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<p>Susan Farnsworth Interview</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:02] So, my name is Larisa Filipov, spelled L-A-R-I-S-A F-I-L-I-P-P-O-V. Could you please spell your name for me?</p> <p>Susan [00:00:13] My name is Susan Farnsworth, S-U-S-A-N F-A-R-N-S-W-O-R-T-H.</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:20] Okay, perfect. So, I'm going to be asking you a series of questions, but keep in mind that you can refuse to answer any of them if you do not wish to answer. Do you consent?</p> <p>Susan [00:00:31] Yes.</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:32] Okay. Perfect. First of all, what are your pronouns?</p> <p>Susan [00:00:36] She/her/hers.</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:38] Okay. And how old are you? And if you don't wish to say-.</p> <p>Susan [00:00:41] 75.</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:42] Okay, perfect. And what word would you use to describe yourself, for example, like gay, lesbian, bisexual?</p> <p>Susan [00:00:49] I'm a lesbian.</p> <p>Larisa [00:00:50] Okay, perfect. All right. Where were you born?</p> <p>Susan [00:00:54] Boston, Mass.</p>	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Verbal consent</p> <p>Pronouns</p> <p>Age</p> <p>Identity</p> <p>Place of birth/origin</p>

Larisa [00:00:57] Did you grow up there?

Susan [00:00:59] I usually say I grew up in New England because by the time I was ten, we had lived in- that my folks weren't living in Massachusetts when I was born there, they were living in New Hampshire. Then they moved to Bangor, Maine. Then they moved to two places- then they moved to Massachusetts and two places in Rhode Island and then back to Melrose, Massachusetts. So I went to high school in Melrose, Mass.

Larisa [00:01:20] Okay. So you lived in Boston and then Melrose?

Susan [00:01:24] No, I never lived in Boston. I was born there. But my folks were living in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at the time.

Larisa [00:01:30] Okay.

Susan [00:01:30] Or Dover, actually. So I usually say I'm from New England, but I've been in Maine since I went to college here. And then I, I stayed here. So I've been here since I graduated in '69.

Larisa [00:01:50] Where did you go to college?

Susan [00:01:52] Bates.

Larisa [00:01:53] Bates College? What did you study?

Susan [00:01:55] I was a Spanish major.

Larisa [00:01:56] Why were you a Spanish major?

Susan [00:01:58] So I could go to Spain for a year.

Larisa [00:02:00] Oh.

Moving around New England

Undergraduate education

Susan [00:02:00] Which I did.

Larisa [00:02:02] Had you wanted to go to Spain for a while?

Susan [00:02:04] No.

Larisa [00:02:05] You just wanted to go?

Susan [00:02:06] Yeah.

Larisa [00:02:07] Perfect. While you were in school, were you involved in any political or, like LGBT groups in school?

Susan [00:02:18] When I was in- at Bates, I didn't even think or have any clue about being gay. I didn't have any idea. And while I was J.Y.A. -Junior Year Abroad-, I ended - I had been dating this guy, and my parents were worried we were going to get married. I mean, we weren't going to get married, so we started talking about it. So I got married when I got back, and I got divorced six or seven years later. It just- I felt terrible that I hadn't really known myself better or to know I would not have done that to somebody to get married and then say, "Oh, I'm sorry, this isn't the right thing for me." But I- I didn't know.

Larisa [00:03:06] When did you start to realize that maybe you weren't straight and that you were a lesbian?

Susan [00:03:11] When I was in law school in the seventies.

Larisa [00:03:15] How was that for you? Like, how was that realization that you were not heterosexual?

Susan [00:03:27] Well, it was in a way, a kind of a relief because it made- it just felt better and felt more me. More right.

Larisa [00:03:39] Had you felt wrong before or not like yourself?

Marriage to a man

Pressure from family to get married

Realizing she's not straight

Susan [00:03:43] No. But I had increasing. I felt like inside I was almost had anger building up because something was confining or something. And I-I just realized that if I mean, I didn't want to end up staying married so long that I was ready to do injury to somebody. So I just said, I need to deal with this.

Anger from repressing identity

Larisa [00:04:13] So the anger, did that start building up while you were married or before?

Susan [00:04:17] No, while I was married. I mean, just over time that the whole institution of being in a heterosexual relationship and with heterosexual people all the time, I didn't know there was anything other than heterosexuals practically at that point in my life. But I know it's kind of hard to believe, but it was true. And I had no role models, no examples of anything. I mean, I read Virginia Woolf, but that's about it.

Lack of gay/queer role models growing up

Larisa [00:04:48] Do you think if you had had more role models, you would have realized that you were a lesbian sooner?

Susan [00:04:57] I don't know.

Larisa [00:04:59] Do you wish that you had had role models?

Susan [00:05:02] I wouldn't have wanted to put the guy that I married through that. That's the only reason otherwise. I'm not. I don't have huge regrets about most of my life. So. And it wasn't. It wasn't a bad experience. It just wasn't the right thing for me.

Larisa [00:05:22] So going back a little bit, you said that you realize that you realize that when you were in law school. Where did you go to law school?

Law school

Susan [00:05:29] Maine, across the street.

Larisa [00:05:31] What motivated you to want to go to law school?

Susan [00:05:38] I was working in a- for Model Cities (?) Agency at the time and I just thought if I were going to move up the ladder, so to speak, I needed more degree. And when I looked around, I didn't want to go to grad school, and lawyers seemed to be professionals who really liked their work. And it gave me lots of options.

Larisa [00:06:02] So I know that you're currently an attorney.

Susan [00:06:04] Okay.

Larisa [00:06:05] So do you want to tell me a little bit about what that's like?

Susan [00:06:15] Um, well, I've been in three courts today, in three different places, in Augusta and Wiscasset and Portland. I just listened to a message from a guy I represented 20 years ago who recontacted me about something and was maybe going to ask me for help. And he called today to tell me his son just overdosed this morning and died. And he basically said, "F- you" to the world. So there was that range. I talked to a client today who's losing her kids to the child protective system, but I think not correctly. I helped people, I, I, I do things that are real estate transactions, family law, estate stuff. Some of it is painful to see or be part of that system right now is hard to work with. And I'm very, very scattered. I go from Skowhegan to Bath to Portland to- I've had cases in Bridgton and in Presque Isle and in Bangor, and if it weren't for COVID era things now with Zoom and all that, I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing as I have a solo practice. So I'm extremely busy, sometimes a little too busy. I do like my work, I like my clients and for the most part, and it's it's very satisfying.

Motivation for going to law school

Current job, an attorney

Larisa [00:07:43] Is it ever difficult emotionally? Like, have you ever had situations where it was just like too much for you, too overwhelming?

Susan [00:07:54] I've had a few cases where it was pretty hard to sort of swallow either what I was dealing with or what what happened to somebody. But for the most part, it's manageable because it gives me a chance to really connect with people and make a difference and help people. Plus, it's problem solving. It's writing, I like to write.

Larisa [00:08:21] Is making a difference very important to you?

Susan [00:08:24] Well, I would like to do something to make the world better, yes.

Larisa [00:08:30] All right. Well, then transitioning into that, I know that you were previously involved with the MLGPA, which is now called Equality Maine. How and why did you first get involved?

Susan [00:08:44] After Charlie Howard's death. I was able to come- I almost know- no, I guess it was at UMA where we met in Jewett Hall, as my first memory. Might have been Luther Bonney, but I think it was up there. Um, people wanted to do something in response, so.

Larisa [00:09:09] What were the most important early battles that the MLGPA fought in the state of Maine during your time with the organization?

Susan [00:09:20] I was only on the board for a year, um, but I was involved in them from the beginning with going to meetings and all that. So I think, um, I mean, when it's before it really got going or maybe at the very, very beginning, there was the whole issue with Tolerance Day at Madison High School, with- when Dale McCormick was not allowed to speak or something like that, and then, uh, they

Connecting with people and helping them

MLGPA/Equality Maine

Charlie Howard's death

Tolerance Day

brought a lawsuit about that. I think that bringing awareness to the far reaches of the state, um, where people didn't have the quick- now there's Internet. There wasn't Internet back then, now that I think of it. And so when we would we would have meetings at different places all around the state. And I think so that was important. But we were just working on getting the human rights amend- the human rights law amended to include sexual orientation. That's probably the biggest legislative battle I was working on. But they also did help hate crimes legislation, and there were a number of things that more specific, like HIV rights. And, um, I don't remember actually all the specific kinds of bills, but there is a lot of legislation in the late eighties, early nineties, that when I was in the legislature that MLGPA was working on and I was there lobbyist for a few years. So after I got out of the legislature, I lobbied for them. I have to think about what I lobbied for, but I don't remember right this second. The whole list.

Lack of internet

Larisa [00:11:20] You mentioned Tolerance Day. What was that?

Susan [00:11:25] It was a day that I think that Madison High School had organized through, um, I can't remember the guy's name, but it was a teacher there who wanted to have an opportunity for students to meet people of different backgrounds, and they invited Dale McCormick. I think at that point we must have- she must have been the president of MLGPA. And somehow, rather than- my memory is very vague on this, but I think she was invited and then told they were canceling it because somebody got upset at the idea of a lesbian actually coming to the campus or coming to the school. So, Jed Davis is a lawyer in, uh, Augusta who took the case and sued somebody in the school board or something. And I honestly don't remember what the whole thing was or what the issue, but the fact that there was a lawsuit about that topic, the whole idea of Tolerance Day being an example of intolerance was good publicity, I guess I should say, so, uh, for gay issues and civil rights for LGBT people.

Tolerance Day

Discrimination for being a lesbian

Irony is good publicity

Larisa [00:12:49] I know you said that you were a lobbyist. Did you enjoy that time? What kind of stuff did you lobby for?

Susan [00:12:57] I was literally a paid lobbyist for MLGPA. I was in the legislature for three terms as a state rep, and I worked on the same kinds of issues then, and before I was in the legislature, I lobbied as a like citizen lobbyist with MLGPA because that's what they were doing, is getting people to reach out to their legislators. And then I got in the legislature and then when I got out, um, I was hired by MLGPA for a few years to work on whatever was- we were still trying to get civil rights amendment done, and that would have been just before that I was lobbying. It was just before, um, Maine Won't Discriminate campaign and the because they passed the civil rights bill, then they had so soon the referendum. And again I'm a little fuzzy on which years, which things happened first, but it got signed into law and then it got repealed and then it got passed again. And then after that was when marriage equality came into the picture. So I was not as involved at that point, the marriage stuff.

Larisa [00:14:19] What was the most important campaign for you that you were kind of working on or trying to establish?

Susan [00:14:31] Oh, I guess I really feel like, um, getting the getting the legislature brought forward to where they could actually pass it in, first in one house. The first time they passed it, when I was in the House, they passed it in the House, but they didn't passed in the Senate. The next term they passed. Dale McCormick was in the Senate. They passed in the Senate, but the House changed and we didn't pass it in the House, or maybe, maybe it did, but the governor vetoed it and we couldn't override it, something like that. And the third time, maybe that was the third time, I don't know. But, its, we tried three times and each time, to my mind, what was important was that all those legislators had come around to being able to support it. They knew they had gay and

Lobbying for MLGPA

Maine Won't Discriminate

Checks and balances preventing laws from passing

lesbian people in their districts and transgender people. And, um, I just felt like before then that I, I mean, people said to me, leadership in the legislature said, "You know, you're not going to get anywhere with this. There's no way this will pass." But then it did, and it was because we did all this one-on-one work with people and on the inside we were doing one-on-one work. I would talk to legislators and so on. But while I was doing that, I was on the phone with people from MLGPA, like side of Sive Nielhan and Dave Garrity and others. And we were, I would say, well, this person said they don't have any gay people in their district. Can you have some people call them? Um, this person said their legislator had this issue or this concern and can we find somebody else that can go talk to them to address that? So we were a team inside and out together and it really worked. And to me, once there is a certain shift in acceptance of LGBTQ people existing, being part of the community, because they were hidden. Everybody was hidden back then. And honestly, legislators, some of them said, I don't think I've ever, I don't think I've met one or I've never seen any, or something like that. So we made sure they knew that people.

Larisa [00:16:51] Would you say that visibility and having people aware of how big the LGBT community is and how many, um, queer people are in their community was a very important aspect of that?

Susan [00:17:08] Yes. Um, and Richard Steinman, who was a sociology professor here at USM, he's no longer alive, but he was really important in that. He was in the first groups that met after- the first gatherings, I should say, after Charlie Howard's death. And he came up with this short survey, first he did a short survey that people handed out in bars and handed out to different people and gave to different groups they were in and asked people say, Have you ever been discriminated against? Have you ever been harassed? Have you ever been called these names? It was pretty short and sweet, but we were able to tabulate the results and then say 75% of the people in this area had this experience or 10% had

Significance of one-on-one work

Teamwork

Making LGBT community visible

Importance of visibility

Short discrimination surveys

this or whatever. So then we use that. And then we did a, um, I think it was a postcard campaign using the survey results, as I recall, to hand out those postcards and say, here's your legislator. Are you willing to send them these survey results and tell them you asked them to support civil rights and that you're a constituent or something like that. It was very short. It was a very simple but pretty effective. So there is kind of a sea change there. And then there was another sea change when they got to the marriage bill, but it's all it's all part of, you know, a movement, I guess you could say.

Larisa [00:18:41] Have you main- have you remained involved with Equality Maine in recent years?

Susan [00:18:46] In the last four or five years, I've sort of just been consumed with my law practice, it's so busy. But overall, I've, I go, I would go to events and go to the banquet every year. Um, but I don't live in Portland, so it's, uh, I guess as time goes by, I'm less involved directly.

Larisa [00:19:10] Why do you think they changed the name from MLGPA to Equality Maine?

Susan [00:19:15] Oh, because there was a, I think it was a consultant that recommended it as a better, better terminology for for reaching more people and not turning them off before they finish hearing what you have to say or something like that. I wasn't- I remember, I'm pretty sure I know, I can't remember the name of that person, but I remember the discussions about it. It was sort of a marketing kind of decision. I wasn't on the board then, but I was involved more. I also think the next biggest thing that I think MLGPA, and then Equality Maine, has done that's really important is raise awareness and focus on issues related to transgender, um, concerns because it just needs to be done and nobody was doing it.

Busy with law practice, not as involved currently

Changing name from MLGPA to Equality Maine

Inclusivity

Raising awareness for trans issues

Larisa [00:20:16] What kind of issues have they been raising, what kind of transgender issues have they been raising?

Susan [00:20:21] Well, just. Everything. I mean, I'm sorry. I don't I'm- it starts with the basics that there are such people that they are human beings, that they are part of everybody's family or everybody's neighborhood or every community, and they deserve to be able to live safely and with good health care and get reasonable education and not be harassed and just treat- I mean, it really comes down to being treated as a human being. And so sometimes the law takes impacts in insurance. It can impact in a health care thing or it can be no access to something medical and benefits in the service versus, you know, civilian and government programs and bathrooms. You know, just endless. I think they're they're not done with that issue for sure. They're not done with anything, really. They never. You never are. I sort of look at civil rights as a tug of war thing. You do, you pull as hard as you can when you're at your turn on the rope and you try to move things. But every once in a while, it goes in the other direction. And then you have to do it again and let somebody else take your place when the time comes. When you need a rest.

Larisa [00:21:50] Very well said. You were also involved with the Dirigo Alliance, yes?

Susan [00:21:58] Yes.

Larisa [00:21:59] When did you first get involved with them?

Susan [00:22:01] When I ran for office, because they were just getting organized. I think we were the first class, so to speak, our first group of legislators that were Dirigo legislators. That would have been the election in 1987, I think. Well, it probably was. Yeah, I think the term started in '88.

Trans rights, wanting to be treated as a human being

Civil rights is a tug of war

Involvement with Dirigo Alliance

Larisa [00:22:30] What kind of events or campaigns did you organize organized with the Dirigo Alliance?

Susan [00:22:35] I didn't. They were a coalition, as I understand it. They had a paid staff person whose name will come to me eventually. And, um, they when they started, they were about a dozen organizations, NASW and MLGPA and AFL-CIO. I think there was an environmental group in there, Sierra Club, maybe, not necessarily so local, um, and then they just branched out and they ended up with maybe 15 or 16, I think. But the idea was we couldn't do things by ourselves and our people, meaning LGBT people needed- in order to get legislation passed that we would need, we needed the help from other groups. Those other groups appreciated, uh, when it was brought up and discussed that they also needed help. We were all, all a minority on our issue and we needed- so we believed that there should be some cross education and cross support. So we got help from Labor, Labor got help from us. We got help from environmental groups, and they helped us. And it's just because progressive groups generally needed to work together. And that was the first organization for that purpose of that sort. And with those members. And they were they sponsored. They did questionnaires for all the legislator candidates, and then they sponsored people and worked with them. And when they sponsored them, it meant they didn't give money. They helped you with training of how to run, they provided volunteers who would help you drive around and do your thing, and they would educate their membership about who was running in their area that was supportive on their issues and your issues. So it was an educational coalition as well as a elective kind of thing.

Larisa [00:24:55] Do you think that having it be educational was just as important as all of those lobbying you were trying to do and like trying to help as [inaudible]?

Susan [00:25:06] Lobbying is educational. Yes, I do, because it was educational for the members of each of those

Idea behind Dirigo Alliance

Cross education and cross support, teamwork

organizations. In other words, they would make the representatives who were involved in the Dirigo Coalition from each of the member organizations would then go back to their leadership and say, We need to tell our people that this is a good bill or that this is a good legislative candidate, or that this is an issue that we need to be concerned about, and we need to tell them that those people are helping us, too. So it's educational at a organizational level. Does that makes sense?

Educating organizations

Larisa [00:25:47] Yes. Would you say that these organizations, not just the Dirigo Alliance, but also like MLGPA and groups like that, do you think they would have been as effective without teamwork?

Susan [00:26:05] No. It was crucial. And I, I think it's really sad that Dirigo kind of lost its way at some point financially and, um, because I think it's crucial. I still think it is, more than ever.

Importance of teamwork

Larisa [00:26:25] Why do you think teamwork is so important?

Susan [00:26:28] Because it's a big job and it's hard to do by yourself. And right now there's more it's more of a big job than it ever was because of the Internet. So. [phone ringing].

Larisa [00:26:57] Earlier, you briefly mentioned your time in office. When did you first come into office?

Susan [00:27:06] I was in office from '88 to '94- through '94, three, two year terms.

Larisa [00:27:13] And what influenced you to run for office and become involved in government?

Susan [00:27:19] I was already involved in government because I worked for the government. I was I had always worked for state government, with a few exceptions. And,

Running for office

um- after law school, I should say- and I was just talking with Dale McCormick and Betsy Sweet one day and they said, "Well, we were hoping we'll find somebody to run in your area." And I said, "Oh, I'd like to do that." About as simple as that.

Larisa [00:27:52] What was the most rewarding moment of your term in office?

Susan [00:27:59] Wow, um, I'm not even sure I know the answer to that. Certainly it felt great when we first passed the House. That first year. First year, I guess. But I don't know beyond that, there were many other wonderful things.

Larisa [00:28:30] Besides being in office, how else were you involved in the Maine government?

Susan [00:28:35] Well, let's see. At the time, I was- decided to run I think was in the beginning of 1987 or the fall before maybe. No, I don't remember when it was, but I- the last job I had in state government was, um, I was chief counsel in the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and I left that to go, um, I left that to go into private consulting and very quickly decided that wasn't working for me, the particular thing I chose. And so I was kind of, I decided to use this time to run for office after I had that idea. And, um, financially I'm still paying for it because I took a whole year without working and just ran for office and totally enjoyed it. But um, I mean, because I was knocking on doors and stuff like that, but I used to be in the, in the attorney general's office. Then I was counsel for, um, the Governor's Office on Employee Relations. Before that, I worked as counsel or legal advisor for Communities- Division of Community Services, which funds CAP agencies, community action programs. So that's the kind of stuff that I did while I was in state government for 11 years.

Involvement in state government

Larisa [00:30:28] You mentioned on your packet that you were also involved with some Native American issues. So how did you get involved with that?

Susan [00:30:40] It's a good question. I think, well, Native American legislators were extremely supportive of our issue. I just loved, uh, the speeches they gave and the depth of their understanding. Some of, I mean, there have been, uh, gay legislators from the Native American tribes in Maine. But back then, the legislators were just- just spoke from the heart about what it was like to be treated differently or discriminated against, and so they were allies in a really big sense. And in the legislature, I got to go to, I got invited, the way you do, to their, um, places and events. So I just had a little more exposure than I had ever had in my life to what life is like for tribes in Maine. And out of that, a combination. I wanted to be helpful. I worked really hard. I don't know how I kind of fell into it, but on a bill to, um, come up with a framework that would be acceptable to all different kinds of people, for the Native Americans, for the I- now I have to think about who it was, but the tribes, I think, to operate a casino at, in, uh, where would it have been? In Calais, I guess, I'm not sure, I have to think about that, but it didn't go through because there was a lot of opposition to it. But I spent a lot of time on that and in the course of it I worked with a lot of different people.

Larisa [00:32:33] Were there ever any times where LGBT rights and Native American rights kind of intersected?

Susan [00:32:45] In the sense that it was clear to me that they, they well, first of all, they have LGBT people in the tribes, so it intersects at a fundamental level there. And the other intersection is just that as people who are suffering from not being treated equally and respectfully and sometimes physically in other ways harassed. And there was that understanding that should go both ways. It was immediate on the part of the tribes. It's not so immediate on the part of LGBT people who, as I had heard, had no no

Native American issues

Legislators speaking from heart about issues

Collaboration between Native American activists & LGBT activists

interaction, no exposure, no knowledge, really. But I think nowadays there's much more information about that, I hope.

Larisa [00:33:50] So going back to LGBTQ rights, I know that you were involved in the Yes on 6 campaign.

Susan [00:33:56] Right.

Larisa [00:33:56] What was that campaign about?

Susan [00:34:13] It was, I think, the campaign for ratification of one of the civil rights bills that got passed. And this is where I'm a little embarrassed about how unsure I am of which, which language, which bill, whatever. I'm pretty sure it was, uh, when Senator Abramson was involved. And so we were, we might have actually had the legislation put it out to the vote is my thinking, but I'm not positive. That was a very difficult campaign, um, in the sense of, uh, it followed Maine Won't Discriminate. It followed the loss in 1998 because I think Yes on 6 was in 2000, that election, and we actually got, it's one thing I think sticks in my mind correctly, we got more votes than George W. Bush did in that election. We still lost. We didn't, we weren't successful, as I recall. Um, so, uh. It, I, it's, if you look at the big picture, it is another entire campaign devoted statewide to educating people about the issue and why there's a, why there's a problem, why this should be the solution. There were issues in that campaign about whether or not to cater to, uh, concerns of the Catholic Church, for example, that divided our community, uh, in the long run. It was just one of many campaigns that were statewide that brought in more and more people. Every, every campaign brought in more people and gave a really, really solid base, not just that campaign, but a series of them. I mean, Maine Won't Discriminate did a fabulous job of organizing all over the state. And it got built on every year after that. And the combination of being able to get marriage into the law to me was, uh, the work of incredible work at the time on that particular campaign, but also the culmination of years. And it started way before I got involved

LGBT activists not always having respect for Native Americans

Yes on 6 campaign

Maine Won't Discriminate

Loss in 1998

Do we cater to the Catholic Church?

Building on foundation from Maine Won't Discriminate

because of the, the people that tried to amend the Human Rights Act in the seventies, I think.

Larisa [00:36:51] Why do you think the loss in '98 made it more difficult to get the Yes on 6 campaign pushed through?

Susan [00:37:05] Not a question I thought about at all, really. But I think everyone, every one of those campaigns, if you're ever involved in a referendum campaign at a top level or at a local level, doesn't really matter, if you get really involved in decisions about how things should be done, it inevitably is extremely stressful. People are doing it for what they consider life or death reasons, whatever they are. And so at some point, you fight with your friends, you you feel stabbed in the back by your friends, or you you feel like this is really wrong or it's really hard, or it turns you inside out and you're exhausted at the end. So it's great if you win. And if you don't, it's, it's hard. It's just really hard. So I think the- 1998 was hard for everybody. Just hard.

Larisa [00:38:07] Besides 1998, were there any other political losses that really affected you or really upset you?

Susan [00:38:18] Well, I, uh. I was very bothered by the casino vote. I remember that, being upset. But, but as far as our our campaigns, if we lost, they were equally upsetting. I just don't sort them out that way in my mind because I see that we made progress and we got where we got and we're still going. And you're still dealing with pock- I'm dealing in my practice with some really hateful behavior right now that's going on very, you know, two guys being really harassed. And there's still hate out there and there's still miseducation and there's still meanness. So it's never over. And but if you consider the level of acceptance that's happened in the last 30 years and the level of overall education and tolerance increase, it's phenomenal. So it's just something you have to keep going.

The emotional and personal toll of campaigns and losses

Losses always upsetting

Educating never stops

Larisa [00:39:32] Do you think that the knowledge, that despite setbacks, you can still make progress? Do you find that inspiring?

Susan [00:39:41] Yes, we did. But we took a lot of credit. Gave a lot of credit, I guess you could say, and learned a lot by thinking about and reading about how the civil rights effort was carried out in this country for people of color and also to, to a lesser extent, suffragists. We were more aware of techniques and tactics and strategies and ups and downs and all the same things we felt not as not as life threatening, maybe, but certainly just in terms of stamina and things. That's not even- there's no comparison, really. But we learned a lot from watching and reading about what the civil rights leaders did and how they did it and how they had their own fractions and that it was incremental, and I don't know, lots of things.

Larisa [00:40:51] Do you think you or MLGPA or any other organization gained something from losses like that?

Susan [00:41:05] You learn some things not to do again the next time. I don't think anybody would want to see you gain it in the sense that, oh yeah, it's a good thing, but if you don't learn from it, it's a problem. And I think we definitely did that. But. We gained, I think every election, every campaign gained ground in terms of where the public opinion was and where the public acceptance was. And where LGBT people were able to see their own possibilities differently and see themselves differently. And there are still people who are personally ashamed or personally afraid or personally and sometimes for really good reasons. I mean, always for good reasons for themselves. But that doesn't mean they have to stay there. And so I. I think there were a lot of games I just would never wish having to get them that way on anybody.

Larisa [00:42:20] What was it like for you as an LGBTQ person to have people arguing that queer people didn't

Learning from predecessors

Learning from losses and setbacks

Other ways of living besides feeling ashamed of sexuality

deserve to have their civil rights protected or that giving LGBT people rights was like giving them special rights?

Susan [00:42:40] That certainly was the mantra of the other side when I was doing that stuff. One of the reasons I felt, um, I guess it's sort of a duty to do what I did was because I didn't grow up knowing I was gay. Thinking of myself as a gay person. I didn't grow up with the shame or the abuse or whatever that a lot of people did. And I also knew that my family was overall relatively supportive of me and that I was loved and I would be loved no matter what. And a lot of people didn't have any of that. They had no family, no love from their family, or they had total rejection, and they had a sense of abuse and shame from a very young age. So I felt I had more to draw on for reserves and I could go into a group and not- I didn't carry that particular bag. It's not that I never felt some of it, but overall, I, I don't know how to describe it, but I just I, I just did not like it. I felt that was their problem and that they if they knew what I knew, they wouldn't feel that way.

Larisa [00:44:03] I really like that. Are you currently involved in any political groups or organizations right now that we didn't discuss?

Susan [00:44:16] Actually, no.

Larisa [00:44:19] Do you wish that you were, if you had the time?

Susan [00:44:22] Uh. I'm not really anxious to do a lot more than I'm doing now. And when I have a little bit of time, I'd rather do something that's sort of restoring for me. I would I wish I had the energy and the time to, like, do it and not feel like it would be kind of a drain on me. But, you know, I just I feel like, okay, I did what I could do and I could do it. And if I can find a way to help here and there, I'll do that. But I'm not dying to be involved in something right now. I mean, it's not like I'm choosing not to. I just I don't have a lot of time and I

LGBT rights considered "special rights"

Supportive family

Someone's homophobia is their own problem

Taking a break from activism, busy with law practice

don't have a lot of energy to, like, drive someplace and do it. But there are stuff going on locally. And I sometimes think, you know, today I need to stay home and take care of myself for a bit.

Larisa [00:45:21] Are you proud when you think about all of the campaigns and issues that have been successful and that you've helped bring to fruition?

Susan [00:45:33] My first thought is I'm grateful that I got to be part of it. It was not anything I did all by myself, and I was working with fabulous people for a cause that I felt was really important and really good. And not everybody gets to do that. I mean, I just really loved what I did when I did it and I loved the process. I liked knowing those people. I liked seeing things change. So I just felt really lucky to be able to do that. I felt passionate about it and I got to act on it. And lots of people I see don't seem to have that or don't look for it or something.

Larisa [00:46:22] Are you still in touch with any of the people that you worked on- that you worked with in Equality Maine?

Susan [00:46:30] Yep. Well, Betsy Sweet lives in Hallowell, so we were in the same yoga group last summer. Dale McCormick lives in Augusta, but she plays cello now, and I play flute in the UCCOO, Unitarian Universalist Community Church Occasional Orchestra in Augusta. So that's kind of fun. And I have phone contact or Facebook maybe, or once in a while I see people, other people, like Sive Neilhan, every once in a while I'll run into her, or Barb Wood or somebody. But I, I don't, I, it's, COVID. I, I haven't been going to too many events or something like that.

Larisa [00:47:20] Do you think COVID has negatively impacted the amount of campaigning for LGBTQ issues that have been going on?

Grateful to feel apart of movement

Maintaining friendships with other MLGPA members

<p>Susan [00:47:32] I mean, probably just like it did everything really. But I think I've been sort of thinking, especially in the because of this week's news about that Club Q, that, um- I'm not sure I haven't thought about this for a while, but I think the closing of bars is a huge change in the gay community. And it's almost like when the discrimination bill was passed and the marriage bill, by that time, people were saying, "Well, we can go everywhere. Why do we need our own space?" I don't know that people said that, but that was sort of the effect of it, maybe, to mainstream everybody. So but there is something lost when you don't have a space to go to that is just gay. And on the other hand, I think that the reason that places like Colorado have a gay club is because they don't have the rights and they don't have some of the other acceptance level that we do. Um, at least I think that's true. The- I had a thought. I can't remember what it was now. I'm sorry.</p>	<p>Effect of COVID on activism and public queer safe spaces</p> <p>More necessary to have designated queer space in less accepting areas</p>
<p>Larisa [00:48:52] Do you think that despite Portland being more open and accepting of LGBTQ people, it's still important to have queer safe spaces?</p>	<p>Important to preserve queer spaces</p>
<p>Susan [00:49:02] Yes, I do. I haven't seen it yet, but I'm glad they opened whatever they opened down here.</p>	<p>ECC building</p>
<p>Larisa [00:49:15] The ECC building?</p>	<p>ECC building</p>
<p>Susan [00:49:15] Yes, I guess so.</p>	
<p>Larisa [00:49:24] So this interview is going to be listened to by future generations of LGBTQ youth. What would you like them to know about what it was like to live as an LGBTQ person in the 20th and early 21st century? And is there a message that you would like to leave?</p>	
<p>Susan [00:49:41] Hmm. What were the centuries? I mean, that's it. I just think about, you know, I'm just living. I don't think about what century, I mean.</p>	

Larisa [00:49:57] You don't have to worry about the centuries.

Susan [00:49:57] Okay. [phone rings].

Larisa [00:49:59] What was it like to live as an LGBTQ person? [Laughter] And what message would you like to leave?

Susan [00:50:06] Well, it was a whole different world to sort of have to be sort of secret. It really was. And it had good things and bad things about it. And the bad things were that for a lot of people, the reason for the secrecy was that it wasn't safe and. The thing is that even with the laws changing and more acceptance level, it's still not safe for some people. So, in fact, for transgender people, I think it's worse than it ever was. Personally, I don't know. And but I think that it's very exciting to think about people growing up and feeling completely okay about questioning their own orientation, their own sexuality, their own identity, and being able to feel like they could be free to be who they want to be and who they feel like. And I think said it can only get better because if you are able to be yourself, you're not wasting energy on hiding parts of yourself. And if you're able to be yourself, you can be the most creative, I think, and most authentic. So that's what I hope people realize is a gift that I hope is going to get better, but that they've got technically, at least here, I think I feel like I would like to now interview you and see how you feel about these things. But that's what I wish for people.

Larisa [00:51:55] That's lovely. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about before we end?

Susan [00:52:01] Uh, no, but I would be interested to know what some of this sounds like to you, because I, I don't think of myself- I mean, I just turned 75, and it's kind of a shock to me, too, that it's been this many years. So I'm curious what what it seems like, because it seems like yesterday to me,

Message to LGBT youth

Previous need to hide sexuality, now LGBT people can be more open

Curious about change from different perspectives

but I realize you probably weren't even born when I did some of the things I've done. Is that true? It's so it's just like, okay, what does that mean? What does it what does it say about anything? I just don't know. I don't feel any different than I did before, except I don't have quite the energy or the time.

Larisa [00:52:51] I'll answer some of those questions for you.

Susan [00:52:52] Okay, off the tape. Thank you so much.

Larisa [00:52:54] Thank you so much.

Closing remarks and
thanks