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INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

Laura Browder: So I'm gonna ask you a series of questions. Take them wherever you feel like going with them and let me know if you get tired or if you need anything.

Guy Kinman: Sounds good. Remind me again what is this particular project?

LB: It's about HIV in Richmond and I'm interviewing activists, medical people, people who have lost loved ones, people who are HIV positive... I just wanna give a full picture of the history of HIV and AIDS in Richmond.

GK: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. That's...

LB: So Mr. Kinman, I'd like to start with you telling me something...

GK: Your voice is so soft so just project a little louder.

LB: I'll speak louder absolutely. Mr. Kinman, can you tell me something about where you're from and how you grew up? Tell me something about your childhood and your youth.

GK: I'm 100 years and eight months old now. But I was raised across the country because my father was an Army officer. I was an Army brat. And we [00:01:27 unc. loved?] our lives together, we being my mother and father and my brother and I. My favorite town as a boy was Fayetteville, Arkansas. And I was born in [00:01:42 unc. Deevener?] Oklahoma. Go ahead.

LB: So did you travel around the country? Was your father stationed different places?

GK: Yes. I traveled all over the country.

LB: And what brought you to Richmond? When did you move here?

GK: I moved here in 1960. It was at a point when I had determined that I would change careers. The first 16 years of my employed career I was an ordained United Presbyterian Church minister. And as such I preached and led the worship services as a protestant minister and the last seven years as a United Presbyterian Church minister.

LB: Wow.

GK: What had led you to that career?

LB: What'd you say?

GK: Did you always know that you wanted to be a minister before you became one?

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INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

LB:

No I didn't. And actually later on I determined that I didn't want to remain it. But my mother had a powerful influence on my life. And it was a very rich life I had with my parents. My mother and my brother and me. But I allowed her to have too broad a sway in my life sort of.

When I came time to decide on my career I went home from college and my senior year to Mother, and discussed with Mother what I might wanna do. That of course is opposite from many a child that either doesn't know and doesn't care or at any rate certainly isn't going to [00:03:49 unc.] whatever their parent says. But go ahead.

GK: It was a different time though.

LB: Yes, it was a different time.

GK: This rich life that you had with your parents, what was it like? What do you remember about your life with your parents growing up?

LB: I remember meals. I remember our repartee and the good conversations. I remember our games played on visits to our family relatives in Arkansas and in Indiana. So it was a very close family then?

GK: In a way, yes. And, in a way, no. I was temperamentally too close to my mother.

LB: Mhm.

GK: And not close enough, at times, to my father. But it was near the end of seven years as the United States Airforce chaplain.

LB: Wow.

GK: Still a Presbyterian minister, but a chaplain serving in the Airforce. It was the end of six and a half years that I felt I must find my truth. I felt as if I had been perhaps wasting my life going about things that I now realize were not at all spent [00:05:40 unc.] my priorities. So I changed and became an employment counselor in Richmond, Virginia in 2000... no... in 1960. Okay.

LB: So tell me what you remember from Richmond then and your life then, up until you first learned about HIV and AIDS because I know there's a good two decades in between those two things.

GK: Well my beginning knowledge of AIDS began with my discovery that I might be gay. And it was a wonderful discovery... Can I help you?

INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

Woman 1: No, I'm just makin' rounds. That's all. Just making rounds.

LB: Okay.

GK: Thank you very much... I discovered that I had been talking a lot and not listening to other people as much as I would like to have. And so I got out of the ministry, and after a period of ten years in Richmond, when I was married to a lovely woman, I went back to my idea that this was not my nature, I was, in reality, a full-blown gay man. And I wanted to live that way. Okay.

LB: What was gay culture like in Richmond during the 1970s?

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GK: During the 1970s, it's just the... they were talking about. Because I came here in '60. I was married from '62 to '72. And then, but in the 1700s [sic.] I was on my own. There was a lot of [00:08:05 unc. tents?] and gay bars, but they had limitations. I went to... I was interested in [00:08:23 unc. life]. I went to baseball games. I went to the theater. I talked with friends by phone and by... and that's all. Go ahead.

LB: I imagine it must've been very difficult to live as a gay man when the laws were so restrictive and so punitive for anyone who was gay.

GK: Yes. People looked askance at anybody that assumed that any man was born to simply look for the perfect girl all his life. And of course I somehow was prepared by my rich life and my family by the differences in their personalities and by this living with... I with... parents who lived vividly as a Presbyterian...

LB: Mr. Kinman, are you okay? Do you need to take a nap for a while?

GK: No. No.

LB: Okay. Tell me how you first heard about HIV and AIDS.

GK: I first heard about HIV and AIDS when people started getting sick. I fortunately never had AIDS and I was careful in how I lived. But I was on the frontlines of helping gays realize that this was... normal for them and that they had a right to stand up for themselves and be proud. So I became famous in 1957 when I was led to become... when I was led to become a chaplain... no, no, no... when I was led to... I decided to make a statement to the public as a whole that gays were normal people. So by chance I read a newspaper article about the success of gay people in Stanton, Virginia, who were, in the face of a strong heterosexual population, a strong heterosexual population were defending themselves. I set out to state my claim in billboards

INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

which said: “Someone you know is gay. Maybe someone you love.” This was a obvious caricature of the [00:12:36 unc.] and of my... it was a caricature of my...

As life went on in the 70s, I [00:13:30 unc.] increasingly active and public as a gay man. I was an exception and became an inspiration to lots of people. And therefore that’s the reason I’ve attracted attention. But I speak in favor of the rights of all people to be themselves. I’m not

speaking of just for one group. But I’m speaking in the preciousness of every human being. And the importance of that precious being led by itself to find the best career that it wants.

LB: What year did you put up your billboards?

GK: The billboards were put up in 1985. I was... to give you perspective, I came here in 1960, changing careers.

LB: Mhm.

GK: I was married ten years. Then I became active as a gay person and active in the gay community. I attended plays, baseball games...

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LB: And when the AIDS epidemic hit in the early 1980s, it sounds like you were very involved in helping people.

GK: What was that again?

LB: It sounds as though when the AIDS epidemic hit, when AIDS first came in the early 1980s, you were very active in helping people who were affected by it.

GK: I was active in a way. In a way I wasn’t active as others were. Most of the gay men had closer friendships than I did. And they were acutely aware of the status of each of them as far as sexual transmitted disease was concerned.

LB: Mhm.

GK: They were... stayed aware of their own status. And they were determined to get the help of the community, and to move forward.

LB: But not so much, it sounds as though you were maybe not so close to that? Is that what you’re saying?

INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

GK:

What I was saying was when most of the other gay leaders immediately signed up to take courses in how to teach people safe sex—I found that this was not my calling, and I went and got back to just giving a general encouragement to all people to be themselves, to avoid extremes, and so that's how it worked out.

LB: How did your life change during this time? As more...

GK: I became, as I became... you ask good questions ma'am, you're good at this... I became increasingly confident and increasingly well-rounded. I did not become an isolated gay people that people would look askance at. I talked to people in restaurants and wherever I met them.

LB: It must've been a very encouraging way for you to live. I imagine that your life must've changed a great deal during this time as you moved out of one identity, as a man married to a woman, and into a new identity, as a gay man.

GK: So I did not continue along the line of helping gays study how they could be more careful.

LB: Mhm.

GK: I left that to other people. But I... my message was that being gay is like... is our nature... and we should be doing it with our own special kind of gifts.

LB: And how did you see the community change, the gay community, and the city in general. How did you see the community change during this time, during the time of the 1980s? [long pause]

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LB: Did you lose friends to AIDS?

GK: What?

LB: Did you lose friends? Did you have friends who died of AIDS during this time?

GK: Yes, I did. But I was not as aware of the guys that were dying with AIDS. The gay community, the active gays, sunk within themselves, and many a gay person felt that their only friends were gays. And so they, when the friends started dying, their circle of friends died with it, because they were lost, their connection, they couldn't exist because their little world was going smaller and smaller.

INTERVIEW | LAURA BROWDER & GUY KINMAN

LB:
It

sounds like you took a different approach. You had many different circles of friends? [long pause] Did you stay hopeful during those years?

GK: What'd you say?

LB: Did you stay hopeful during the years when so many of your friends were dying?

GK: Yes, I was hopeful.

LB: What gave you hope?

GK: I was... I was hopeful that out of this would come... My hope was with the research, the marvelous research being done. Millions was being set aside for research and I became enamored by the fact that any community could pull itself together and win its own victories over AIDs... that that was my conviction. Go right ahead.

LB: When did you first begin seeing changes around you? You've talked about so many of your friends whose worlds were getting smaller and smaller as their friends died, and who sunk into themselves. When did you start seeing people getting hopeful around you? [long pause] Mr. Kinman, shall I go and let you sleep some?

GK: I think we [00:24:53 unc.]

LB: Okay. Tell me any last thoughts that you have that you'd like to share with me.

GK: My last thoughts are that I'm very thankful that life and God have allowed me to live this long and see the changes that are taking place in society. I'm not afraid of change. And I am proud to be able to go up and move through restaurant to restaurant and to City Square, the City Square, and to talk to people. And to find like spirits and hope in other people. This is what I do today.

LB: That's a wonderful way to end this. Thank you so much Mr. Kinman.

GK: Thank you.

END TIME: 00:26:07