underground as the early high school GST’s had to almost 20 years ago you know we were very underground movement for a long time with tremendous work to maintain confidentiality and to remain secret and that’s

LGBT Families

Concerns about exposing kids to gender and sexuality

Harrasment

Changes over 20 years to greater openness

all changed you know it's there's much less than that pressure for the secrecy there are some security issues that we still like for instance when all the groups in southern Maine get together and a GLSEN, GSTA night you know the the announcement of where the meeting is only goes to the people who are expected to be at the meeting it's not announced publicly and is there some of those kinds of precautions that are taken to be sure that is a totally safe environment for students when they go there because of course I mean there's always someone who's just coming out that never disappears from the landscape and so there's always.... There are always students who are very much at risk and vulnerable to thoughts of suicide and self-harm and that never leaves the landscape and so you always no matter how more so much more secure the movement grows start how much more respect and safety comes those other realities those darker realities are still almost part of the picture and as teachers we always have to remember those and think about them and make sure that we're creating environments where that full range of the most terrified and the most out and proud can all be safe and it's a challenge you know. From a learning perspective yeah so anyway so that's what the to GLSEN chapters do they, also do professional development trainings for faculties and and sometimes even community groups and let's say I think of them four quadrants. In here to have stopped doing so much presentable that GLSEN's my life is coming down a little bit used to be the slowest little clearer chart shows the areas of work that GLSEN chapters undertake age

GLSEN, GSTA

Precautions to ensure safety

Students at risk

GLSEN Trainings

there is one of them is the research and the little chart so this is already a little outdated as you see June, 2014 but there's a whole area of activism in public policy and advocacy and this would be like testifying to the legislature being involved in statewide referenda you know all of that kind of thing. This is the professional development quadrant here's the student leadership paper, the GSTA's and then there's all just the internal work of keeping organization going and yeah so that's that really represents what you know, that the areas where at least our Southern Maine GLSEN chapter on put his energy and I don't think it's very different now a couple years later even though i'm not, I'm no longer part of it doesn't help.

GSTA

M: You said earlier that you were able to reclaim the school for safety, do you think that being a part of the GSTA help you with that?

GSTA

B: Oh yeah, oh it was definitely the the Avenue I could never have done that along you know what I needed to do was to be fully out to students and the whole school community into finals and students and this was controversial in my journey because that hasn't been done yet in Portland and you know it just it just meant that it was sort of thought, you know it was highly charged part of the oppression of course that LGBT people experience is the pressure to be silent and to be invisible that's true. Also for people of color and other kinds of minorities be, invisible be silent. Like will let you kind of exists as long as you you know pretend you're

Need to be fully out to students

not there and of course them yeah that's a totally unacceptable way for anybody live so, so I realized that you know that I was going to need to take that step at school would happen and all kinds of things for me. My personal life too I needed to leave that long relationship that was closeted and I needed to leave the faith community that I had been a leader in for 20 years and you met lots of changes really kind of like a tornado blowing through you know knocking down all the buildings and I was 42 at that time and and I just knew that you know I had a really an assignment you know. A charge where they want it or not is immaterial you know it so and I knew that I wasn't going to be able to finish out a teaching career that and be the kind of teacher that I wanted to be and I expected myself to be unless I was teaching fully out and being a leader in my school on these issues so and the good news about that is that is the minute I took that step and there are many many stories around this and inside this but the minute I took that step students approach me right away you know a group of 18 or 20 students that I didn't know they had heard about gay straight alliances somehow don't know how and they just said will you help us start with a hearing you know and I said yes right away so so we did and that started in a whole journey of first like learning how to reclaim our own school for ourselves you know that we had to be underground inside our school like me the secret meeting place and and you know people had to cover the glass you know for students to feel safe in there, and the minute my English colleagues discovered that has

Pressure to be invisible

Decision to leave closeted relationship

Age 42

Fully out as a teach

Asked by students to help organize alliance

said yes to these students and I mean the next morning I'm writing on the board at seven in the mornings you know. I mean the old days of chalk and blackboards right I wrote almost unimaginable today but I mean they're going to put my notes on the board for the day and and any of this colleague shows up at my door and says I heard a bunch of students visited you last night after school, oh yeah I heard that has to something should I heard you, said yes this is here silence and she says you're not doing that alone. This wonderful straight identified English colleague right and she bless her heart she that's what a real is right she stepped right up she took all the same risks I had a building level administration that did not want to get straight as did not want out LGBT teacher and on were angry about it and made life difficult and she was willing to go through all that with us and with me so really I wasn't alone you know I have these wonderful students and and they weren't alone either and and this great colleague and then a series of colleagues who stepped in to help at various times and and made sure that we always had a GSA. Deering you know the whole time that I was there we were never without one from that from the time the students going to start one now in lots of schools these clubs kind of their board they died over over again you know but we had a period grid stability at Deering at the beginning as I mean as long as it just for all those first years it you know even when the group was small it was sturdy it wasn't going to be wasn't going to be a little flame that one out and that's a hard thing the schools were you know where the group's

Straight colleague support

Deering High School GSA

struggle to exist and then the flame goes out because the older kids have cultivated the younger leaders and then conditions and the school go back to where they were before the GSA ever existed the grasp of levels and hate language all comes back and then somebody said we have to do something about this let's start a GSA again. Right and then you know the very existence of a Gay-Straight Trans Alliance and school takes away permission for the hardest things about only for is, is this this tacit assignment permission for her answers to address and what her teachers dealing with this week but the fact that this massive silent permission or actually outside permission has now been to give it for some of the worst kinds of behavior you know from the person considering the pinnacle of our society and so the part of the important work of a GST, a Justin being present even if it's not terribly active or terribly visible in school the presence of that club means no permission and everybody knows it right you know so it tamps down a lot of the worst behavior not all but a lot of it a significant portion and that results in better conditions for everyone so for example. In the in British Columbia the school of the UBC School of Nursing decided to look at student reported data in their national health surveys to determine they want to look at all of the hospitals in their province and to segregate the data for the schools that had GSA's and those that didn't it turns out about a third of high schools of this is a 2014 studying think about a third of the high schools had GSA's and two-thirds didn't well it turns out in the student in the self-reported data about suicidal

GSA
GSTA

ideation meaning thinking about suicide and actual suicide attempts at those two categories of data there was a powerful correlation between the existence of a GST a school and lower suicidal ideation and actual suicide attempts lower by half ok in comparison with those two through schools that didn't have such a group so you know. You look at that kind of evidence and end by the way those figures were not just for LGBT identified students they were for everyone, straight students included in fact straight boys had some of the biggest drops and yet see because this is a school climate it affects the school climate for everyone right it affects how everybody feels about themselves about their own safety about their potential as learners balance their ability to do what they need to do in school to get ahead in their lives affects all those things right and then also there are wonderful longitudinal studies coming out of the San Francisco State University I think Caitlin Ryan is the lead researcher on some of these studies on one in particular is been a longitudinal study. It was I just was leaving early results in 2011 and I need to chase down now what she's found out the last five years but in 2011 she was reporting early results of this longitudinal study where she had followed she ever colleagues have followed groups of students in San Francisco high schools and maybe probably greater San Francisco I know probably just that part of California again schools with and without GSA's and it turns out that by the time those high school students got to age 25 they had stunningly lower levels of it if they were in school they had GSA they didn't even have to

Location, GSA, LGBT, GSTA, Health, Education

be in the GSA to get these benefits right they had significantly lower levels of depression and self harm so that they were healthier obviously you know they were alive, they had significantly higher degrees from high school completion better academic achievement and higher college attendance you know so I mean on every front of sort of psychological welcome your physical health and educational achievement they were doing enormously better in the the school's coming out of high schools that had GSA's and again they did now this this is a study of LGBT you have no people they did not ever even have to grace the door of where the GSA was meeting to get there was to get the benefits there's no difference between the kids who were in the GSA and the kids who aren't but if they if they're school had one they were experiencing these powerful lasting benefits in other words they were being watched in tremendous the greater safety and self-respect. So you can understand why somebody like me, we just be crazy over this concept I managed became obsessed by something this simple and this inexpensive that could make this kind of difference in young people's lives and I just the more I learned about experiential at Deering because some of these insights that began to be reported an academic research I had already experienced directly at Deering by watching kids right. I could see these things happening to them and so I just became a true believer in a straight trans alliance and so I think I always will be. There's plenty of evidence now it's you know it was so if you at first and it's so not if he now you know there's just this model of evidence that these are

GSA, GSTA, Health, Studies, Depression, Anxiety, Suicide rates

seriously good interventions in schools that are there really really help young people emerged through the passage of adolescence more intact, more whole, more productive more healthy that are educated like what is not to love right so yeah it became really formative part of this 20-year cycle. That I, where I was primarily focused on this work it was still teaching this for a lot of it and that was hard you know to be able to do both but even after I stopped teaching english names vary I stayed very very involved in this work have I answered the question?

M: Was it hard for you to be teaching English and work?

B: Oh just because it's so incredibly demanding to be a high school English teacher I mean you know you just you don't sleep was seriously. You know, you did you know that the loads are the stupid clothes are ridiculously heavy and if you're trying to teach writing I mean all you have to do is the math I mean if you spend 20 minutes on a paper which really isn't very much you spend just 20 minutes on a paper, if you go ahead if you have a hundred and thirty or 250 students you add up how much that ss and like where are the hours and you have to prepare like sometimes four or five different preparations and that all takes time I never was a cookie cutter kind of teacher. I never did the same thing twice you know is a constant being on a constant creative edge which is of course why I loved it so much right and why it never ever got boring for me for one minute it was exciting for me on the last day is the first day

GSA, GSTA, Education, Location, Degree, Coming out, LGBT, Community

and you know but it is kind of all-consuming and it's I don't know I don't know if you have english teachers in your family or if you have friends who are marinating this teachers it's not a real fun thing to be married to an English teacher because they are married to those papers right you know there's just so much to do to keep up and so also to be advising extracurriculars and doing some of the other generous things that English teachers do is just it's just very demanding. You know I was, last night with a high school English teacher who advises both the GST a school and the civil rights team in a large public high school and I did not dare ask her what her student load was like how, many students, how many classes how many preparations everyday, I just. I couldn't, I couldn't bear to ask her because I just knew I would tear out every hair in my head but I didn't, I did just listen to the kind of wanted to tell me about her involvement with these groups and so she said so the GST meets two mornings a week Tuesday and Thursday before school and the Civil Rights team meets twice a week, Wednesday and Fridays, is in frantic before sport and I'm saying to her so like before the school day starts four days a week, but you only have one day to have your own thoughts before classes and that her. You know I don't know how she does it. I could not write just for whatever but she does you know so yeah it's just it's a lot to ask of people basically you know so it's hard to hold life together in those years just to well into have a

Education, Career

Teacher, GSA, GSTA, LGBT

<p>[00:55:01.17] B: Well and to have a life, I mean, to have, to have a home and a partnership and in some cases children, how do they do all that? S: Yeah B: So, that's why that was hard. S: Huh, I could only imagine. ALL LAUGH M: Totally understandable B: Some people commute some distance to school, where are the hours? Somewhere you gotta sleep, you know? ALL LAUGH M: How has the HIV/AIDS epidemic affected you? B: Well my generation as you know, there's nobody without stories, well I was my coming out to myself and in the earliest years of awareness of aids for me were pretty much the same time and again, that was a terrible thing to come out into. I mean can you imagine? It wasn't only the horrors of this unknown and poorly understood disease, but the social stigma that magnified and intensified and the again, opening of the floodgates of permission to harass. I mean, I had just experienced and I have to assume this is a common experience nationally, that anti LGBT harassment and violence against us as LGBT people, exploded in the 1980's. So you have not only this massive medical issue that is decimating our community but also it's still a very active round community. I'm not even sure, I mean I guess there was a community, but I wasn't connected to it. I mean I had no experience of community in the 1980's because it was too scary to be, to even have anything to do with. I mean it would have meant the end of my career and who knows what else. So um, but I was certainly aware of HIV and you know like all responsible citizens at that time, I was reading about it, learning about it, um because I was active in my church. It was a matter of faith to be doing something about it and so I served on. I actually help to found and AIDs task force in my church and we actually, we started, we visited with the AIDS project when it was still quite new in Portland. And asked what they needed and what they told us at the time Diane Elsie whose a name that you my have heard about, she was an important activist in that early period in Portland and was instrumental in founding Portland Outright. But Diane as on the, she was a social worker on the staff of the AIDS project at that time. She worked with my church and basically said what we need, we have people who are often unable to cook for</p>	<p>Family , Time</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Terror/Scared</p> <p>Harassment</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Alone</p> <p>Time, alone</p> <p>Career, Scared</p> <p>Community</p>
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<p>themselves. They don't feel good; they don't have the strength to cook healthy food for themselves so what we really need are good, nourishing, home cooked meals. That are and again, ha, I'm dating myself here a little bit but this is before microwaves.</p> <p>ALL LAUGH</p>	<p>Community</p>
<p>B: We need these meals in single portions and frozen so that we can distribute them to people. Patients who come in here can choose individuals meals to take home just defrost and heat up and eat without having to prepare anything. My church started that program, this was a church that had about a thousand members and we started. I must say that despite peoples anti gay bias, the humanitarian aspect of this crisis was so deeply upsetting to people in my church that people were very, very highly motivated to respond in some concrete and loving way. To this emerging plague, um the just awful devastation that was happening, all these mostly young men dying at such a horrific rate, and there was so much stigma attached to it. People refusing to treat them, people being violent against them when they were already sick. I mean people just, awful, unspeakable cruelty, and that was really an issue of conscience for my church. So that's when they got really excited about this program and they ran this program for 25 years</p>	<p>Time</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Terrified/Scared Harassment</p>
<p>S: Oh wow</p> <p>M: Oh wow</p> <p>B: They were still providing the meals later in microwavable containers right. But I was the person who for many years while I was still there, transferred the meals would come in. We instructed people to leave them in the freezer of a regular freezer of a refrigerator.</p>	<p>Time</p>
<p>S: Yeah</p> <p>B: In a little kitchen that was right near the door and handy, right so people could lug all these things in, sometimes they cooked special things for it. Sometimes they just, if they cooked lasagna and they had three portions left over it went into these little then aluminum dishes that we provided. When you walked into the, when you entered our church, the first thing you saw was the table of dishes. Take dishes and here's the little brochure that tells you how to bring them back. People would cover them and put little messages, you know loving messages. Encouraging and sweet thoughts on these and sometimes in the handwriting of very elderly people, all shaky and sometimes in children's printing. There would be, because you had to list the ingredients, right, because people had allergies so you list out all the ingredients. Then instead of just the ingredients people would also add these loving messages.</p>	<p>Community</p>

So it was just wonderful to see what came in every week and then I would transfer those, dozens of meals every week, carry them on big trays down to this, the church bought a big freezer chest.

S: Yeah

B: And we would leave them there and they would accumulate until the AIDS project said, oh and we bought a freezer for the AIDS project as well right. So the meals would accumulate until the AIDS project would say, "hey were getting low", and then a bunch of us would make a delivery, and they were heavy.

ALL LAUGH

B: Ha, we would make this delivery; this was when the AIDS project was in monument square.

S: Yeah

B: We would take these elevators up with these heavy, heavy trays and these boxes of meals. That was a wonderful ministry and it allowed the people in that congregation to, to have a meaningful way of administering to people that they often didn't have other ways of contact. Because of confidentiality issues and privacy.

S: Yeah

B: They could give those meals to the Aids Project and people who were well enough could chose what they want and people who weren't well enough could have social workers chose for them and bring it right to the house. That was something that I was involved with early on that really it, it didn't stop until finally the Franny Peabody Center got organized in a way that they couldn't accept food that had been made elsewhere.

Right, they and there own programs.

M: Yeah

S: Yeah

B: So they alerted the church that, thank you very much but it's time to stop. Its amazing, really 25 years, ha, that's the congregation I had to leave because I couldn't be out there, ironically but what wonderful work they did for all those years and what faithfulness to keep doing something for that long, you know? I'm also really happy that, although I was very angry and grieving when I had to leave. I found another congregation that was very affirming obviously and my old church and I have had this long journey of reconciliation and I consider us fully to have completed that circle and I'm actually really proud of them because they have done tremendous work to educate themselves and they have become leaders among Protestant denominations for LGBT equality. In fact, about

Community

Time

Time

Alone, Community

<p>three or four years ago, their minister or 25 years retired, they had to call a new senior minister and they called a lesbian. So talk about going from not being able to tolerate the presence of out LGBT people in your congregation to asking one to be your senior pastor.</p>	<p>Community, change</p>
<p>S: Yeah</p>	<p>Time</p>
<p>B: You know, in a span of just really not very many years. I think they have done a lot of learning and growing and they have been very intentional about it. It has taken a lot of courage, they've lost members, they've lost money, but they did all that, so I'm proud of them.</p>	<p>Change</p>
<p>S: So with the recent election, would you like to tell us how you feel about that?</p>	<p>Change</p>
<p>B: Well, I'm devastated, I find it hard to imagine a person in any of the persecuted minority groups who wouldn't be, I'm sure there are those among us who aren't. It's just hard for me to imagine not being devastated by it. It was a physical shock, like an earthquake for me and I think for lots of people. I'm one of the people who wanted Hillary to be the president in 2008.</p>	<p>Alone</p>
<p>S: Mhm</p>	
<p>B: Barack Obama was my second choice, talk about having one hell of a great second choice.</p>	<p>Scared/Terrified</p>
<p>ALL LAUGH</p>	
<p>B: I mean really, I am so proud of what he's done, under very difficult circumstances.</p>	<p>Time</p>
<p>S: Yeah</p>	
<p>B: I don't mean just for LGBT people, I mean overall. But no, he was not my first choice, Hillary was so you can imagine. Not only did I want to see a woman be president.</p>	
<p>S: Yeah</p>	
<p>B: I also recognized early on from the time that she and her husband were first campaigning on the national front. I recognized what a really powerful intellect she was and just what a superb talent and resource she was for us as a country. I very much wanted her service. I don't think there has been anybody as qualified to be president as she is. Possibly ever in the history of the republic, but certainly not in modern times. Its just an utter heart break to have us turn away a person who could have served us so well. That alone would be terrible enough, just not to have her, but then to go to the opposite extreme in every way. A person who has never served the public for one minute, a person who has not experience in any elective office, not even high school student counsel, completely and utterly unqualified for office. Morally</p>	<p>Change</p>

<p>degenerate approving a phony, a fraud, a liar, a conman, I mean I think these are all fair and accurate descriptions of him. To have such a person in the White House is honestly a little bit still beyond my comprehension, I don't think that I have been able to fully absorb it yet.</p>	
<p>S: Yeah</p>	Terried/Scared
<p>B: So we are what? Today's the 17th?</p>	
<p>S: 18th</p>	
<p>M: 18th</p>	
<p>B: 18th. So were 10 days after the election.</p>	
<p>S: Yeah</p>	
<p>B: I'm very concerned about what it will mean on every front, I think it's going to be a really rough 4 years and I'm worried because of the consolidation of republican power, at every level. Not just the president and the Congress, but what it will mean for Supreme Court appointments that more than 2/3 of the governors are now Republicans. That some of the state legislators are heavily Republican. I'm worried that this could be even longer than 4 years. So it has been a really tough 10 days, just myself. Then you start adding in what it happening on the grounds in schools, which is really a nightmare. What I'm hearing from my teacher friends and administrator friends who are trying to manage this are very distressed. I'm really somehow usually an optimist, I think its probably, I get teased in my life. I'm sometimes called Pollyanna from the cornfields.</p>	<p>Time</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Scared/ Terrified Time</p> <p>Time</p>
<p>ALL LAUGH</p>	
<p>B: But I did grow up in the cornfields and I don't have any apologies about that. But I do tend to believe the best about people until they show me otherwise and I do believe in the basic decency of the American people, I just do, my feelings about my country are very strong and very important to me. The fact that I have been able, as an LGBT person to see the kinds of advances in the last 20 years especially that I have seen. That's only made me more of a believer in our founding documents in our ability to move towards the vision of our founding documents. Even when there's a struggle, even when there are causes you know, my life story has been one of seeing our country grow to be a more just and more fair place through the African American civil rights movement. Who some people are now calling the second reconstruction. I came of age in that time knowing that there was this profound injustice but watching people I actually knew, you know the foot soldiers, marching in the south, in Chicago. I watched this movement unfold as a child and young adolescent and similarly I watched a president brought down when I was in college. By criminal</p>	<p>Change</p> <p>Change Time</p>

<p>activity and I watched our constitution work and these experiences while none of this results in a perfect country, these experiences really built a very firm faith in me about the system that we have and its sort of just a big bulky boat that will rock with a storm.</p>	<p>Time</p>
<p>M: Yeah</p>	<p>Time</p>
<p>B: But ultimately, its not one of those light little skipper boats, its heavy and its solid and it has tremendous self correcting properties built into it. So the strongest voice in me is we will weather this and we'll come out on the other side, I don't know when but we will come out on the other side, with profound rejection of the values that we see about to enter the White House right now. That it will be firmly rejected and it will be seen as ultimately the last gasp of the white Christian patriarchy. And the something that is much more what we dream of and hope for will emerge. I actually believe that it will emerge, I just don't know how long it will take, I don't know if I'll be alive to see it. I feel sad for my elderly parents because I know they wont be alive to see it. You know, my father is 92, my mother is 85, their both still very keen, and my mother never took her Hillary stickers off anything from 2008 until now and just desperately wanted her to be president and it so heart broken. Sometimes I think that it is harder for me to see my mother disappointment than feel my own. I don't know, it's a very sad and difficult and trying time and I think the worst of it is the social fabric has been so frayed. That so many Americans are treating each other in ways that I consider un-American. I have some pretty clear ideas about what I consider to be proper American behavior. So its hard, I realize that I live in a place where I'm going to see a lot less of that, that many Americans will see. I've seen a lot, because I'm not living in a school every day. In my daily doings for the last 10 days, I've seen extreme random acts of kindness. I see people going out of their way to be exceptionally kind, to anybody who looks like they might be in one of those threatened groups. I'm hearing lots and lots of stories that are very affirming and encouraging. But I realize that, that is not the reality of many Americans and its certainly not the reality of a lot of our school kids. Who because the president elect has so appealed to the crudest and most boorish behavior and has modeled that for the country. We have a lot of children who now, or adolescence who see that they have been given permission to be like him. This is a really tough for parents and teachers and its a setback for our culture as a whole. So I'm very distressed about it but not in a doomsday sense. I don't see it as apocalyptic I see that</p>	<p>Change</p>
	<p>Strong</p>
	<p>Strong</p>
	<p>Change</p>
	<p>Time</p>
	<p>Alone</p>
	<p>Harassment</p>
	<p>Career</p>
	<p>Community</p>
	<p>Community</p>

<p>we've made as a society a lot of progress, relatively fast historically speaking. And I don't mean just for LGBT people. Although, to look at my own community, I mean its really astonishing what we have been able to accomplish in the last 20 to 25 years and certainly in the last 40. It certainly is an exemplar of very rapid historical change. So we are looking at a time of retrenchment now, this is how social change works. It goes in waves, and we've had a really powerful wave. That has included electing of very first African American president and lots of really good things. But now we will be in this retrenchment period and it will be ugly, the people who have a different vision of America are just going to have to be the bright lights and are going to have to be tireless and resist like hell and work hard and keep each other encouraged. Because everybody's going to go up and down at different times, and were going to have to do good self care and hang in there for however long it takes until we can bring a better person and a better administration into office. The Supreme Court is the worst of the news because that will out live me for sure and who knows maybe even you. Anyway, its sort f grim to talk about that but I do still feel hopeful for the country. That may sound paradoxical but I thought, so when I was 18 years old, I was in the first group of 18-year-old Americans to be able to vote.</p> <p>S: Yeah</p> <p>B: Yeah, I mean I was 18 that year, so I was thrilled beyond belief to be able to vote, it was a huge deal to me and we had president Nixon in office and we were still at war in Vietnam and our brothers and beloved male relatives were dying for no reason in an immoral war. A lot of us had been involved in protesting it, I certainly had and I just thought Richard Nixon was just a complete disaster for the country. So of course I went out my first semester of college, I went out power the pavement for George McGovern, I was in Iowa, I went to all those little Iowa towns; Ottumwa, Marshalltown, Oskaloosa, I mean you name it any little Iowa burg I was out there knowing on doors for George McGovern. So I was just shattered on election day, I was in De Moine at the state capital watching the returns come in and I just thought the world had ended. I remember my father, he was a WWII veteran, he served 4 years in WWII, he's the one who talked to me about the Jeffersonian faith in the American people and that I really had to realize that folks were little smarter and a little ore decent than I was giving them credit for, even if they had elected, or reelected Richard Nixon. Now of course Richard Nixon did himself in, right, I</p>	<p>Harassment Alone</p> <p>Terrified/ Scared</p> <p>Accomplishment Change</p> <p>Change Accomplishment</p> <p>Scared/Terrified</p> <p>Time Scared/Terrified</p> <p>Time Change</p> <p>Scared/Terrified</p> <p>Change Accomplishment</p>
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<p>mean the guy was a crook and finally he got caught and our system worked. When I was 20 I watched him wave goodbye and my dad sent me a dozen roses hat day. That was his way of saying, you know we had had some pretty tough arguments about him about Nixon and politics generally, but that was his way of saying, “honey you were right”. He was a danger to the republic. And look, look at what has happened. The system took care of it. There’s not guarantee that that will always be the case but I think I still am willing to, I mean there was a serious constitutional crisis, certainly the most serious in my lifetime and I saw it come out right. So we may be entering into another period of constitutional crisis but I actually am fairly optimistic that the system will maintain itself. I mean we do have to remember that Hillary won the popular vote by well over a million votes, and people are still counting but there are a lot of people out there who did not want this result. So that’s a good thing.</p>	<p>Alone</p>
<p>M: Haha S: Haha B: So how are we doing on time and questions? S: We've got an hour and 21 minutes, so we still have a little time. B: Ok</p>	<p>Time Accomplishment Change</p>
<p>S: Did you have any final stories you wanted to tell us at all? B: Where are we in your questions? B: Coughs</p>	<p>Scared/Terrified</p>
<p>M: We covered pretty much everything we wanted so if you have any important stories or anything that you really wanted to talk to us about.</p>	<p>Accomplishment</p>
<p>B: Well I think I'd like to talk a little bit more about my professional coming out because it was pretty charged and pretty difficult. But I think what I would like to say about it was that I was challenged by students to do that. You know I taught my first 15 years at Portland High and then there was a little break where I worked in the department in Augusta and then at USM for a little bit in special projects and then I moved to grad school, but when I came back the population had shifted across the city and they needed an English teacher at Deering and not at Portland, so that’s how I ended up at Deering, I was transferred there. Initially, I wasn’t all that happy about it because I knew I was going to have to do this coming out thing at some time and I thought it would be easier to do at Portland High. I still think it would have been easier there, but you are, where you are, and you have to do the work that’s yours to do, not matter where you land. What happened for me is that, I had</p>	<p>Time</p>
	<p>Scared/Terrified</p>
	<p>Career</p>

some former students, there was one former student in particular that came back to see me, she had been my student in ninth grade at Portland high and I had 110 students that year and busy English teachers, I don't know how other people handle this, but I always felt that I had to kind of do a triage sort of thing right away at the beginning of the year. Who is gonna disappear in the next week or two if I don't intervene. Who are those people and how do I get to them fast. So I would always go through this extensive process of reading records and learning about first years work and talking with colleagues about kids that I thought looked at risk. Because we had a significant drop out problem and I was a ninth grade teacher and that's a very high-risk time for kids, just they get overwhelmed by high school and would just disappear. So I was always creating these sort of triage lists and who were the most at risk, I would do these categories. In that year I had this student that I call Laurie, I had 110 students in my load and on my triage list, she was 110.

M: Hm

B: Seriously, I mean, she seemed to me to have, I mean ninth grade is a hard time for anybody but she seemed to me to have about as close to an ideal ninth grade life as was possibly to have. She was brainy and beautiful and athletic and musical and all these talents she had friends, I knew her parents she had parents that loved her very, very much. I just thought well I'm not gonna have to worry about her. In fact, I actually defined my job with her, when I got to the place in the triage list that I could afford to think about the kids that were the best off, I would say ok what's my job with them, and in her case I decided that my job was, I mean she had such tremendous intellect that I decided that my job was to stay out of her way and t create as much space as I could for her intellectual growth. To run interference with some of the banalities with school and to challenge her and push her and make sure she was reading appropriately challenging material and push her on her private reading like, those kinds of things here my job as her teacher. To move aside obstacles to her own self-directive growth. Now meanwhile 8 years later she comes home from Harvard and we go and have this lovely picnic together at Portland Headlight and she's doing this update on her life. She's studied all sorts of fascinating things with all these great scholars in the world and it was wonderful to hear about, and you know she had also fallen in love with a woman and she wanted to tell me about this relationship and I felt at that point, were both adults now, I can come out to her. I was not out at

Career

Students

Troubled
Scared

Troubled

Accomplished

school at this time. That led to her description of what ninth grade had actually been like for her. What a humbling experience for a teacher who worked as hard as I did to try to understand what kids needed, because my reading of her could not have been more wrong. In fact, so this Laurie that I talk about is actually a composite character but all parts of this story are true, it's just not all one person. But Laurie told me that day at that picnic that she knew she was a lesbian, she was out to herself quite early and felt completely alone. The stigma was very, very strong in the 80's, you know were talking about this period of HIV and total permission to harass and killing LGBT people and treat them as less than human beings and this is what she was coming out to herself into. She talked about how lonely she felt, how afraid she was, how she couldn't at that point in her life at a 14 year old imagine having any occupation that would be commensurate with her abilities. She saw no possibility of family, children, she had all those same dreams and aspirations that lots of children have and everywhere she looked she saw dead ends. No I'm never going to be able to be a doctor or whatever else I might want to be and I'll never have a sustained nurturing relationship with a mate for life, which is what she wanted. The whole, I won't build a family, you know, it's just all these no, no, no, no's for her. Because she felt so hopeless, she thought a lot about taking her life and had the means and had a plan and according to her she went home every day from Portland High in that year she was my student and seriously debated whether she would come back the next day. Here's this kid that's marked 110 on my list and she probably should have been first, but I didn't know. Of course as these revelations unfolded I was in tears and I asked her what could I have done Laurie to have made ninth grade more bearable for you? What could I have done as your teacher? She made a nice little list of things she said I had done, I didn't remember any of them but they did sound like things I tried to do, that were part of my MO as a teacher. So that was a little bit comforting but then she looked me right in the eye and said you know, what you really could have done to make me have hope for my life. If I would have known that you and I were alike in this was she said, people would have respected you, my parents respected you, kids respected you, everybody knew how much you loved teaching and how devoted you were to it. If I had known you and I were alike in this way, I would have had so much more hope for my life, so what you could have done, you could have been out. To me and to everybody, that's what would have made a difference,

Accomplished

Scared/ Terrified

Students

Alone

Harassment

Alone

Career

Alone

Scared/Terrified

Suicide

<p>you could have been out. That was in the mid 90's and that was an example, probably the most powerful example of the kind of experience that I was ultimately either going to have to leave teaching all together and mind you this is a person who has never thought about doing anything else, and didn't want to do anything else. Sang in the shower everyday getting ready for school.</p>	<p>Career</p> <p>Alone</p>
<p>S: Haha</p>	
<p>M: Haha</p>	
<p>B: Seriously! It's that kind of joy, if you every find something you feel that way about don't you give it up no matter what. You find a way to stay in it because it's important to love your work. For me it was never a job, it was a calling, I felt called to be a service of young people in this way. It was an important part of my reason for being on earth, so the idea of giving up was just unthinkable to me. It was also frankly at the time also almost as unthinkable to give up my relationship, but obviously when push came to shove, the relationship is what went</p>	<p>Community Career</p> <p>Time</p>
<p>because it wasn't just this woman that I loved, it was also the prison that we were in and the fact that she was not willing to consider to do any counseling or any kind of work to leave that prison and I couldn't imagine living out the rest of my days in that prison. So I chose an open life and it meant choosing to leave the relationship, but it also meant unbenounced to me a lot of empowerment as a teacher to be the teacher I was meant to be for students. Opportunities that I never would have dreamed of, like being asked by students to help them grow this</p>	<p>Career</p>
<p>GSTA movement and being able to see it make such a difference and being able to live long enough to see the early GSTA students from Deering become teachers and GSTA advisors themselves, which is happening and is a really beautiful and exciting thing to me to see. The next</p>	<p>Career</p>
<p>Generation is already taking it over, and it will just continue because of these virtues of the movement that I have described to you. Because of the benefits to everybody in schools. I had to look at this decision, this crossroads and the story of Laurie is an important positive motivator towards stepping across that</p>	<p>Alone</p>
<p>chasm that was a very scary chasm for me because I rally thought I might lose every, including maybe even my life. It really was that level of decision. At the same time, I had a student that I call Steve that was driven out of my English class at Deering. He had survived; he had been outed against his will</p>	<p>Alone</p>
<p>hallway through freshman year and had become a target for this trammed harassment that was going on in the 90's. Now the 90's were an especially terrible time because HIV, they were</p>	<p>Accomplishment</p> <p>Community Accomplishment</p>

<p>only just developing some of the preliminary treatments for HIV tat would allow people to live longer lives. The stigma was still very, very strong and we were still losing these enormously talented gay men at a horrific rate. Not only gay men, lots of people in the population, but our community was being really ravaged by these losses. This also meant that young gay men, people coming of age were at tremendous risk for becoming ill really early in life and not having their lives, just not having their lives. So as a teacher I was very, very concerned about that, I had taken a number of steps in the 80's at Portland high to do things, talk to kids about things that I never imagined I ever would, in order to make sure that the kids were safe. I was continuing to do that at Deering. So here's this young man who is a gay boy, who has already survived this most relentless harassment and its still in the era when faculty are not intervening. There is this abandonment of LGBT young people, because of everybody's fear. There's all this fear around, HIV has somehow become alighted with gay people, which we know isn't accurate but that's how people thought about it then. So there's the stigma, there's the death, there's the fear of disease, all tied up with this particular population. Then there's also the sense, like the politic angle in schools, that if you defend a gay kid, you're not gonna be backed or supported, parents are going to rep you somehow, or if your an administrator you're gonna lose your job, there's going to be head lines and you'll be out of your position. If you're a teacher and you report something, the administrators are going to be too scared to do anything about it, so teachers wouldn't report. What did this mean for students? It meant that they were abandoned; they just had to face this stuff without adult support in their schools. I don't mean that no one ever tried to help them, that would be an over statement but on the whole, the system abandoned them so they were just targets, they were just sitting ducks. Steve was one of these kids; it was like he just walked through the school with a target on his back. He had lived like that for three semesters; how he came into school every day I just do not know. He got to me as a junior, by this time, it wont surprised you, he was suffering severe PTSD, anytime he tried to move in the school, he was kicked, punched, had his head smashed into lockers, face smashed into water fountains and he would be kicked, have his kidneys hit from behind. Just in constant horrible language, it just never stopped. Invitations for him to kill himself, on and on and on. It was all day every day, and he had lived through already three semesters of that. Then he gets to me and I see this kid who,</p>	<p>Accomplishment</p> <p>Scared/Terrified</p> <p>Student</p> <p>Harassment Time</p> <p>Scared/Terrified Time</p> <p>Harassment</p> <p>Alone</p> <p>Scared</p> <p>Alone</p>
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my first really red alarm was that he couldn't read Barbara Kingsolver's, The Bean Trees, which was the easiest book we were gonna read in American Lit and he couldn't read it. I thought what is going on, I looked at his records and he had no reading problems, he had always had high reading scores all his life. Why couldn't this kid read and retain? Well this is when I started to understand that he was in severe PTSD and couldn't concentrate, couldn't retain what he read and that he wasn't lying to me about not being able to remember. Even if he sat and tried to read, it was like nothing went in. So what happens to the learning of the student who is in that kind of situation? He was being deprived of his right to a public education. This is a civil right that every one of us has as Americans and he was being denied that right by the untrammled harassment that he was experiencing from his schoolmates. Obviously he was lucky he had supportive parents, they did everything that they could, I did everything I could as his English teacher, he had good support from the social workers and counselors but the administrators didn't do anything on the disciplinary front to help him. Let me say, they didn't do enough. Eventually Steve was driven out of my class and out of Deering High school. Never got a high school diploma, eventually, many years later he did a GED and he's 34/35 years old now and still taking college courses. The classroom is still a very traumatic place for him so everything is much, much harder for him than it should be. He's a really bright guy, but everything is a struggle, academically for him. It's because of the way that he was so harmed and damaged by people who were young and playing this game, to them it was just a game. This very cruel, very destructive game. So I had to watch him, I mean frankly, it's a miracle that he's still in this world. We came very close to losing him, multiple times and I had to watch him be driven out of the school and almost out of life. So that was a second really powerful, in my face, very much in my face experiences that was just excruciating. Then there were suicides; there were kids I loved who died. There was also a very public suicide of a young man I didn't personally know, but his story deeply affected me. He was a student at Lewiston High School, he was a football captain, a senior, he was a straight A student. When he died, he had 50 college offers on his desk, 5-0, fifty colleges wanted him and he chose death instead. Part of the horrific nature of his story is that his body wasn't found for 10 days. The story in the news that this super star kid just went missing and every morning I would wake up and there's public radio with another report about how he was still missing.

Scared
 Alone
 Harassment
 Student
 Harassment
 Suicide
 Career
 Community
 Career
 Trauma
 Time

They were doing a big national search for the man, and meanwhile they just hadn't found his body. So morning after morning for 10 consecutive mornings in September 1995 when we were in midst of the first State-wide referendum which was designed to prevent LGBT people in Maine from ever having any civil rights. So we are experiencing this hideously hateful referendum and awful language in the media everyday, and don't think that didn't contribute to this death. And this amazing kid goes missing. Every morning for 10 days, I wake up and it's the first thing that enters my consciousness. I just have to tell you, this may sound a little strange but the truth is that, the very first morning that I woke up to the radio and it's this story of this kid who has gone missing, there was something about his story and the way it was reported, I just knew two things immediately on day one. I knew them with 100% certainty, I can't explain it, I just knew: number one that he was dead, number two that he was gay. Nothing I ever learned about him later surprised me, and I was right about those things. These things are all happening in the mid 90's at the same time and that converged in my life. These beautiful and treasured and beloved, lone people, being lost in one-way or another. Losing their lives, losing their education, in other cases having to look back on a high school experience, even with a successful college experience having to look back on a high school experience that was just a complete nightmare that you wouldn't wish on anyone. It was either leave education, or come out fully and use every ounce of strength I had to change this. You know that old sob about "oh one person" and this and that, but the fact is that, once I took that step I was never ever alone. It was never about one person; it was always about joining efforts with other people who were as convinced, as I was that there had to be movement on this. Together we have brought things a long way.

S: Yep

B: So, I think those are important stories to know about me, that the role of students as my teachers and my motivators and my incentive. So I guess those are things I would like to have on the record.

M: Ok, thank you very much for your time here today.

B: Thank you

M: Thank you for allowing us to interview you,

B: You bet, it's a pleasure, lovely to talk with you, thank you for your good listening.

S: Haha

Terrified/Scared

Suicide

Scared/Terrified

Alone
Suicide

Accomplished

Suicide

Community

Time

Harassment

Suicide

Time

	<p>Accomplishment</p> <p>Alone</p> <p>Change</p> <p>Accomplishment</p> <p>Change</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Students</p>
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