

City of Savannah Municipal Archives

Proud Savannah History Project

Interview: Candace Hardnett

Interviewed by Carla Johnson, September 2, 2021, Zoom

Transcribed by Brittany Ellis

Transcription edited by Megan Kerkhoff

Note: All interviews are unedited and may contain language and content that some may find offensive or difficult to view. Interviews reflect the time period they were recorded and the views of the interviewee.

Start of interview.

Carla Johnson: Today is September 2nd at two o'clock, and today I am interviewing Candace Hardnett, who has generously volunteered to tell us a bit about herself and about her relationship with the community in Savannah. So, first of all, I want to ask you, Candace, can you tell me what your full name is and your title? Because that's important.

Candace Hardnett: Candace Yvonne Hardnett, and my title is pastor.

CJ: Excellent. And you, how do you identify yourself?

CH: I am bisexual. I am in a monogamous relationship with a woman, however.

CJ: Great, and what pronouns do you prefer to use for yourself?

CH: She, she/her.

CJ: Okay, excellent, thanks. Now tell me, when were you, where were you born?

CH: I was born in Fauquier County Virginia. Warrenton, to be exact—

CJ: Where?

CH: Warrenton is the, the town name.

CJ: Oh, cool, and when did you move to savannah?

CH: I moved to Savannah in 2008, the end of 2008.

CJ: Wow, so that's about thirteen years ago.

CH: Just about, yeah.

CJ: So, what brought you to Savannah?

CH: We were—my wife and I, as well as our oldest daughter, wanted to start a church here in Savannah. An affirming church for all people.

CJ: Now did—what made you feel called? Did you know people here in Savannah?

CH: Honestly, no. We, we knew one person here, and her name is Dana. And we were in San Diego, and we felt called by God to come to come to Sav—or to—we felt called to go and find a place to plant a church. And so, as we were praying about it, we did take a trip to Savannah. Just and—and nothing for, you know, for the church or anything, but just a visit. Happened to be around St. Patrick's Day, and we, we visited for a little while. And it was nice. And when it came time to actually decide where, we started doing some a little reconnaissance. At that time, Myspace was very popular. And so we, we befriended people of the LGBT community in Savannah. And when we were still living in San Diego, and started talking to them, and asking about kind of the demographics, and whether or not there was a church that was affirming, that was inviting and welcoming for the LGBT community, specifically those from the African American community. And they said, "No," and so we felt like it's probably the perfect place for us to go.

CJ: And how did you begin your search for, for a place to, to have your church?

CH: Well, we, we—that came later. We started with a Bible study in our home. And so, we kind of did it in stages. The first stage was first to get here. And we were part of Pride that year, and we passed out flyers, and just collected information as far as names and, and information from the people, email addresses, myspace handles, that sort of thing. We ended up later on going to, to—and getting into our home, and opening our home for Bible study for anyone that wanted to come and that we had met and wanted to be a part of the Bible study. And so that kind of started off, and, and by January of 2009, we were ready to go ahead and open the church doors. And we started off in a hotel, in just a ballroom in a hotel. And, and we did that for a little while. And, and slowly but surely, it began to—doors began to open for, you know, a small space here, a small space there. And it grew from there.

CJ: Well, that's incredible. What other members of the faith community did you reach out to? because from other interviewees, I, I know that there were a couple of churches in Savannah that were welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community. What were the other organizations?

CH: Welcoming but not affirming. So, we honestly did not find any, any faith group here in Savannah that was affirming and what I mean by affirming is would ordain and license members of the LGBT community into leadership roles, would also marry. At that time, marriage was not legal, but would perform like a holy union for LGBT couples and do so inside the church building. So, that was non-existent—especially, and I think the key was for the—and I think

there was maybe a Lutheran church. If I'm not mistaken, Reverend Schulte's church was, but he wasn't non-denominational. And he wasn't African American-focused. and so, the key was, you know, something for the African American community. I know that the Episcopal Church has been open and affirming for a little while. I'm not sure exactly the dates on when they became open and affirming, but again the one—the Episcopal Churches in Savannah were not African American focused. I know that Asbury Memorial was—is—was welcoming at the time. They are affirming now, but they were not. They were not. They were only welcoming; they were not affirming. And they did not have an African American focus and, so, there was definitely a need for the African American community to have a place of worship that would cater to their specific needs, as far as worship service were, as far as what a worship service would look like for them.

CJ: So, that brings me to a question I have, also about the, the dividing lines racially in the faith community. It seems like those are underscored in Savannah, according to some people that I have talked to. That, you know, perhaps there was a faith community that was welcoming, but there was really not a lot for African Americans, that they were largely white. And so, there was definitely some sort of segregation in the faith community in Savannah when you arrived in 2008.

CH: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's, that's kind of the norm in the south especially, just everywhere, and for multiple reasons. You know, the black church was birthed out of the need for safe space for African American people. And because of that, it became its own entity as far as the style of worship that African Americans tend to gravitate towards. And, of course, these are generalizations; these aren't, you know, across the board. Everybody, of course, does not prescribe. But African American services tend to have different music. And the way in the, the, the cares—the charismatic feel is in freedom of worship is a little bit different than that of a typical white church. And so, yeah, none of the other churches had that flavor. And far as I knew, and far as I even know now, I don't think any of the other churches even had African American leadership. And so, there wasn't, it wasn't even a church scenario or situation where, you know, well maybe we don't have the African American flavor, you know, so to speak, or maybe we don't do the African American songs and the traditional songs that African Americans may relate to, but we do incorporate African Americans in our leadership, and we do have African Americans that are participating in our services in a role that's more than just coming and sitting in the pew. That was not, you know. And that's important in building a congregation of any sort—organization of any sort. that the leadership of that organization will mirror that which you're attracting to the organization, so.

CJ: Yeah, well since 2009, when you really kind of officially got going, how much do you think that has changed in Savannah? Just looking around you and, and, and the contacts that you have with other people of faith and other leadership. Would you say that that has changed markedly?

CH: No, I would say—like I said, the, the change that I do see is that Asbury Memorial has become affirming since, but I don't see that they have incorporated more African Americans or leadership or anything like that into, you know, the, the mix. I, I see that they've changed as far as affirming, you know, LGBT people as, as a whole. But not moving towards integrating the church to be someplace that an African American person would, would gravitate towards or typically.

CJ: Mm-hmm, yeah, so—

CH: —And I don't know if that's even possible, you know.

CJL Yeah. I mean, I think, you know, looking from the outside, you know, I would see definitely stylistic differences. Certainly the way worship is conducted and probably also some doctrinal kinds of differences, which exist between denominations in, in the Protestant faiths. You know, etc. Not to mention all of the doctrinal differences with Catholics and, you know, people of Islam and, and the Jewish faith. So, yeah, I mean that, that's a big can of worms to get into, but I definitely see your point, and I take your point. So, you know, segwaying a little bit back into the LGBTQ+ community, as you came in, you were an openly gay couple, would you say? An openly, openly married couple?

CH: Yes, absolutely.

CJ: How was that received? Did you feel a difference in how you were received in Virginia or in California versus how you were received in Savannah?

CH: Absolutely. In California, it, it wasn't a thing— I mean, California had (where we're from in California: San Diego) has a whole place called Hillcrest that's nothing but gay people. I mean, every, every restaurant, every store. Hillcrest is gay, you know. And, and, and if they're not gay themselves, they're gay affirming. It's—you don't go to Hillcrest as a bigot. And you will not survive. Like, you will feel very out of place. And so, we had that safe haven in San Diego. The church that we attended when we were there was in Hillcrest. And then later on—well, Hillcrest was in one, like a block down, and then it was in North Park, which was very close. And so, we didn't have those issues. We were pretty, pretty blessed. And so, when we came to Savannah, there was no hillcrest or anything like it. Starland hadn't quite started. It—that was the promise. That Starland District eventually would become the Hillcrest of Savannah. And so, we were—that had not started taking place yet. And so, there was really no place for us to just be.

So, yeah, it was very different. We learned very quickly that the LGBT community, it's pretty hidden in Savannah. You, you have to find it, you know. It, you know, and search for it. And it almost has to find you, at least at that point in 2009. It had to find you. You, you didn't find it.

That a lot of things were done in homes, you know, so there weren't necessarily clubs, you know. There, there was like one or two. There was Club One, of course. Then there was V. Dorian, used to put on a club called Club Jade. And, so, and—but Club Jade was only—they used to hold it in Island Breeze, which was just a restaurant with a club area or like a dance hall area and that was only on maybe Friday or I think it was Saturday nights and so that was one night a week, so, there was, other than Club One—and I think there was another club run by someone by the name of Candy, but I'd never, I never attended that one. And maybe one or two other little bars or whatever, but other than that, there was nothing for us to just go and be. So, culture shocked nonetheless. Hold on, I think you're on mute.

CJ: [Pause] I'm sorry, yeah, I put myself on me for one second because my cat was meowing and then I forgot to take myself off. I'm sorry. So, so would you say that—have things changed in that way in terms of visibility in the community? And the other part of my question is, do you think that some of the work that you've done has helped to bring that about? Because I've heard that about you. [both laugh] I've heard that you have done so much in the community.

CH: Aw, well, that is that's really sweet. I would like to think so. I would like to think that my work has helped, but I think—and, and the answer to the first part of the question: yes, I do see a change, thankfully. And I think it is—I think it's the progression that's been happening all throughout the country, where—but I think Savannah is in particular, we can see the change because we've been more, I don't say more, but we have really been, we've grinded, you know. We've really been on the grind to make this happen. Not just me, but all of the other activists within, you know, our community. We've made it happen, you know. We've voted in the right people at the right times, and I think that's all important, and that all contributes to what we see is the change now. Where there was no place to be there, there—the Starland District is starting to take off. It's starting to grow, you know, and so there's now kind of a little safe, little block area where there are like, gay business owners. There's a gay veterinarian there, there's a gay real estate, you know, there's, there's the—what's it called? There's an art, you know, gallery there or and, you know, and they sell art supplies. Like, it's starting to happen, and, and that's, that's awesome, you know. I think—

CJ: Where is this area?

CH: Starland, it is downtown. Goodness, I'm—and I don't frequent there a lot. It's downtown in the Historic District, I believe. Or right, right before the Historic District. It's the Starland District, and there are a lot of people that are LGBT friendly and LGBT that are right there. So, businesses, restaurants, right there. So.

CJ: That's amazing. So, and when you came into town, how did you align yourself with the, the larger community? Did you want to get involved with the community at large, or did you want to

get involved with African American lesbians, for instance? Or, or bisexuals? What was your kind of entree into the, the larger community?

CH: Oh yeah, the community at large. You know, at the end of the day—and the blessing is that me and my wife, we're really, we're two different people. A lot of times, people think we're, I guess because we're married, you know, that we are the same when it comes to things. And you know, not to say we're polar opposites on a lot, but we differ, you know. And so, the cool thing was where my focus was the LGBT community at large, my wife's focus has been the African American community at large. And so, you know, so, we, we—and then we come together when things can be brought together, you know, that, that makes sense to bring the two communities together in some way. And so, that's just been a blessing in itself because I focus on what's my lane, and she focuses on her lane, and, and we meet in the middle. You know, I think it's important for both of us to, you know, that LGBT and—and she's a huge LGBT activist. That's important to her, obviously. And it's important obviously for me that African American people are treated justly, but it's not my main focus. LGBT as a whole is. So, for me personally, it was let's get in and see what the community needs as a whole, and then see how we can help, and what we can do.

CJ: And what were some of the things that you did in terms of community organizing, and what part did you play in some of the already existing organizations?

CH: Yeah. So, when we first came, one of the first things—a guy by the name of Kieran Daly was hurt, really badly. It was a gay bashing in, near Johnson Square, I believe it was. And I believe this was 2009, if I'm not mistaken. And they, they beat him. It was actually two Marines from, I guess they were from Beaufort or whatever. They, they say he wrote—you know, looked at them a certain way or whatever, and they took offense to it, and they beat him up. And hurt him very, very badly. And of course, the gay community was in an uproar. And that was like the first thing I ever did. I spoke as—you know, I went to Johnson Square; we did a rally, and I spoke out against the, the injustice. I personally—I honestly had just gotten out of the Marine Corps. I, I EAS'd in—fact, I was technically still a Marine at the time, to be honest. I had inactive duty to do, so. But I did my five in, and then I was free to be a civilian basically, but if they ever needed me back, I was, I was a Marine. [Laugh] I'm still a Marine, but, you know, I was at—or inactive until 2011. So, I was still a marine. And I spoke out against the, the brutal treatment of, of Kieran Daly, and that was the first thing.

Soon after that we did the Queer Power March. The Queer Power March was run by—was his name? Jesse, I want to say was his—I can't remember his name. Any case, him and another—it was like a—these were young people. And I remember, I saw the flyer for it in a Panera Bread. Was it Panera? One of the, you know, like Panera Bread type places. And I saw the, the flyer, and I'm like, “I think we need to be involved in this.” And so, we contacted them. They needed

help. They needed help organizing. They were like, “Please. You know, we're meeting at Gallery Espresso.” We went to Gallery Espresso. We met them. We all sat around. I think Mark Krueger was there. A couple other folks were there. And we, you know, we, you know, started putting the ball together to do the Queer Power March. And we marched from—gosh, I don't even remember where we marched to—from. But we marched to Harris Square, where we had a rally. And we had invited in some folks from California even. Evelyn Thomas and another young sailor that—they were part of an organization that advocated for Don't Ask, Don't Tell and so on and so forth. So, we brought them in. And you know, we just, we marched, we, we, we screamed, we hollered. And, and that was, that was something.

We've picketed on City Hall for our domestic partnership rights, for our city workers, we—gosh, I mean, there's so much. Before marriage equality—well, that was City Hall. I mean when marriage equality was passed, I mean, we, we did a rally then. You know, there was so much. I mean, our non-discrimination ordinance. We went to City Hall several times here in Savannah to get our ordinance put into place because we realized we had absolutely no city protection. No ordinance against hurting us. And you know, and, and discriminating against us. And so yeah, we've done quite a bit.

CJ: Yeah, it sounds like it. So, what about the issues that you identified then? You know, when you came, say 2008. I'm sure you identified some of the issues. You know, ticking them off in your head. Big ticket items for you as a woman, as a woman of color, as a woman who is bisexual. And work towards addressing a lot of the injustices that you found. What do you think are the most important things that, that you're working on right now? Are they some of the same things or different?

CH: I would say they are, they're different. You know, I think, if I think back to when we first got here, a lot of it had to do, a lot of the work had to do with marriage equality, Don't Ask, Don't Tell. You know, that sort of thing. To be honest, my personal focus has changed quite recently to trans women. And I've come to the knowledge and the understanding that if I don't help to advocate— if I advocate for our trans community— since the trans community—. First of all, they're the, they literally are the least of us, as far as numbers are concerned. You know, as far as, you know, we make up maybe nine—with the gay lesbian community, we are nine or eight, nine or ten percent of the community—com—or the population as a whole. Trans people are like one percent. And, so, they, they're not a big group. And so, because of that, even within the LGB community, there is a lot of hatred, discrimination and, you know, just downright, just horrible treatment. And our African American sisters, especially our—be our trans African American trans sisters especially are being killed at record numbers all throughout the country. And trans people in general are being killed in record numbers, disproportionate to who they are in our population.

And I realized that if they are brought up and get equality, we will too. It's impossible for us not to because they are so stigmatized that if we remove the stigma from them, then it also it, it, it liberates everyone else attached to them. So, so, that's been my personal focus to, to try to help empower the trans community. So, and to educate regarding the trans community, so that we can, we can stop the, the discrimination of transphobia that's been so just vehement towards our our trans community, our trans women especially.

CJ: Do you have a formal non-profit dedicated to transgender rights, such as we have here in Atlanta? There's one called LaGender that I've certainly been a friend of for many years in the work that I used to do, and Dee Dee Chamblee is the head of—has been the executive director for a long time. But so, you really don't have anything like that down in Savannah?

I think these groups of transgendered people here in Atlanta have been so vocal, especially working with the churches who have really turned their back, especially on transgendered people. And so, I mean, that's one thing that I think— if there were a formal organization, that might be more helpful to you because I'm sure you struggle to help individuals, get them into your organization, and see what can be done to hook them up with services and such. Which leads me into another, another avenue. We were talking about the things you identified, you know, early on, and now you are coming into the transgender group. What other groups do you think require more advocacy now?

CH: Intersex. People know nothing. They think they're the same; they think that intersex people are, are transgender people, and it's just not the case at all. And they are really ignored. I mean-

CJ: You're talking about gender fluidity?

CH: No, intersex—

CJ: Or gender fluid people, or? I'm sorry. If you would share the definition of that with me, that would be helpful for me.

CH: Sure. The, the medical term (which is now a derogatory term for just basic use) is hermaphrodite. And so, intersex people are people that—and there's multiple different ways to be intersex, of course. But these are typically, people who have ambiguous genitalia, that may or may not be male or female or both. And so, and even chromosomes. They're, they're the third gender, really. And honestly, they make up 1.7 percent of our population, about the same amount as people with red hair. And yet we ignore them, you know. [laughs] And we make it like it's this,

“Well, there's only—it's a small percentage.” It's a small percentage, but so are redheads. But we know who they are, you know. And so, yeah, intersex people don't get nearly as much—there's no education, there's no, you know—that, that I think they should.

They kind of do and don't fall into our community. They do because I believe LGBTQIA and the “I” is intersex. “IA+” incorporates all of the sexual minorities, you know, of our, of our nation—or our, of our world, our society. But at the same time, like, literally, you know, it's almost like we, we skip over, and we don't even give—they may or may not be gay or lesbian. They may or may not be, and it's on them to even teach us, and to tell us like what's up. Like we, we can't make that determination for these people. And, and, and they don't get any advocacy. So.

CJ: Well, well you've taught me a lot because I was not aware of those statistics. But that, that's a really interesting take on it. So that would tend to really broaden the definition of LGBTQ+ even more so. What are—

CH: And the bad thing about it is—and, and just to add on to it, and why I believe they need advocacy. A lot of people don't even know their intersex until later in life. And they then come into the knowledge of their intersex identity because doctors make parent (or used to at least), make parents decide at birth a lot of times what—if there's ambiguous genitalia, what they're going to do about it. And so, they will literally perform surgery on babies to make them “right,” you know, or make them “normal.” And then that child is expected to be raised at whatever gender the parent chose. You know, most of the time it's based on, you know, what, what would—which one are they most like, you know, like what do we see here? Is it easier to, to, you know, make this, this genitalia a penis, or is it easier to to make it a vagina? You know, and they, and they do the surgery on this child, this baby, that has no say-so. And so, they're raised female let's say and then wonder why the child is—feels masculine, or, you know, or never develops breast or, or starts to develop facial hair, and all of these things. And then later on find out they were intersex. But a piece of them that God gave them is gone with no say-so, with absolutely no say-so. They were children. So, yeah, the intersex population, I think, needs more advocacy, definitely.

CJ: Oh yeah. So, I, I know that a lot of activists—and you're young yourself—

CH: Oh, thanks.

CJ: Where do you think the place is for, for youth here? Because the elders have to lead the way, but sometimes the youth leads the way. So, how do you feel about involving youth in all of the work that you're doing?

CH: They're so needed. I mean, so needed. If we would listen to them, you know, I think—and they know what's going to—we have to reach them because if we don't, then we'll die off, you know. And, and we'll never pass the torch. I think about like, the African American community, to be honest with you. And how back in the 50s and the 60s, the African American activists were like, everywhere; but when we won a little bit of freedom, and we were able to sit on buses, and, and lunch counters were integrated, everybody took a seat. And nobody, like nobody passed on the fight to the next generation. And so, the eighties and even—it started getting picked up again in the nineties. But you know, the seven—about the end of the seventies, the eighties that was like, rest time. I know personally, I was never taught how to be an activist, and I'm African American. I was never taught about the history other than school, like it was not a thing because we've settled and—at least I believe we settled, and we got complacent, and this was good enough. But obviously it was not good enough because here at the end of, in the year 2000 and beyond—even up to today, especially last year—we're still seeing the same stuff. But we had to rally again. A whole new organization had to be birthed called Black Lives Matter because their the torch hadn't been passed.

And so, then it was queer black women, mainly queer people, I'll say, that picked up the torch from the African American community and said, "We'll do it because we know how to fight. We know how to be activists." But where was the African? and so then the African American—American community had to learn again, how to be activists. And had to teach others how to be activists. When, you know, when we could have just kept the ball rolling.

Same thing in our communities. We're going to do the same exact thing. We've won Don't Ask, Don't Tell, we've won marriage equality, we've won, you know, DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act]. So, now we've, we've sat down you know, it's like, "Okay, we're done." But we're not done, and it will be even more prevalent in another twenty years, just how not done we were. And yet, we will have, not have passed on any of the information, any of the fight, any of the organizations, any of the fervency to the next generation, if we don't do it now. And so, this is the time for us to, you know—as we are winning, and we're winning, and we're winning, this is the time to teach and to involve and the next fight should be brought up by them, not us, you know.

And you know, I'm putting myself in the older category, but, you know, by me—like the older, our older generations—our, our, our Pam Millers, our Mark Hills, our Mark Kruegers. They should be like, sitting back and just coming to our stuff now. You know, it should be my generation that's leading it and helping along the, the younger ones. They should be coming and sharing old stories about what it was like in the times, you know, in the seventies and the eighties. But yet, they're still having to work because we haven't picked up the torch, and we're certainly not teaching the next generation to do it.

CJ: Yeah, they, they mentioned that when I talked with them—because I have talked with both of them—and one of the things that they felt strongly about is that projects like this, where you have a documentation of the oral history and then even, you know, books written about it, movie kind of adaptation. I think people love stories, and people relate to stories of things that have happened. And then the young people have something to look at. What are some of the things you do, or think should be done, to involve younger folks?

CH: You know, we have to stop nitpicking these young people, be honest with you. I mentioned the Queer Power March. There was a huge—and it was done by—I can't remember that young man's name. He was young, especially at the time when he put it together. He was in his early twenties. And the people that he, his friends, they were all kind of in their early twenties at the time. And the older LGBT community gave him the hardest time over the word queer because in their day, queer was a derogatory term that had been used against them. And totally understandable, you know, had been used against them. It—they were—they were triggered by the word, and so on and so forth.

However, the younger people were trying to reclaim the word, and use the word, and empower people through the word. And that's been kind of the, you know—we've seen that, that —we've seen that already happen now. Queer is no longer seen in such a derogatory word—way. Because of young people, such as this young man, and, and whatever. But there were people that refused to contribute and be a part of the Queer Power March because of the name.

And that was a prime example of the older generation not moving out of the way for the younger generation to do something positive. Because they were so just—it—on that little word. And I get it, the word was triggering. It was, it's, it was problematic. But these are young people that know what's happening now, today, right this second. And if they say, “This is how, you know—this is what's going to draw the attention.” If this is what's going to bring the younger crowd in, then older people, our responsibility is to say, “Okay. Well, I'm going to support you. I might not agree, and I'll voice my opinion on the disagreement, and so, let it be on record that I don't like this. But for the overall good, I'm going to participate.” But we had so many people drop off and say, “We're not participating,” and wanted to strong-arm him into changing the name. And when he didn't, they wouldn't participate.

CJ: Yeah, and that's something that's also been alluded to, somewhat, is that there have been factionalism and cliquishness in the Savannah LGBTQ community and the grassroots organizations that formed as a result. That, you know, a lot of people, you know, had personality problems with one another, or represented different interest groups that they felt should take more precedence over others. So, you know, one of the old statements from the, from the old work I used to do is people—“the people united can never be defeated.” And I think setting aside those kinds of differences is really important if you want to make anything happen. I also want to

touch on, on something that I'm sure you're very involved in right now. Is younger people and voting. The right to vote is a huge issue in Georgia right now. How, how involved are you and the community and the LGBTQ+ community involved in the voter's rights, rights initiative?

CH: I did at the begin— couple months ago, I did a, a voter's, voter's rights virtual rally and push for the LGBTQ community to exercise our right to vote, to not allow our rights to be, to sit on the wayside. And so, I did that right after—I want to say it was right after they passed the discriminatory laws, the voter suppression laws that they passed here in Georgia. In fact, it was then— it was right afterwards. A response to that, matter of fact. I try to be very instrumental in, in pushing the vote. I think I, I don't try to involve— I don't involve politics or partisan pop-politics over the pulpit at all. Even though I'm pretty sure ninety-nine percent of my congregation probably votes the same way, and probably the same way as I do. I just don't feel that that is my job to—especially over the pulpit—tell someone how to vote. It's a separation of church and state for me. But at the same time, I do think it is my job to encourage people to vote, no matter how they vote. And so, our church is very instrumental in advocating every election season, for educating, making sure that, you know, your voting poll, understanding who your candidates are and what they stand for, educating— if they have questions, they can certainly come to me. You know, making sure our people get out there and vote and encouraging—and we've even run drawings for, you know, Fire tablets. Everybody that has a sticker that says they voted, you know, is entered into the drawing. We'll pick a name; we'll pick a sticker. Whoever it is, wins a hundred-dollar gift certificate. You know, like, stuff like that because it is so important for us that our people exercise that, that right. Somebody died for that right.

CJ: Yeah, yeah. I can relate to that on a number of levels. And you know, talking about dying—I don't think we've touched on the, the AIDS crisis. And, and that's something that is dear to my heart, as I worked in HIV for so many years. But how big of a problem is HIV perceived as in, in Savannah? Would you say there's still a consciousness about HIV?

CH: Oh yeah, absolutely. Very much so. Matter of fact, we just—I, literally—. Okay, so Tybee Equality Fest just honored Mark Douglas, from My Brother's House—Home. My Brother's Home has been gone for quite some many years now, but that was a 501(c)(3) organization that was specifically directed towards our African American community to help advocate for HIV testing. They would test, they would counsel, they would, you know, offer support and various other advocacy, HIV advocacy there, through their office. And they lost funding. But Mark Douglas—they just, honored him back at the beginning of the summer on Tybee Island. And— what was I saying? Pam Miller was there, a couple other—the mayor was there. So, yeah, we definitely—Mark Hill was there. As far as HIV, AIDS, it's still very much on the radar. It is still very much important. Matter of fact, Georgia Equality just asked me to do, and I did a video for August 29th, which is, it's National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. And to, to help broadcast

that, that, that we should end the epi—or—end the epidemic, and also end the stigma around getting tested, and around knowing your status, and sharing your status with people.

I had a young lady from part of our church who felt uncomfortable going to one of the—I can't remember now exactly what organization, and probably it is best because we're on a record—but one of the organizations that caters to our, our HIV, AIDS patients here in Savannah does not have, according to her and I've heard it from another source, that have the most privacy— they don't, they don't care about HIPAA, honest—obviously. And they, they're messy. And, and she refused to go and get treatment because she was—she did not want to to face and deal with them. The people that worked there. And she didn't want her business all over Savannah. And apparently what has happened within the African American community in particular is that those that come in, it becomes a thing. It becomes talk that “so-and-so came into our office today,” you know, or whatever. And she ended up almost dying. She ended up really deteriorating over the course of however many months that she was feeling that she couldn't be treated. And it was, that, that—and we're still working on that because no one should go without treatment because they're afraid, or, or don't want to deal with discrimination, or don't want to deal with people talking about them and spreading gossip about them. I don't—I didn't, I didn't like that at all. And we're still working on a righting, like alleviating and fixing that problem.

CJ: Yeah, I think part of the thing that, that I was so concerned about at the beginning was, you know, when you regionalize services, say in the state of Georgia. You know, you make people go to the closest place, and the closest place is not always the most comfortable place. And some people don't mind driving a few hours and going to another place where not everybody knows everybody.

CH: Right.

CJ: You know, that's going to be a hard thing to combat when you're in your own community. You know, and you know a lot of people. And it's a small. It's something—in many ways, Savannah is still a small town. So, I can see—

CH: Very small.

CJ: Huge. Huge issue.

CH: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah. So, you know, one would imagine that given the pandemic and the number of cases overwhelming the health care system right now, that poor folks with HIV have felt like they're kind of in a back seat. You know, that it, that it's really, really tough. And it's tough to advocate

for funding, you know, when there's so much being diverted in other directions. So, I think we've covered just about everything that I, that, that I had, you know, in terms of contributing to the discussion. What do you feel about this project? Do you—how do you think this project should be used? This oral history project?

CH: I mean, I think it's, I think it's awesome for the archives to have an oral history for people that may do studies later, college students that may need statistics, or even two hundred years from now when someone wants to know what it was like for, you know, for research, for a book or some type of documentary. I mean, I think that, I think this is awesome. I think it's very much needed. I really wish that this was something that would have happened even forty years ago, maybe. You know because it would benefit me today to hear from people from forty years, or even twenty years ago. You know, I think this is something that should be done, you know, every decade or so—that, that—or more, maybe. You know, I know it's a huge project. Maybe every twenty-five years, maybe. That, that this is done, so that we have a history of the progression. I think it can be very empowering and, and inspirational to see progression. I know it empowers me, and when I do feel like there's no work or the work is in vain or, or that I'm not making a difference, it empowers me to think back on twenty years ago or even thirty years ago or further and see the progression that we have made. And so, to put this in an archive where someone could view it or or listen to it or glean from it, I think is, is important for all people. Not just LGBT, but, but all people.

CJ: Well, I sure hope that if you hear of anyone that would be a great person to interview, please do suggest to Luciana. You've got, you've got all the contacts for the office. Because I love good stories, and I think people would love to listen to—especially older folks that have been through so much, and people who have successfully advocated. There's so many incredibly inspiring stories that I've already heard. And I thank you so much for being willing to share yours.

CH: Absolutely. Thank you for inviting me.

CJ: All right, thanks, Candace. I hope to meet you in person. I'm coming at the end of the month, the first weekend in October, so—

CH: Cool.

CJ: I might have to see if I can grab you for lunch or something.

CH: Sounds good. If the numbers are right, then we can make it happen. But this COVID has me quarantined, so.

CJ: Oh, it's kind of crazy, I know.

CH: Yeah.

CJ: It's crazy for all of us. All right, take care. And thank you so much again.

CH: All right, thank you. Bye.

End of interview.