RT: Today's date is January 16, 2019. My name is Rebecca Thayer, R-E-B-E-C-C-A T-H-A-Y-E-R. What is your name?

DL: My name is Dick Latham, D-I-C-K L-A-T-H-A-M.

RT: My pronouns are she and hers. Can I ask what pronouns you use?

DL: He and him.

RT: Great. How long have you lived in South Carolina?

DL: God. Let's see, we moved to South Carolina when I was fifteen, so about forty years.

RT: Where did you move from?
We moved from Raleigh, North Carolina to Rock Hill, South Carolina. I went to high school in Rock Hill, and then I came down to the College of Charleston and basically stayed in Charleston after I graduated.

You went to high school in Rock Hill?

In Rock Hill.

You grew up in North Carolina. Can you describe it? What was it like?

Raleigh at that time was a really diverse community. IBM was a big employer. You had people moving in from up North, overseas I remember—on my street it was a dead-end street. It was the typical suburbia, kids playing out on the lawn and that sort of thing. On one side of us, my neighbors, those children were adopted, which was rare in the '60s, or that they were open about it, but we knew about it. My other side neighbors, which were my best friends, they were Jewish. Then down the street I remember we had a Japanese family. The church that I went to had a lot of people from different—just different places. I don't want to say it was cosmopolitan, because it really wasn't cosmopolitan, but it was diverse in a sort of '60s way.

Now as far as race, I went to school in an integrated school and that kind of thing, but as far as the people that I hung out with and friends, they all pretty much looked like me, so there wasn't that kind of racial diversity, but I also never experienced or saw any racism or anything like that really until we moved to South Carolina. Then I heard more. I don't know. My parents made a concerted effort they said to raise us so that we weren't racist, and I guess kind of liberal. It was kind of liberal.

I discovered I was gay at a relatively early age. I never felt—it was around seventh grade, so it'd have been around '76, '77, was when I first started thinking that, "Oh, maybe I'm gay." That was when the gay movement was getting really full-steam nationwide, so the papers in Raleigh had a lot of information about it.

We did have Jesse Helms. [Laughs.] We did have Jesse Helms talking—he I think owned, maybe owned, or he worked for one of the TV stations. They would have the news and then they'd have an editorial by Jesse Helms. I always thought of that as the boring part of the news, and there was this man that was going to come on and say boring things. I never really paid that much attention to him and his hate and his hate speech. I don't really think it was that strong until later. I don't remember North Carolina when I was there being so conservative and so full of, "I'm better
than you are because I'm not different," that kind of thing. I don't know when they became that kind of conservative.

DL: Then we moved to Rock Hill. I was in the arts and theater and music and all that, and that was really strong in Raleigh. Then we moved to Rock Hill where that wasn't strong. I don't know, I was kind of bullied, not bullied-bullied. I was bullied all through school because I was interested in school, I liked school, I followed the rules, I was quiet, I was a little effeminate, maybe. I was the kid that everybody picked on, even in Raleigh. They were in, what, sixth grade, Raleigh had this great idea of having all the sixth graders go to the same school. We rode the bus, and there were four or five fights on the bus, and I was in every single one of them. It was because I was effeminate, probably, and an easy target. We moved to Rock Hill and that was my first experience with what we called mill kids, the rednecks and the real country, undereducated, bigoted group of people.

DL: In Raleigh I was getting ready to come into myself and be comfortable with who I was and that sort of thing. Then we moved to Rock Hill and I had to backtrack a little bit and go really quiet. I did come out to people in high school. I came out to a teacher in a summer camp that I went to. We had to keep a journal in seventh grade, and in the journal I came out, I said, "I think I might be gay." He wrote some real positive comments. I kind of had a crush on him.

DL: Then in ninth grade at the same summer camp, it was for gifted and talented students, there was a guy that I had been in a play with in Raleigh. He was a year younger than me or something. He said something, but he called me gay or something like that. We were throwing a ball I remember. I didn't say anything about it. I just kept throwing. He was like, "Why is it that when anybody calls you gay or makes fun of you like that, that you don't say anything?" I'm like, "Because I am." He was like, [laughing] "What?" I'm like, "What?" That was the first person that I truly came out to. Then I had some other people at that camp that we became really good friends and we all came out to each other. Then when I got to Rock Hill it was like be real quiet, go undercover.

DL: Then my senior year in high school, I came out to my friends. They were pretty accepting. It was like, "Oh, okay." I know that two of them I was going to come to the College of Charleston with. I know that their mothers called each other, concerned about what they were going to do about me with their sons at college. We had this big problem of Dick Latham at the College of Charleston with Jeff and John. I was livid when I found out about that.
DL: Part of it was I'm no different. I don't know what made me—I guess it was my parents let us be individuals and never gave us any kind of, "You have to—here's how to live a good life. This is what you need to do. Within this parameter or these limits you're cool." I never felt like I needed to be a certain way with my—they raised three individual, strong children, and I was one of those. Somebody would come at me about, "Why are you gay?" It was real easy to say, "I'm not any different than I was yesterday. You just know more about me and that's okay."

DL: I remember reading the Gordon Merrick novels—*The Lord Won't Mind*—and the other two sequels. They're so trashy. I can't read them now. They're so embarrassing. I do remember reading them in high school and thinking, "This can't be all," because they're not real positive relationships as far as gay relationships go and that kind of thing. They're harlequin romances with just two men. They're a part of our history, yay. I always felt that I would be in a relationship that would be like my parents, except it would just be me and another guy.

DL: Then when I got to College of Charleston, I was familiar with Charleston because my mother was from here, so we visited my grandparents and stuff like that and cousins and things. I was familiar with it, but I still lived on campus. My grandmother would take me out to lunch after church or I'd go over there after church. Then her day off was Thursday, and then there was a couple years where I didn't have classes on Thursday so I'd go to lunch with the girls, that kind of thing. I still had contact with my grandmother, but I was able to be my own self. I was in the theater department, fine arts. I was a fine arts major.

DL: That's really where I think I did make a decision, "I'm in Charleston now. I don't have to hide who I am. I can be fully open." I had the pink triangle button on my backpack. I had all kinds of little stickers and things like that, and if anybody asked, I was. I do remember there was one—my backpack was at the Fine Arts Center, sitting. We were just all waiting for an audition or something. There was this guy, and I watched him as he pointed to my backpack and whispered to his friend, "You know what that is?"—I was sitting there—"That means that's a gay." I'm like, "Aren't you just the most effeminate straight guy that I've ever seen?" It turned out later I found that he was gay. That's been my experience.

DL: I was in Alpha Phi Omega, the service fraternity. I was out. I dated my senior year. My boyfriend was in the fraternity. They knew we were a couple. Caused some problems with some—you know, but not a lot.

RT: What type of problems?
Again, when he came out to his friends, his friends blamed me for it. One of his friends, she'd gone to high school with him, I think she had a really big crush on him. She and I were close. She was my little brother in the fraternity. It was because it was a coed fraternity, which is the only kind of fraternity I would join. I think she really blamed me for turning him gay, and I had nothing to do with it. I may have been his first, but I had nothing to do with it. Then his best friend I think felt a little alienated and again blamed me for it. That was a little difficult, but I think Robbie was also finding out who he was and that he wasn't the person that he had—you know how we grow between high school and college. He was doing that, and I think his friends weren't allowing him to do that as much.

Then there would be comments like—somebody told me these people were at the cafeteria and they were talking and then somebody said something about that I was gay, and she's like, "Oh, that's such a waste." I'm like, "No, it's not. I'm having fun!" There were things like that. Pretty much I was out and open and knew everybody that I knew, knew and that kind of thing. I didn't keep it secret.

Including your family?

I never had the big coming out scene with my mom and dad. My dad, before I went to college, he asked me, "Do you think you're gay?" I was in the kitchen with my mom, and my dad said, "Can you come out to the shop with me?" I got a little nervous. I was thinking, "This'll probably be about my allowance for college," and things like that. We got out there and he was like, "Do you think you're gay?" I said, "Yes." I really should've said, "No, I know I'm gay," because he left it ambiguous. I said, "Yes." He said, "It's okay. I love you. You're my son. I'll never not love you," that kind of thing. That blew me away, because I was a little afraid of coming out.

In my family we didn't talk about sex. Dad gave us a book about the birds and the bees. Later on my sister was six months pregnant before she told my parents. We just didn't talk about—then one of her kids she didn't even tell my parents she was pregnant with until after he was born. We didn't talk about sex in my family. I think that's the only repressed way we were, that you just didn't talk about that.

My dad said, after he said, "It's okay. I love you," and all that, he said, "If you're not sure, that's okay too, but be careful what you do. Don't do anything that will follow you for the rest of your life." I was like, "Huh." I didn't really think that much about it. If, for example, I wasn't gay and I was just playing around and I might've done some things that now with AIDS and everything could've gotten me sick or gotten with the wrong
person who could've blackmailed me later on, that kind of thing. That was also the stereotype. You don't come out because people are going to blackmail you with that. As far as I was concerned, I thought about it and it was like, "Huh." Actually, I tried to follow it. There was one or two people that I dated or hooked up with that I probably shouldn't have and that kind of thing. Then I had to deal with the repercussions, and I'm going, "Oh, this is what my dad meant. Okay, got that."

DL: My mom, we never talked about it directly, but I remember that when my boyfriend in college came to visit, as he left, mom and I were in the kitchen washing dishes and stuff, and she was like, "He's such a sweet boy. Such a nice boy." I was like, "Yeah." I was like, "Does she know what—" Then later on after college when I was with my first live-in boyfriend, they came and took us out to dinner and then went back to the house afterwards. She knew that Vince and I were together. I never really had to come out to my mother. Maybe she and dad talked about it. I don't know, probably. I knew my mother knew.

DL: My brother and sister, I don't know. I haven't asked. I'm sure they know. They've got to know. They're not stupid. [Laughs.] Again, I never had the big, "I'm gay. This is what's going on."

RT: You mentioned before that you were really close with your grandmother. Did you ever come out to her or have any sort of conversation?

DL: No, I didn't. She was a beautician, so she knew gay men. She rented a chair from one. No, I didn't. Part of it was our family didn't talk about sex. We just didn't talk about sex. I think she understood. I think she knew about me and Vince, kind of, I think. She knew gay people. I think she may have picked up. That part of my life was—I didn't talk about it that much with my family, because we didn't do that. We didn't sit around the table talking about who we were dating or who we were sleeping with or whatever. Even with my brother and sister we didn't do that.

DL: I did have a great-aunt who I saw every now and then. She lived in the mountains of North Carolina. She was my godmother. Every time I saw her, she was like, "When are you going to get married? When are you going to meet a nice girl and settle down?" I really wish—I don't know what she would've done, because she died a couple years ago, and she was ninety-six, so definitely old-school. That did prevent me from going up and seeing her more, because I got tired of the, "I just haven't met the right person." That's still true. I haven't met the right person. I don't know what his name is. I just got tired of that sort of thing.
RT: It sounds like with friends and whatever, you came out pretty early and that you had a sense of who you were fairly young. Was there anyone in your community in Raleigh or Rock Hill that you knew was gay growing up or that you heard people talk about?

DL: In Raleigh there was a guy, and I don't know for sure, that lived maybe three houses up from us. He was kind of flamboyant. He was older, he probably was—maybe ten years older than me or maybe college age or something. I didn't really know them that well. I would see him around, see him on the street. He was flamboyant and that kind of thing. I don't know whether he was gay or not, but I think he was. Not really, there wasn't anybody that I—I did sort of date a guy in Rock Hill my senior year. He took me to my first gay bar. That's all. As far as a mentor or anything like that, no.

RT: There was a gay bar in Rock Hill?

DL: No, it was in Charlotte. We had to go to Charlotte. We had to go to Charlotte. Now there is, I think, but in that time though we had to go to Charlotte.

RT: How about in Charleston when you were a student just getting used to the area? What places were there—

DL: Oh God.

RT: —that you were able to go to? Do you remember?

DL: They've come and gone so quickly. There was LJ's, Les Jardins, which is in Market area. That was around. I don't know when it started, but it was here pretty good when I got here. Maybe my senior year in college it closed, or something like that, which would've been around '85, '84, '83, somewhere around then. I remember I'd stumbled—I went home for the summer and then came back and came in and it was like, "LJ's is closing in a week."

DL: I can't remember when I went to these. There was a place called Scarlet's, which was open for a couple years, '84, '83, '82, around there. Garden & Gun I went, but not the one on King Street, the one on Hasell Street. When I was an apprentice with Spoleto the summer after my freshman and my junior years, went to there because it reopened, it was like the bar for the Spoleto Festival. There was a bar called Cheeks on Society Street, which is not a nice bar. Streetcar on King Street, which became Dudley's. Streetcar, went there. Another bar, Connections up on East Bay Street. During college it was pretty much all the downtown, because I could walk,
because I didn't have a car then. When I graduated from college, I think that's when Connections was big.

DL: The Arcade was big. It had been a straight club when I first got here for college, and then it changed into a gay club maybe my junior year. The Arcade was pretty much the big bar. It's where a lot of people went.

RT: How did you find out about these places?

DL: There was a publication. I can't remember the name, but there was a little gay newspaper that came out. It was printed in—was it published in Raleigh?

RT: Was it QNotes Carolina?

DL: It was sort of like QNotes Carolina, but there was one, and I can't remember what it was called, but it wasn't for Charleston all by itself, but it had Charleston stuff listed in it. I think that's where—maybe somebody told me about LJ's. The first time I went to LJ's I went by myself, and then I saw people that I knew. I pretty much went out every weekend. That's what I did. Then I got a circle of friends, and that's what we did, and that kind of thing. It was good to go where you had other people like you there, because you didn't have that anywhere else.

RT: Were those the main places where you could be around people like you?

DL: Yeah. There weren't any social clubs that I knew of or anything like that. You could go cruising down at The Battery, but you're not really going to have conversation while you're doing that. [Laughs.] You'd meet people, but—there was another, a piano bar that opened. I can't remember. When I was in college and when I graduated, it's all blurring now.

RT: You don't need to [crosstalk.]

DL: This is all just free. I think it was called The Battery Club, and it attempted to be more elite, a piano bar. That's why it closed after a couple years. In Charleston, what I noticed when I was here, there was this class system. It wasn't necessarily racial, but it was a class system. It was old Charleston people who had money, who maybe married, but had boyfriends on the side, because we don't talk about that. They were very closeted, but they were very gay, but they married for appearances. Then there were what I called the normal people that were just average and we like to have fun and we had some money or a little bit of money or it's that kind of group. Then there were the drag queens. Some people looked down on the drag queens, in both groups, that kind of thing. Then you had, I don't know, I
don't want to say poor, but yeah, the poor, undereducated, more redneck-y, country, closeted, not real happy with themselves, but have to have sex. Those are the ones that you'd find in the cruise-y areas. You'd also find the upper elite, "My wife's out of town," that kind of thing.

DL: I did date this guy that was married. He worked here but lived in Columbia. It was basically, he told me, he married her for the beard, the protection. In his profession he didn't want people to know that he was gay. That was hard because I was just like, "I don't really care who knows that I'm gay."

DL: It was funny because when I was an undergraduate I really didn't care. I was pretty open and everything. Then when I got into graduate school for education, as far as college went, because I stayed here at the College for that, I went back into the closet a little as far as school went. I was—I guess I was a weekend gay. I would go out and see people and all, but then during the week when I was in school, it was all very quiet, and I'd, "No, I'm not married. No, I'm single," and that kind of thing, and because I wasn't sure how education—you got this feeling that a male in early childhood education is automatically suspicious.

DL: I actually had a principal tell me that he couldn't hire me as a kindergarten teacher because he'd already hired a lot of male teachers and people were going to think he was gay, and he was gay. I'm like, "What? Okay, fine."

DL: Then once I got my job at Trident Technical College, teaching the three-year-olds in their child development center, I opened up a little bit more, because it's like, "Oh, I've got a job, I can be out." When I left that job they gave me a going-away party and they invited my partner Vince at the time. But I didn't—you know how some wives or women will complain about their husbands? I didn't complain about my boyfriend at the time, but they all knew I was seeing somebody.

DL: Then when I started working at the College of Charleston's Early Childhood Development Center, I had a friend who was teaching at the Governor's School. She was teaching a class on diversity. She asked me to come and speak to her class, because she had known me in college and I was one of her gay friends. She came to ask me about the class—I'm sorry—She came to ask me to talk to the class, there we go, about being gay and what experiences and discrimination and that kind of thing I've gone through.

DL: The head of the Graduate School at that time was Andy Abrams, who worked at the College and oversaw us. I felt like I needed to go to the director of the center and tell her that I was doing that, in case some of the
parents or whatever found out about it, because it's still a sensitive issue, gay men and young children. I understand why, I see, but I don't necessarily always agree that it's a bad thing. They all kind of knew, but that was the first official time that I came out. It was like, "I'm going to go do this. Is this okay?" She's like, "Oh please! Yes." I was like, "Okay, great."

DL: Now working at Trident Tech, they all know. I did the Safe Space training for our campus, for our faculty/staff stuff. I'm like [laughs] the mascot gay. I'm on tape saying I'm gay and here's how to be nice to gay people and students. It's funny because it took me a while to do that as well when I got to Trident. When I got to Trident, I was in the middle of being in a relationship with someone who had mental health issues and drug addiction issues and criminal issues. When he died I got a letter from the president saying that she was sorry that my partner died, which meant a lot because I wasn't sure how much they knew about things like that. That was kind of cool.

RT: Do you want to talk a little bit about that partner who died? If not, that's fine.

DL: How he died or what?

RT: Or just him, your relationship, whatever.

DL: A little, I guess. I can draw a line from his early experiences being molested and sexually abused and emotionally abused by parents and stepparents to his death. He is a clear example of someone who the adults in his life really messed up his life and are responsible for, partially responsible, because we all make choices.

DL: He was addicted to cocaine. He was using crack. Part of it was to self-medicate. He had bipolar issues. He wasn't as out as I was. I think part of the problem was—I mean, he'd been with women and he'd been with men, and I think the significant male relationship that he'd had had been—it was 1980s Miami. That's all I got to say. Cocaine and violence, from what I understood. It didn't end well, and I think that soured him on relationships with men and that kind of thing. He was a good person; he was just really messed up.

DL: I really fell hard in love with him. That pulled me out of the gay community in Charleston. Before that I'd been president of LGLA [ed.: Lowcountry Gay & Lesbian Alliance], and I had gone to all the LGLA stuff. Before that I was there when LGLA was started. I went to the initial meetings to start LGLA and all of that. I was on the board of We Are
Family and was one of the adults at the Safe Space that we had. But I couldn’t—he was like a child; I couldn't leave him alone. I didn't know what his behavior would be like when we'd go to something. It pulled me out of—I think a lot of people saw him as someone who was pretending to be gay to take advantage of me. Maybe that was true at the beginning, but I do know that he loved me and I do know that we had a relationship. I do feel that we had a relationship. It did pull me out of the gay world for about ten years.

DL: He had an accident. The police report is that he had an accident, he was found on a street unconscious, and they took him to the emergency room at MUSC [ed.: Medical University of South Carolina], and then called me that morning—I had a class at Trident Tech—He was in a coma. He had a traumatic brain injury, and so was basically out in a coma. They left him there for two days, and then his sister came from Ohio and his stepmother came from Savannah.

DL: Until his stepmother got there, they wouldn't tell me anything, because I wasn't blood or we weren't married or anything like that. I had met his stepmother once before. She knew I was a good leveling influence in Charles's life and that kind of thing. When she was there, they were all telling me what was going on and all that.

DL: The doctor, when she came in, once she figured out who the three of us were, she addressed me. I was the one that had to make the decision to pull life support. She let me instead of his sister, because he was kind of estranged from his family, from everything that had gone on. She let me do that. The sister and the stepmother let me be able to say goodbye. They were all real open. They were nice, "Glad to see you," and all this stuff. Based on what Charles had said about his family, I wasn't quite sure how they would accept me. His mother came and visited once, and she really loved me. We got along real well that time.

DL: He did drain a lot out of my life. It took me a while to recover, both in self-image, because I had been arrested while we were together, and basically lost my job here at the College because of that. My charges were dismissed. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong person, and it looked bad. Unfortunately, because I was a teacher, Channel Five put me on TV, because I was a teacher. Actually I wasn't even under contract with the college, because it was May. My contract had ended and I wasn't working Maymester. I was taking Maymester and Summer I off. Technically I wasn't really even under contract. But it kind of exploded, I'd say my life exploded.
DL: After Charles died it took a while to get back into the community and everything, but it was amazing how now I'm older and I'm one of them now, I'm one of the old gays. I'm like, God, please, I hope that I never treated anyone my age like these twenty-somethings are treating me, because I really—

DL: There was one time where a bartender, I'm waiting for a drink, and she's ignoring me. This was at Dudley's. She's flirting with another customer and then ignoring me and letting other customers—finally somebody points out that I've been standing there, and she asked me what I want, and it's loud, so I say, clearly. She's like, "What?" I say it again, a little bit louder. I didn't think I was being aggressive or forceful. She takes the glass, pours the vodka in it, and then pours it out while she's looking at me. I'm like, "Oh. Oh. You're going to do that. You're going to disrespect me that much." There have been a couple of other, like I go in and sit at the bar and people will look at me like, "Who is this?" I can just see it.

DL: I hope, I hope, I hope, but I really experience the ageism. I know that the ageism has always been there in the gay community. Now that I'm experiencing it, it's not fun and I don't like it and I want to get rid of it, because I don't think that I'm that old. I know I am, but I don't think I am.

RT: That's a real shame. Do you feel like you've experienced that ageism mostly at the bars or in other places as well?

DL: Mostly the bars, and now the dating apps too. Again, I guess thinking back on it, when I was younger, people thought, oh, because I always liked a little bit older than me, and people wouldn't take me seriously because I was too young. I'm like, "But I'm just as smart as you." Maybe the ageism is just prevalent. On the dating apps you'll see, "No one over 30," or that kind of thing. I'm like, "Whatever." It's kind of hard.

DL: I always pictured myself as being old and in a relationship, not old and single. And I'm old and single. There are times where I'm like, "I'm perfectly content with this. This is fine. This is great. I can be old and single." Then there are other times it's, "Gosh, I really would like to have somebody to share my life with." Then I'd have to move out of my house, and I don't want to do that. It's one of those things that as you get older, and I look at people that have been together for a long time, and that's what I thought I was going to have, but throughout my life I met the wrong people or I never met Mr. Right, I guess.

DL: It's interesting to be single and at this age in this community that really values hooking up and being together and being with other people, being with another person, but then they put all of these qualifiers on it.
Sometimes it can be hard to maintain that self-identity or that self-confidence that you've got.

RT: In the face of when it feels like you're not being valued by the community.

DL: Yeah. Now that I've brought everybody down.

RT: [Laughs.] No. There's a couple of things I wanted to go back to, because you mentioned briefly talking about being there when the Lowcountry Gay & Lesbian Alliance, LGLA, was founded. What was that like? How did you meet the people who founded it, and why did you guys decide to found it?

DL: Joe Hall was the executive director of, it was PALSS—Palmetto AIDS Life Support System—then. I think that's what it was. It was the AIDS group that started in Columbia and then branched off to Charleston and then became its own group. Joe Hall was the head of that. He decided that there needed to be a social group and an advocacy group. I knew some people that knew him, and so I was invited to come, had a meeting at the public library when it was on King Street, in one of the meeting rooms. The meeting rooms are pretty open. You walk into the library and there they are. There were a lot of people that didn't want to come because it was so open. They didn't want people seeing that they were going into a room that had a meeting with gay people.

DL: It was interesting. Basically it was just like, "This is what we can do. How can we do it? What do we want our mission or whatever to be?" There was a lot of talk, planning, "Okay, so we've done this for an hour and a half, two hours. We'll meet again next month or whatever." I remember there was a lot of talk about trying to get consensus and trying to get everybody equally involved. This was a time where I saw lesbians versus gay men at each other head to head. Then also you had the closeted people and the fully out people head to head, "Are we going to have a membership list? Is it going to be open membership? What if the membership list falls into other people's hands? What are we going to do? You can't send a newsletter to my house," that sort of thing. There was a lot of discussion about that. Even when I was president, maybe ten years after it had started, there was still a discussion on how are we going to send out the newsletter so that if it gets to your house, no one knows that it's gay mail, that kind of thing. There was a lot of that.

DL: There were people that were pushing for LGLA to be more of an advocacy, militant group, because ACT UP was starting then and all that, so it was like, "How can we change—" Then there were other people that just really wanted a place to socialize and get together outside the bars.
There were a lot of people that wanted to do service to the community, and so that gay people could do community service and be an asset to the community.

DL: I remember we arranged to do highway cleanup on the stretch of road leading into the county park on Folly Beach. There was a big controversy about we wanted the sign to say Lowcountry Gay & Lesbian Alliance, the little sign that it says after, but they wouldn't do it. They did put LGLA. We did have to replace the sign a lot of times, because it would get shot. Maybe the sign did say Lowcountry Gay & Lesbian Alliance, or something. It would get shot up a lot. There was a big discussion between us and the people, whether to include the gay and lesbian part on it.

RT: By the people, I'm guessing you mean whoever's responsible for the sign?

DL: Yeah, whoever's responsible for the signage. We wanted people to know that the gay men and lesbians were contributing to the community, that they were doing acts of good, that we are good people, we care about our community. It was a time where gay and lesbian wasn't politically correct, and so you didn't put it on signs.

DL: Eventually, basically, we would do that community service, we'd do toy drives, food drives for the Lowcountry Food Bank. The Pride parade was only in Columbia then, and so we would march. I think we had somebody on the Pride Committee for that. We would also march there. Then we also had monthly potlucks. The monthly potlucks became the social time. It actually ended up being what was the more popular event, the event that more people got to. I think towards the end that's what people were looking to LGLA to provide was the social, because by that time AFFA [ed.: Alliance for Full Acceptance] had already started.

DL: I don't know for sure if it happened or not, but I always look at it as like AFFA started because somehow people got a little disgruntled with LGLA's soft-foothing it around and making sure that everything was nice and consensus and they wanted to shake things up a little bit. That's great. The community needed that. They were the ones that were being more assertive as far as saying we wanted rights, whereas LGLA was more of, "Let's have community, let's get together and support one another," that kind of thing.

RT: That's the sense that I got from looking at LGLA's newsletters and stuff. I brought them, what we have, if you want to take a look at them later. I was planning to ask you what you saw as similarities and differences between AFFA and LGLA.
DL: When I was president of LGLA I tried to bring everybody together. I tried to bring all the organizations that were—actually I was able to bring them together—well, no, anyway, I tried to bring them together, and then AFFA was able to bring them together. I was president then. To get everybody to work together, and because I felt that we all had specific missions, while overarching were the same, but that each of us provided our own little piece of it, and then if we worked together, so it was like AFFA and LGLA and the church—MCC [ed.: Metropolitan Community Church]—We Are Family, to all work together, so that we weren't duplicating what was going on.

RT: Why were you interested in becoming president of LGLA? Because I know a lot of people might be interested in going to potlucks or just spending time, but why was it important for you to be in leadership?

DL: I think it was important at the time because I really cared about the organization and there really wasn't anybody else willing to step up, so I did. Because it was towards I guess the end, because like I said, once Charles was in my life I lost touch with everything. I was president—I met Charles in 2006—so I think I was president in 2004, 2005 maybe, 2003. It was really hard to get leadership. It was really hard to get people to do anything other than participate in the potluck.

RT: That was the sense that I was getting when I was going through these papers. Mostly what we have is the newsletters. You can see people asking for people to run for positions. One thing that's not really clear from the stuff that we have is when the organization closed and why.

DL: I'm not sure about that. It would've been somewhat time I think around maybe 2007, 2008, 2009.

RT: The last thing we have is the information on the boat cruise from 2005. We don't have anything after that. I wasn't sure, it sounds like you think it went on for a couple years after that?

DL: It may have. It may not have. It may not have. God, I'd hate to think that I killed it.

RT: No. You weren't the last president. I can tell you that.

DL: I know that.

RT: I can ask you after the recorder's off if you have contact information for people who might've been involved as well.
Yeah. Lynn Mefford was our vice president. Her partner Jane, I can't remember Jane's last name, so she's going to kill me. Again, these people I haven't seen in a long time, but I know that they're still around because I've saw them at Pride.

RT: Great. I'll follow up with you about that. Were you also involved with AFFA at the time or mostly just with LGLA?

DL: I was involved with both. I was a member of AFFA. I went to the events. I was more of a participant than a leader in that organization. I felt—[pauses] Oh, this is going to be so bad.

RT: We can always edit it out later.

DL: I wasn't rich enough to be a full member of AFFA, to be on the leadership board. I didn't travel in high enough circles, I felt, to be a part of the leadership circle of AFFA. To me the leadership part of AFFA were the elite, and I wasn't. I was active with We Are Family. I was on the board of that for a couple years. I appreciated, I enjoyed participating in the AFFA events. It's just that the leadership part wasn't who I was, I guess.

RT: How about your work with We Are Family? What did you do with that organization?

DL: Basically I made a donation and they put me on the board. We were in transition, because we had a really strong leader, Ciri Barfield. Actually employee, because she was the one that did all the counseling with the kids and everything. Then Tom Myers was still on the board, and he had founded—[pauses] A father of a daughter who had gone through We Are Family was on the— There were people on the board that had really seen the effectiveness of the group. Then they transitioned off the board, and in the end, me and Ken Hubbard and Laura Cousineau and Wilhelmina [ed.: Hein] from MCC became the board, the new board.

DL: Then that's when Ciri left to go to another job, and we were stuck without someone to lead Safe Space and all that. We interviewed countless people—not social workers, but counselors or whatever—to find somebody. I think we let the good one go and hired the bad one.

DL: Then I had to come off the board because Charles came in my— I went to one of the Safe Spaces and wouldn't let Charles come in, and so he wandered around, and the next thing I knew, when I got ready to leave, it was one of the times that he was trying to commit suicide, and so I had to deal with that. I was like, "We need to just get off this board and focus on this." I lost touch with We Are Family after that. We also lost the lease.
We had a place on Folly Road in a shopping mall, a strip mall, but then we lost that space, maybe 2007, something like that, 2007, 2008.

RT: You also talked about growing up and going to college, going to church. What church tradition did you grow up in?

DL: I grew up in the Episcopal church. The church that I went to in Raleigh had been started by a group of people that wanted a church in their neighborhood. It was diverse. I say it was diverse, it wasn't necessarily racially diverse, but you had different backgrounds and that kind of thing. Because it was new, there weren't any families who had been there forever.

DL: I'm not sure how it happened, and maybe this is why I was on the board, that I was so involved with We Are Family for a while, was because I had to work all this stuff out myself. I didn't have a group to go talk to, although once I got that group at summer camp and things, we were able to talk about some things. I had to work all the stuff out myself. I was able to work out my relationship with God and being gay and being okay and everything's great and I'm a fine person and God's not going to come down and get me. I had someone in high school try to convince me of that.

DL: Our minister at the church in Rock Hill, he was a friend of the family, because he had actually been the minister of our church in Raleigh. Then he moved to Rock Hill, and then years later we moved to Rock Hill. I said, "Can I talk to you outside?" I didn't say the gay thing. I just like, "Someone said I'm condemned, that I'm going to hell, for one thing, because I'm an Episcopalian," because he was Church of Christ or some ridiculous thing like that. He laughed and he's like, "No." I was like, "Okay."

DL: I was able to work all that stuff out on my own. When the church would get conservative and ignorant and stuff like that about me being— about gay people and homosexuality and all that in general, I just ignored that, because I knew that that wasn't from God. I knew that that was from man. For some reason, I don't know exactly how I got that, it's not like God came down and went, "You're okay and you're fine," but I felt that. I've always felt that I was okay with God, that the church may not be, that the church may be incorrect, but that I was okay. My experiences at church, I pretty much would ignore what I needed to ignore to get through.

DL: Then I came down to college. My grandmother went to what was then called the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul Episcopal. I would go to church with her. She introduced me to the choir director with, "This is my grandson Dick Latham. He will be singing in the choir with us when he
comes to school in September." I'm like, "Oh, didn't know that, thanks Bubba." I went to church and I got to see the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of South Carolina become more and more rigid and more and more conservative and downright evil about gay people. I was having to ignore more and more and more.

DL: I remember there was one old minister that was giving a sermon. The choir, we sat in the balcony of the church, in the back. He said something homophobic. I can't remember now exactly what it was. It was along the lines of "all gay people should be killed" and that kind of thing. I went, "No!" It just popped out of my— I'm like, "I cannot believe this is coming out of this man."

DL: From then on, church for me was the music, because the people that made the music—the organist was gay, the choirmaster was gay, there were people in the choir that were gay. For me, church became the music. Then after my grandmother died, I was in graduate school and working, so there was a period where I wasn't in the choir.

DL: Then after my grandmother died I dropped out for a little bit, but then I went back to the choir, and they had a new minister, but you could still hear the homophobia in everything. Again, it was just basically I want to make music, I want to sing music. I sang at the ceremony that brought Mark Lawrence as bishop, that confirmed him or whatever. I sang in that service, and it was a beautiful service. Unfortunately, he's an evil man. I kind of watched that.

DL: Then when things got really bad with Charles and everything, I stopped going to church. It was easy actually to stop going to church, because church wasn't church for me. I wasn't able to sing. When I started working at Trident Tech I wasn't able to sing in the choir anymore because I had to teach Wednesday nights and things like that. The music wasn't there.

DL: I had heard about St. Stephen's [ed.: Episcopal Church] for a long time. I had friends in the '80s that went to St. Stephen’s Episcopal and said that it was open and that it was tolerant and welcoming and all that, all the words that we use to signify churches that like gay people. When I decided I needed to start going back to church, that was one of the first places that I chose to visit. It felt like my church in Raleigh, it felt like home. That's one of the things that I look back and I think, gosh, I really wish I'd had this the whole time I've been in Charleston. It would've been really nice to—but then I wouldn't have met the people that I met and that kind of thing. Things happen for a reason.
DL: It's really nice to see. It's been nice to see the Episcopal Church in South Carolina become more liberal again, to become a better church, and now hopefully everything will be all straightened out with those members of the Mark Lawrence cult. [Laughter.]

RT: That's a difficult issue. Let me see. I guess I'm going to have only a few more questions that I'd like to ask. You were living in Charleston basically since you moved down for college?

DL: Mm-hmm [affirmative.]

RT: What year was that that you started?

DL: I started college in '81, fall of '81. Yeah, fall of '81.

RT: I'm curious about what your experiences or what you know about the AIDS crisis in Charleston during that time.

DL: Oh gosh. I've lost two really close friends, actually three, three really close friends to AIDS, early on in— People started getting sick I guess around the mid '80s, late— '90s. Probably '88, '89 was when the first person that I knew died. You heard about it, but again, in Charleston, there's a lot of stuff you just don't talk about. That was what it was.

DL: Then when Shan [ed.: Whittle] died, that brought things close to me, because I went through— I didn't go through his illness, but I knew what was going on because I was close friends with him and his partner and his ex-wife and her partner. I knew that group of people, and we were all really close. It was going through that, you saw how people didn't want to talk about it, but they were concerned about it.

DL: Then with Michael, he was the second friend. I'd known Michael since college. He was one of the people that I knew from St. Stephen’s, or that went to St. Stephen’s. I headed up his care team, that was composed of people from the theater community, people from his church. He lived in an apartment on Thomas Street I think. He died in, oh God, '91, '92 maybe.

DL: Both Shan and Michael, I saw the ugly side of people as far as mostly straight people not knowing what AIDS was. Shan's family, if you will, they had rented a beach house. Actually, we weren't supposed to, but we did, we had an LGLA event there, a potluck there. Then evidently the next day the landlord found out about it and had said no parties, and he threw them out of the house, and basically when he found out that Shan was sick, just basically was really ugly and discriminatory. Then the same
thing for Michael. His landlord wouldn't fix things because he hoped that Michael would leave, because Michael was sick.

DL: It was one of those things that people didn't talk about. I talked about it. When I got my job at Trident Tech in '88 there were lots of trainings around about AIDS and HIV and how you contracted it and how to avoid contracting— that kind of thing. I went to those workshops. I knew, because we were talking about childcare and AIDS and developing a policy for the center, and it's like, no, a child whose parents have AIDS or if a child has AIDS, they're not going to pass it to the other kids, I know that, but I had to go to a workshop so that people would believe me. It's that kind of fear and that kind of—if you found out that someone was positive, they became ostracized. A lot of people didn't disclose. A lot of people didn't discuss it.

DL: I love Charleston and I've always felt like I've had a pretty good life here, but one of the funny things about Charleston, and maybe this is where my family got “we don't talk about sex,” is that there's a lot of things that Charleston doesn't talk about. They like things to be pretty and neat and organized and very surface.

DL: When someone comes in, like Joe Hall would come in and talk about the AIDS prevention and what we need to do and how we need to take care of it and that sort of thing, he really rankled a lot of people. I think that's one of the reasons why he burned out and left was just he got tired of the fight.

DL: PALSS then became Lowcountry AIDS Services, so I became involved with Lowcountry AIDS Services, with the Dining with Friends, holding parties, and things like that, when I moved into my house. Then a couple times we had Gay Bingo for fundraising, and I was on that committee. I actually dressed up in drag once with it, because I had done a play, Psycho Beach Party, where I had played the evil mother [Ann Bowman], and it was a success. We just brought Ann Bowman back to make fun of everyone. That was where I noticed a change, was it became more accepted and more of a party charity. "I'm having a party and it's for a good cause and you need to come," that kind of thing, whereas before it was, "I really need money. What can we do? No one's going to come to this because they don't want to be associated with it."

DL: Now it's part of the community. They come and do AIDS testing at Trident Tech all the time. Nobody's blinking an eye. I will admit I still get upset and a little bit angry when I see on the dating apps that there are twenty-year-olds that are positive, because that shouldn't be happening. Some stupid person is—I mean becoming positive is not the death sentence that it used to be when I first heard about it, but you're still
messing somebody's life up, because they're going to have to be taking medication for the rest of their lives. We know enough now. It shouldn't even be around now, because we know so much about it, we know how to prevent it, we have medicine to prevent it.

DL: What I'm seeing now in places is that because we've got PrEP and because it's, "Oh, I'm positive, I'm sick," because it's kind of light, we're going back to that '70s, fuck everyone that you want to, however you want to, whenever you want to kind of culture of the '70s and '80s. I don't know. I'm seeing a lack of common sense now. When people hook up it's not, "Are you safe?" It's just assumed. I don't know. All I know is that when I was baby gay and coming up and that sort of thing, it was standard practice that you'd practice safe sex and there was no discussion. Now you have to mention the safe sex again. You have to say, "We play safe." "Oh, well I don't do that. I only do bareback." I'm like, "No. No. Dumbass. No." That's bothering me that it's become so accepted that—

DL: And these twenty-year-olds, they never lived the history. I watched Michael just shrivel up. He was a performer, so he went and he did the show talking about his experiences. I've got this picture of healthy Michael standing in front of this big blowup picture of extremely sick Michael, because that's how the disease progresses. You get sick, you lose a lot of weight, and then you conquer that and get better and then you get back to normal or close to normal, and then you get really sick again. That's what Michael did. It's like, this is what's going to happen, people.

DL: Again, this is where that ageism, because I know the young people don't really want to hear, "When I was your age, I was doing this," or, "You need to watch out for this." Sometimes it's really hard for me not to say— I'll be honest, there were times—I wonder why I'm here and certain friends of mine are not here. I'm fine. I'm healthy. I wonder why I am and why friends of mine are not.

RT: That's hard to know. It's important that younger people realize what happens and they've got to protect themselves.

DL: I say I had three close friends die, but I also knew a lot of other people that died from AIDS or died for "reasons that we won't talk about," which is AIDS. I don't know. It brought death into my life at an earlier age than I think the generation before. Generally in your twenties and thirties you don't experience a lot of your friends dying.

RT: Were there any other national or state-level important gay milestones or something that you remember? I remember you briefly talking about
remembering seeing Jesse Helms on TV. Is there anything else that sticks out for you?

DL: I remember the first March on Washington. I didn't go, but I watched it on TV. I remember feeling really proud about that. I remember finding out—the gay Latin-American or Latino man that read the poem at one of Obama's inauguration, and just being so that, "Oh, he's gay and he's Latin." It's so cool. It's just like, "Oh, his tie is white," that kind of thing. Watching that kind of growth in our mindset, where it's not a bad thing, to where it's just you don't even really need to talk about it, and it's just an accepted part of who you are. I know that's not a national event, but just watching the various events that have happened, like Will and Grace coming on, and movies like The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, and things like that that have become accepted, mainstream events, if you will, that have made it not so different to be gay, not such a standout thing. It's now people find out I'm gay and they go, "Okay."

DL: I'll be honest, at my age, because of everything, every now and then it's a little difficult to say “As a gay man,” or to say to somebody that may not know that I'm gay that I'm gay. I may not come out as easily or to say my partner or my boyfriend or that kind of thing. I do find myself every now and then using those '70s, '80s euphemisms or dancing around things. It's like, why? In this day and age I don't have to. I was having dinner with a group of people. There was a man, I guess he's in his seventies, and we were talking about stuff, and he kept referring to this guy that he's dating as his friend. It got me to thinking about how I still sometimes do the '80s and '90s dance around and talk about things like that. I think it's great, but it's still difficult to say husband, talking about Jesse and Will and church, they're husbands. It's kind of difficult—not difficult—I think it's great, but to use the language now, because of my background or my age or whatever, it's just weird sometimes.

RT: It's an urge to self-censor, yeah.

DL: I still have that urge to self-censor, whereas I don't think a lot of people in their twenties and thirties necessarily have that.

RT: I still do sometimes, depending on the situation that I'm in, when people ask me what my job is, do I say, "Oh, I'm an archivist at Special Collections." Even when I do say, usually I take a breath, like, "I'm a [pause] LGBTQ project archivist." I have to prepare myself to spit that part of it out. I know what you're talking about.

DL: The self-censoring. I'm on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee at Trident Technical College. I'm on the Safe Space Committee. This was
when Warren [ed.: Redman-]Gress was still the executive director. I contacted them to come in and do the Safe Space training for us, and I never got an answer from them. There was stuff going on, transition, and I'm sure, so it was no big deal.

DL: I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, I've already been through a Safe Space training, which was funny, but a long time ago, when it was first coming out, and then I'm gay, so I probably could develop the Safe Space training for Trident Tech. Our committee was getting pushback. I said to the head of the committee, I said, "I can go ahead and do the training if you wanted to." She's like, "Great! Have it done by June," or whatever. I was like, "Okay, great."

DL: I developed the training and I gave the training, but I gave the training as objectively as I could. I never identified myself as being gay. I also do this when I teach in the diversity classes, when we're talking about gay and lesbian parents and that kind of thing. I never identify as gay in the class because I don't want them to think that I'm pushing some kind of agenda. I know they won't, but there's that '80s and '90s mentality going on in my head.

DL: I'm doing this workshop, and I'm getting an amazing amount of kickback, "Why do we need to do this? Why shouldn't we do this for all students?" and this kind of thing. Finally I was like, "Okay, let me tell you. Let me give you an example." When I was in college at the College of Charleston, I was talking to a friend of mine, and my roommate was asleep in the room, and it was late, we were trying to be quiet, but it was the guy that I was dating, and my roommate found out I was gay. He didn't know that. The next morning he said something about that I needed to move out of the room because I was gay and that I didn't tell him that I was gay when we first got the room. This was in March. I was like, "No, I'm not moving. It's the house on the corner of Glebe and George. I am not moving out of here."

DL: He went to the school counseling and came back about a week later saying that I had to move because I didn't tell him I was gay when we became roommates. We were just random roommates. It wasn't like we sought each other out. I was like, "You didn't tell me you were straight when we started rooming together, and I don't see that I have to move out," and so I didn't. The good thing that came of it is he stopped walking around the room naked, because it was not a pretty sight.

DL: I said, "He had a place to go to, to talk about what was going on. I didn't, and I could've easily been thrown out of that room because I was gay, if I hadn't been so self-assertive and strong and confident with who I was."
said, "The Safe Space allows students to do that." I could see some people not pulling back, but just going, "Oh, okay." It's like, "Now you know I'm gay. Now you know why Safe Space is important. Let's move on."

DL: I thought about it afterwards. I thought, because I really was like, "I should use this as an example. No, because then they'll know I'm gay, and then no, but then I'll—" I should've just not worried about it, but because I have that past of where you do think about it, where you come out thoughtfully and you come out intentionally, I still bring that into the present day, where you're not coming out.

DL: In my first-year seminar class that I'm teaching this term, I have a transgender person. I called the name, which was a male name, Norman, and she raised her hand and said, "It's Norma." I'm thinking, "Did I do something wrong with the printout thing?" I'm like, "No, because it's up to the student to change the name, and maybe the student is in the process," because her face was beautiful, but there was nothing else to indicate gender. I'm like, that's really brave of that student to be able to do that. I don't know if I would've been able to do that in the '70s and '80s.

RT: Great. I guess going off of talking about your students, what sort of issues do you see currently and for the future with the LGBTQ community? I know you talked a little bit about ageism.

DL: I still see acceptance. I still see in the South especially and in South Carolina, you still see a lot of ignorant people who are not accepting of differences. You see a lot more people that are accepting of differences so that I think when someone encounters intolerance, there are more places for them to go and get support. I would like to say that I don't think that gay youth are as alone as we are—I was. I used to teach four-year-olds. They're now anywhere from college age to in their thirties. There are a couple of children that I taught that have transitioned into the opposite gender. They all have benefited from We Are Family. They've all benefited from support and that kind of thing, which wasn't around, even when I was there. I think that there's that, but I still think because it's different, and I think the transgender community is going to experience it more than say the gay and lesbian community per se, group, whatever, I've lost my word, gay and lesbian—

RT: Community.

DL: Community, there we go. Was that what I said?

RT: Yes. [Laughs.]
DL: I think that the—transgender is a new people to be intolerant about, because people don't understand that. It's easier now because it's been in popular culture so much, it's understandable, gay and lesbian relationships and that sort of thing. You're still going to get stupid people that don't understand it or refuse or who rely on ignorant religion, but again, you're seeing more and more support to refute that. I see that there are more and more gay role models for our youth. There are more and more people that are in positions of power or visible that are out. I think that helps.

DL: Again, it's one of those things where I didn't learn how to date until college, because I didn't date in high school, because I couldn't date guys. I see high school students are able to date guys, and same-sex couples are able to date. They learn how to date in high school, so they can make those relationship mistakes that you learn from so that you can find—there are a lot of relationship mistakes that I made that I think that if I had been able to date in high school, I would've not made those. It's one of those things where I think that's a good thing.

DL: I think social media can be both a positive and a negative thing. Again, the bullying that goes on social media, the outing, the unintentional or intentional outing before someone's ready, that kind of thing can spread.

DL: My ideal world would be that everybody just treats everybody the way they want to be treated, and it doesn't matter who you are and everything, but we're still going to have people that judge, and we're still going to have people that look at other people differently, and they're going to take those differences and blow them up. I don't think that'll ever be a hundred percent smooth sailing for gay and lesbian people. Again, I notice the ageism, but I'm also noticing that more and more people are becoming aware of it and trying to fight it and get over it.

DL: Again, I worry, if I'm by myself and I can't take care of myself, where am I going to go? Am I going to go to a nursing home and then go back into the closet? Oh my gosh, no, I would really be a cranky old man then. What do we do? There's that kind of thing that I'm a little worried about.

RT: I think that's about all of the questions that I have. Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would like to add on?

DL: I can't think of anything.

RT: I feel like we were pretty comprehensive.

DL: I pretty much talked a lot. I talked a lot. Sorry.
RT: No, no, it was great.

End Recording.