

**City of Savannah Municipal Archives
Proud Savannah History Project
Interview: Orlando Montoya
Interviewed by Carla Johnson, August 26, 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 Thursday, August 26th, and we are starting our interview around three o'clock. My name is Carla Johnson. I'm representing the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives as a volunteer, and today I'm interviewing Orlando Montoya for the Savannah LGBTQ+ Oral History Project. And we're conducting this interview at Zoom, both in the city of Atlanta. So, we thank you for joining us today. Orlando, I—have you had a chance to kind of take a look at the project information on the website?

Orlando Montoya: I did not, no.

CJ: Okay, well I, I'm sure that you can appreciate the importance of having an archival record of personal histories and memories for posterity's sake.

OM: Yeah.

CJ: Can you tell me why you think a project like this is so important?

OM: Well, I think with any of the marginalized communities, they often get left out of the official history. And as the LGBTQ community becomes more visible and more accepted, I think that a lot of the the beginning history might get forgotten. So, you know it's for the same reason why you might want to know what happened at, you know, the American Revolution or, you know, the Civil Rights Movement. You know, you were there at the beginning, but then if you go, then there's not anybody to remember.

CJ: Right, right. So, when you think of people that might be interested in viewing their archives, what are you thinking of as an audience that would be most interested in these personal reminiscences?

OM: Well, I think, you know, personal details, stories, narratives. I'm not too terribly interested in, you know, people and places, you know, what bars there were, you know. I'm more interested in stories, how things came to be. So, I think that's probably what people would be most interested in. And when I say things, you know, what things am I talking about? The, the Gay Pride Parade, the gay, the Gay Pride Festival. Who was involved in the organizations that I was involved in? What was it like to be a gay person in this time? And when I say gay person, you know, me. How—what was it like to be me because the gay experience the, the experience of gay people is as different as every person that there is. So, anyways, I'd be interested in the individual stories with the caveat of saying, this is just one person's story, and I can generalize, but the, the closer I stick to my story, the more accurate it is. and the more I generalize, the more inaccurate is.

CJ: Right. Well, let's begin by having you identify yourself. I think it's very important to know how people identify themselves in the LGBTQ+ community. How do you identify yourself, and what pronouns do you prefer to use?

OM: I am a gay man, and I use the pronouns he/him.

CJ: Okay, great, thank you. Now, I know that you're not originally from Savannah. Can you tell me a little bit about your early days and how you, how you got to Savannah. When was that, and and, when you left?

OM: Yeah, I, I came to Savannah in the summer of 1998. I came here from—I came to Savannah from Orlando, Florida, where I grew up and went to college. I moved to Savannah to take a job as the morning show host with the public radio, Java Health for fifteen years.

[Pause]

But apropos to the subject at hand. In Orlando, I really was not gay. I mean, I didn't do gay things; I didn't go to gay places. I was very shy. I had never been to a gay bar. I had never really attempted to meet gay people. I knew that I was gay ever since that I was in middle school, really. But I didn't really act on it or do anything. It was terribly lonely, to be quite honest with you. So, when I came to Savannah, it was—I, I was still pretty shy at the beginning, but by March of 1999, I started to go and to meet gay people. And so, Savannah was really the place where I came out of the closet, even though people in Orlando—many, some people did know. But it wasn't until Savannah that I came out of the closet and became involved in the gay world.

CJ: How old were you then, when that happened?

OM: So, that was 1999, so I was twenty-four.

CJ: Okay.

OM: Might have been around—you know, it was the, it was the month of my twenty-fourth birthday. I went to a First City Network Saturday Social. Now to explain what that was. First City Network was the gay and lesbian organization in Savannah, and they had a monthly social and potluck on the first Saturday of the month. And they would get together—gay people would get together in somebody's backyard and somebody's house and everybody would bring something. And so, I had been, you know, I saw it. You know, I don't forget where I saw it—maybe it was online. I don't know where I saw it. And I thought about going, and I thought about going. And I finally got up the bravery to go. And that's when I went in March of 1999. And to give you an idea of how little interaction I had with gay people: I, I pretty much went there with the expectation that I would have sex, which is ridiculous to think about. But I had not had any interaction with gay people. I didn't know, I didn't know what gay people did together except, you know, the obvious. I thought, “Well, if I go there, the obvious is going to happen. But sadly, it did not. But that's how, how little I knew of the gay community. I, I thought for sure I'm gonna go there and it's gonna end in sex. But that actually is the point of the First Saturday Social. The First Saturday Social was a place where people could go in a setting that's not a bar—see, I didn't want to go to a bar. I didn't drink alcohol. I don't drink alcohol very much now. So, I didn't want to go to a bar and so this seemed to be a good thing to do. And I met Mark Krueger at that time because that Saturday Social was hosted at his house, so I would often say the first gay person that I met ever was Mark Krueger. Of course, that's not true. But he hosted the First Saturday Social that I went to in March of 1999.

CJ: And so, did that give you an entree into a community of people that you could hang out with as friends?

OM: Oh, yeah. So, it was if, you know, Mark Krueger. He's very personable, he likes to get people together, and he's very active in the gay community. And so right away, he identified me as the new person who needed to be connected to all types of things. And because I was the morning show host, you know, I got involved—he got me involved with the First City Network. And we can go into those things if you want. First City Network, I eventually ended up, you know, joining the board of First City Network. And co-founding a non-profit organization and doing all kinds of great things. But it was really Mark Krueger who pushed me into doing all that stuff.

CJ: How supportive was the station in helping you do some of the work that you wanted to do for the community?

OM: So, the radio station didn't care what I was doing in the community. I mean, I was, I—they knew that I was gay, and I told them, and they were okay with that. Everybody was fine with it. I think that they had a problem once, and only once, when my name appeared in a gay newspaper, the *Georgia Voice*, and it identified me as Orlando Mancom—"Orlando Montoya, gay activist." And that word was not supposed to be used. I was—and first of all, I was not a gay activist; I was a non-profit—I was working with a non-profit organization that was doing cultural things. And First City Network was never a political organization, and the organization that I co-founded, Standout Youth, was a non-profit LGBTQ youth group. And again, it had nothing to do with politics. So, that was an unfortunate word that they used in the newspaper. And you know, they told me not to be a gay activist. But, you know, I, I never was a gay activist. I was involved in gay things, and I was around gay activists, but—and I did—you know, what, who's, what's the definition of activist? Somebody who is active in doing things? Sure, then I'm an activist. But they just didn't like that word. That one word that one time.

CJ: Well, in general, coming from Orlando to Savannah, would you say there was a huge difference in how gay people were perceived, or did you feel that there was increased discrimination of any kind when you moved to Savannah?

OM: I really have, have no idea because I was not in—I didn't do any gay things in Orlando. So, Savannah was my first experience with gay life and meeting gay people. And I was never harassed or called any names. I know that some people were, and some people had been physically assaulted. Some of those have been written about in the newspaper, and people have identified to me instances of homophobia, but I really cannot think of any instance in Savannah where I experienced any homophobia whatsoever. I mean, I could be—it's possible that my mind is just blocking them out, you know. I'm sure maybe a comment here or there, but no, I don't think Savannah was a hostile place for LGBT people. I do think that it was a very small place. It was a lonely place in a lot of respects. And just the fact that you have so—you're so, you're in a minority of a minority of a minority. So, that's why you need organizations and community and things like that, because you're such a small number really.

CJ: Were you ever involved in any organizations that supported people living with HIV?

OM: I suppose no, no, not directly. Obviously the First City Network had HIV testing. I never did that part of the organization. And Standout Youth, the organization that I co-founded, got a grant to do HIV testing. And we did that, but I never did that part of it. I—but I knew people with HIV and—but I was never involved in, sort of that end of it.

CJ: Now, how do you feel about the, the issues that were really top of the agenda back then? Say in the late nineties. And how have things evolved for the better? Have some things evolved for

better, or some things for worse? Just, you were there for a long time, so it's great to get your perspective.

OM: Oh, yeah. So, when I moved to Savannah in 1998, being gay—sex between men was illegal. And there was a Supreme Court decision I'm thinking it's called—oh, I can't remember the decision. But it was a decision that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Georgia law that made gay sex illegal. So that happened right away.

Also, something that I was very affected by was the killing of Matthew Shepard, which took place, I believe that would have been 1998 or 1999, but it was—I'm pretty sure, maybe it was '98 or '99. The fall of one of those two years. Matthew Shepard was killed in Wyoming, and he and I were about the same age. He perhaps a little bit younger than I, and that very much shook me up. The fact that, you know, somebody could be just killed like that.

And then another thing that shook me up was that I remember very distinctly I was driving to Charleston, South Carolina to do a story about something, and I was just flipping through the radio, and all of a sudden, I came upon this religious broadcasting station. And they were talking about how Matthew Shepard deserved to die, and he was going straight to Hell, and we need to make sure all these, you know, evil people go to straight to Hell. You know, he was—basically he was basically encouraging violence against gay people. This minister on the radio. And I stayed listening to that radio station. I tried stayed listening to that radio station as long as I could to try to get the call letters or who they were, but they, they faded out before I could.

The bottom line was—the point of those stories were that, you know—I was very shaken up in 1998, 1999 by those events. And this sort of all corresponded with the time that I started getting involved with Mark Krueger and the people at First City Network. Now, you have to fast forward many, many years, I think, before you get to the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. And then you fast forward many years after that to the Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage. And those are the sort of the big things that people think about.

I myself got married in Canada to my then-boyfriend in the year 2006. So, I met my boyfriend in 1999. December of 1999. And then we moved in together in summer of 2000, and then in the summer of 2006, we went to Canada because at that time, the only two places to be married in the United States were Massachusetts (which had a residency requirement) and Hawaii (which was very far away). So, we just decided to go to Canada, and we were married in Vancouver, Canada.

So, so, the big changes that came through the gay community when we talk about politics, those are the big changes. I mean there are other changes that took place in the gay community as well, including with HIV, AIDS, with drugs and everything. People became more loose and more free

or less safe, as you want to say, with regard to their sexual practices. Of course, I was married, so I didn't experience that. But also, another change in the gay community is just socially, how people interact. Back in 1998, 1999, the only way to meet gay people was to actually meet them, like in a place [fake gasps]. Now there were chat rooms. I remember chat rooms. I don't know if you do, remember chat rooms. Chat rooms, you could go into chat rooms and chat with gay people online. This is basically typing in a big space with other people online. But then as the years progressed, then we get to the cell phones and the social apps, specifically Grinder and Scruff and all those. And, so, the way that gay people meet and see each other has changed very, very much. And I think that's probably as big of a change as any political change because let's face it, how many people—how many gay people get married? I mean, it's—I don't know the statistics, but gay marriage is the same thing as straight marriage: a lot—some people do, some people don't. But they all gotta meet somehow.

And gay bars, they closed down when I moved to Savannah in 1998. How many gay bars were there? There was Chucks, there was Felicias, there was Faces, there was the Loading Dock, there was a Black gay bar, and a lesbian bar. So, there was like six. And that's not—and that's not even counting the big one: Club One Jefferson. The only one that's still there. So, Club One Jefferson is the only one there now. So, you go from six or seven gay places down to one. That's a direct result of the the apps, the dating apps, the Grinder, the other ways of meeting people. You don't need to meet people in a bar anymore, so what's the point of going to a bar? And also the fact that gay people are more accepted. You don't have to go to a specifically gay place with your partner. You can go on a date at any any restaurant you want to. So, those are some big changes that I saw in the gay community.

CJ: So, would you say assimilation has been a good thing? I've heard some people who are gay lament the fact that all the good gay bars are gone, and they kind of lament the fact that there's been so much assimilation that, that part has disappeared?

OM: My opinion is that some of those places needed to close. But they just needed to close because they were dirty, and the bar owners didn't take care of them. Somebody told me once why Club One Jefferson has, has remained that way all the time. Somebody told me that they have some sort of grandfather clause, where if they put too much money into the renovation of that place, then I don't know, it's considered new construction for whatever tax reason. I don't know. So, in other words, it's a dump. It's a dump, and they don't put any money into it. And will I be sad when it closes? Oh, meh, yeah, okay. But it's a dump. Why not go to a place that's nicer? And the same thing with that bar that was called Faces. I used to call it Feces because it was so dirty and dingy, and the ceilings were so low. And, so, yeah, do I have any nostalgia for those places? Somewhat, but, you know, life goes on and change can lead to good things.

CJ: So, you've talked about some positive things. Is there anything that comes up for you. You have just recently moved to Atlanta. When was that, that you moved to Atlanta?

OM: July of this year, so that is just about a month and a half ago.

CJ: Just a heartbeat ago, it seems like. So, having recently left Savannah, what do you think some are—some of the big things are that are still left to do, as far as, you know, as being a gay man? And, and on some level, an activist? Being very interested in in the community and in civil rights. What do you say—what would you say the challenges are these days?

OM: Just a, a sense of community. Let's all come together instead of being so competitive with one with one another. I mean, and there's—within the gay community itself, there's a lot of work to do on racism. And, you know, because gay people are—can be racist. And I—you know, I've met many of them, and it's it's hard to believe, but, you know, you are part of an oppressed community. And you are a part of the oppression of another community. So, I think the gay community has a lot to work on with regards to that. But with regard to this idea of, of community. You know, stop being so into your cliques and into yourself, you know. Get out and embrace people more, be more welcoming. I think that's a challenge wherever you are. But Savannah has that in particular, I think. You know, just trying to bust into communities. And when I say communities, I mean like, friend groups, circles. It's just very hard in Savannah.

CJ: So, it's, it's kind of a—would you say very cliquish small-town kind of feeling?

OM: Very close, everybody knows each other. And the, the supply of gay men is so very small. I mean, you can just do the math. I mean, there are 300-and-something, 320,000 people in Chatham County. And then, you know, you take, away, you know, half of them who are women, and ninety percent of them who are straight, and you just keep going down the list, and you figure out that actually, the pool of gay men in Savannah is, is very small. And so, for there to be negativity and competition, and in groups and out groups. There's no place for that. And—but I did experience that and that would be one negative thing I would say.

CJ: Uh hm. Well, and it—you did share with me that you had been newly single, so you had been having a hard time perhaps meeting people—

OM: Yeah.

CJ: Before you came here.

OM: Yeah, that's one of the reasons why I moved to Atlanta. Not only to pursue more professional opportunities, but also for, you know, more personal opportunities. Because there's just a larger community here.

CJ: Well, I don't think you've had enough time to really get a good perspective on that. But how do you find the climate here, as opposed to Savannah, so far?

OM: Yeah, I think it—yeah, it's just it's too early to tell. Obviously, you know, people are people. People are people no matter where you go. That's a song. So, yeah, I'll give it time.

CJ: I, I've heard a few things. That there's still some challenges in Savannah with the police and gay people. Do you think that's still the case there?

OM: Well, I was involved in First City Network when they got a police liaison. In other words, I think her name was Traci Walden. And you should interview her too, if she's still around. Traci Walden.

CJ: I'm going to write that name down.

OM: Yeah, Traci Walden. Traci with an "I." I spoke to her many times. You know, she was in, involved in the gay community, First City Network, all that kind of stuff. And she was an openly gay police officer, and she volunteered to sort of be the go-between between the official groups (First City Network, Standout, and Pride) and the police. And I think that she facilitated much dialogue. Now, she will have to explain what specifically she did in the police department. But I think that having first a, a gay liaison, and then having gay-friendly politicians in office really helped the climate and the mood in Savannah.

I might add, when we talk about people in high positions that are gay, there were and there are, you know, city councilmen in Savannah that are gay. And some of them are out of the closet, and some of them are in the closet. And that was always a frustration with me, as to how, you could be in the—they were, they were closeted gay people on city council. I used to joke at one time that we had, we had a close to a gay majority on council at one time. But they were all in the closet. And it was a terrible thing, but that's the way that life is. I don't—you have to ask them why they, they chose not to.

I think a lot of it, also—let's be honest and talk a little bit about race here. In the Black community, it is much more unaccepted to be gay, so within the Black community there's a lot more. If you're Black and gay, that is a situation that I will never understand because that is a double thing you got going against you. And within the Black community, you know, the religion and everything like that. Hoo-wee. So, I can understand how some people in that

community want might want to, you know, not stick their head up above water. But it would have been nice to have some openly gay politicians on city council. And let's not even talk about Tony Thomas.

Tony Thomas, the city council member. Everybody, he was—he's gay. He's got these young men that he hangs around. Of course, you can read all about his scandals and whatnot. I really thought he was an embarrassment to the gay community, but he—there he was on city council. You know, was he in the closet? Was he out of the closet? You know, it was just—and he was embarrassing. He got drunk. He had these young boys. And I just think that he was embarrassing. It would have been nice to have some openly gay politicians, openly—not even politicians, maybe even business leaders, you know. When you look at the face of corporate Savannah, it's a white straight male. So, it would have been nice to have some out figures in high positions

CJ: So, from what I'm, I'm hearing you say that the situation with the police has improved somewhat as far as you know, but that racism is still a big issue in terms of white gay people and, and Black gay people, and then also within the Black community. Homophobia really still being a huge problem.

OM: Oh yeah, I definitely agree with both of those statements, you know, because you still have people who will not hang out with Black people or white people depending on the race. They don't like to hang out with you, or they will actively say on their profiles that, you know, "I only, I only go with white people," or "I only go with Black people." You know, and if you do—if that is a preference of yours, well then, you know, why do you have to, like, say it? You know, keep it to yourself.

And within the Black community, obviously the religion plays a point part of it. And if you grew up in any sort of white evangelical tradition as well, you would have a lot of baggage. Now I will say, if we can talk a little bit about churches for a minute. There were several gay-friendly churches in the Savannah area, and one of them was my own, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Savannah. Very gay friendly, perhaps the most gay friendly of all. The national denomination is—was on the forefront of gay rights back in the sixties and seventies. But other congregations in the Savannah area as well, need to be lifted up including, Asbury United Methodist Church, especially the pastor Billy Hester. He worked with turning that church into a mecca for creative people, theater people, anybody who is a little bit out of the box. And that would include a lot of gay people, so his church, the—what did he say? That the church that creative people built, or something like that. Is his motto. He has plays there, and it's a very gay friendly church. Billy Hester. I might also lift up Candace—Candace Hartnett and Erica—oh my god, I'm gonna forget their last name. Erica and Candace. And they were at Agape Empowerment Ministries.

And Agape Empowerment Ministries was a church that they specifically founded. They moved here. You got to talk to them, too. I'll send you their contact information. Candace Hart—

CJ: oh, I've got, I've got her on the list.

OM: Oh, okay, good. They specifically moved here to start that church. So, there were a number of churches that I think deserved to be lifted up. Father Michael Chaney with the Episcopal Church as well. He has a little congregation that is very gay friendly.

CJ: That's wonderful. And so, the churches really played a big role in helping the community embrace gay people?

OM: Some churches.

CJ: Yeah.

OM: Some churches.

CJ: So, there's still some work to be done in that area, as well.

OM: Definitely.

CJ: Anything else that you would like to add about some of your experiences and your perspectives on Savannah and in the community?

OM: Definitely, you know, my period—and this probably should have been said—I should have said it up front, my period was between 1999 and say 2004. About five, five good years there when I was doing so much. I was the newsletter editor for the First City Network. I was the secretary for First City Network. I co-founded the gay and lesbian youth group called Standout Youth with my friend Gene Graves. And Gene Graves deserves equal recognition for that. And he and I worked within First City Network, and we formed committees and got grants together and budgets and all the crap that you need to do to start a non-profit organization. Now that organization is now called Jeffrey's Place, and it is separate from—well, first it was separate from First City Network, and then it became part of what's now called First City Pride. But it's now called Jeffrey's Place LGBTQ Youth. And the reason I started that was because when I was in high school, in college, I had no one to turn to. I was alone. I, as I said I was in Orlando, I was alone. I thought that I just had so many terrible thoughts that I attempted suicide. And so, when I came to Savannah, I thought, "Well, oh what happened in Orlando was—I—"

Here's how it started: in Orlando, when I was having these suicidal thoughts, I looked in the Yellow Pages—and believe me, there was a thing called Yellow Pages and you had to look up phone numbers. And in the Yellow Pages—in the White Pages actually, it said Gay Information Line in Orlando, Florida. And so, I called the Gay Information Line, and it kept on going to a recording, “Please leave your message. We'll call you back.” Well, I'm 17 years old living at my parents' house. What am I going to do? Call me back at my parents' house? “Hey, this is gay here.” No, I'm not going to leave a message for gay information line to call my parents' house.

So, anyways, when I came to Savannah, I—and I got involved in all this kind of thing. There was this gay youth group that First City Network was—had, and they were meeting like once a month on a fourth Thursday, or something like that. And they had the same thing the gay information line, and you call, and I'm like, “No, we should have a, a cell phone, and it should ring—”

CJ: A hotline.

OM: Yes, it should be a hotline. Somebody should pick it up. And that was the birth—that was the genesis of what became Standout Youth. We started with a, a, a cell phone. And Gene Graves actually was the one who had the cell phone physically, and he picked it up. And then they started doing weekly meetings, and then they started doing programs, and then we got some really great young people involved. And the young people took it upon themselves to do programs and outings and events and things, so that was all happening in that period of time.

And the Gay Pride Festival started in the year 2000, and I was on the committee that started the Gay Pride Festival. Now that, the, the credit for that goes to two people: Carol Riels and Bobby-Bobby Jeffrey. Now, Bobby Jeffrey is still in Savannah. Carol Riels was run out of town, like any good gay person with energy and talent. She was run out of town. And you know, sort of like me, she was very energetic, very—and you know, they had ruffled feathers, you know, and that's what happened to me. I, I was active in doing things and raising money, and I was putting all the other people to shame, right. All these, these, these people were just sitting around doing nothing. And here comes this twenty-four-year-old from Florida who's, who's making things happen. “Yeah, we're going to backstab him.”

So, same thing happened to Carol Riels. She got that whole first Pride started. And went along with Bobby Jeffrey, too. My part in it was very small; I think I designed the t-shirt, or I had the t-shirt, t-shirt designed, or I sent out press releases, or something. But that first Pride Festival was held at the Roundhouse Railroad Museum, which was the former rail repair shop for the railroads back in the nineteenth century and they turned it into—had you ever been there? Savannah Stat—

CJ: No, no.

OM: Savannah Station. And it became an event facility. An event venue and a museum, all about railroads. And so, it's the Georgia State Railroad Museum. And that's where they held the first Pride Festival. Now, I will point out that there was a big discussion on the First City Network Board as to whether it should be called the Savannah Pride Festival or Savannah Gay Pride Festival. And I and a lot of other people were kind of disappointed when they decided to call the Savannah Pride Festival, leaving out the word gay all together. And that it remained that way for years. I still think it's only called the Savannah Pride Festival. Like pride, what? It's gay pride. But they just wanted to call the Savannah Pride Festival. I guess we don't want to say the word gay. And I will say another negative—one—It's not negative. It's just the truth—is that the, the people who made things happen in Savannah in the gay community, all came from somewhere else. Mark Krueger came from Wisconsin. I came from Florida. Carol Riels was from South Dakota somewhere. And so, the, the, the native gay community, the gays who grew up in Savannah, they were the ones who were most resistant to everything that we were doing, whether it was the Pride Festival or Standout Youth. They were the ones who were all, “Ooh, we got to take it slow. We can't, we can't go too fast. We want to pursue little incremental things.” And that's what they would always say.

Oh, and I remember—oh, the debates they would have on the First City Network Board over, over things, like the, the, the cell phone or like, like the debates they would have over, like who's talking to the young people. They're like—they're—they were very concerned that we were starting a gay youth. You know what they were concerned about? They were concerned about, you know, sexual molestation, and, of course, you should be concerned about youth and older people being together. But why is that the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about that? I mean, that is—and that is evidence of what we call internalized homophobia. I mean—and they were mostly the native Savannah gay people we're so concerned that if we have a gay youth group, it's going to attract pedophiles. I'm like, why? Why is that why—why is that even a thought? No, I mean, of course, you should screen people and have background checks for anyone who was anywhere near the youth, which I never was. But why would, why would that, why would you think that? And the same thing with the whole calling it Gay Pride. “Oh, we don't want to. We don't want to attract attention.”

CJ: So, from your perspective as an outsider—literally an outsider in the community, what do you think caused so much tension between the outsiders and the locals?

OM: Well, I think it's the same story in any community: nobody likes the outsiders coming in. And I think it's just that we, we were, we were new, we were young, and we were brash, and we just didn't care, and we wanted to change things. So yeah, I think that's the point that I was trying to make is that most of the native Savannah gay people didn't want all of that. They didn't want

to—I mean, if it were up to the native Savannah gay people, they would still be, you know, in the closet.

CJ: Well, that's a very interesting perspective. I also detected a little bit of, a little bit of tension with Miss Giles. And I've heard this from other lesbians that during, you know, during the movement for gay rights and inclusion into our communities, there was a tension between gay men and, and lesbians. Do you think that that was true during the time you were involved as well?

OM: Yeah, but I think it had more to do with just personalities.

CJ: Okay. So, it's personality driven rather than being people who identify themselves in a very different group?

OM: Yeah, I think it was—I think it was personality driven. Some of these, some of these, you know, ladies, they, they really didn't like me very much.

CJ: It was because you were unlikable, because of your personality?

OM: I wasn't unlikable. I would just—I think I was, just, well—you'll have to interview them to get their perspective, and you know, I think this is beyond the scope of the interview subject.

CJ: Yeah, in terms of discussing personalities.

OM: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah, definitely. I was just really teasing you on that one. But, yeah, I have heard from others that, that during the, the movement for gay rights that there were definitely certain communities that did clash. And I was just wondering if you had that perspective in Savannah as well. [Pause] How about transgender community? Were their clashes with the transgender community?

OM: I don't recall any, but you'll have to ask the trans people.

CJ: Did you have a lot of transgender people actively involved in the organizations that you worked with?

OM: No, no—well or not when I was there: 1999 to 2004. And then, even afterwards, I don't remember.

CJ: Yeah. Well, then— that's, that's an interesting perspective. And sounds like you did a lot of wonderful work. So, anything that you want to add before we close today?

OM: Well, I will say that the, the Gay Pride Festival has got more visibility. You know, they started out at the Roundhouse. And another reason they were at the Roundhouse was because it was kind of separate—it was kind of set away, it wasn't it wasn't in the middle of things. But then later they moved to Forsyth Park and River Street and Ellis Square. Areas that were more centrally located, so it didn't feel like we were off in a corner. Which is—which was good for the gay community. But, you know, I will lift up all of the people who worked early—earlier than I did, like Mark Krueger, or—well, I'm forgetting their names. You'll have to get the name from Mark. But, yeah my bit was, was rather brief after 2003, 2004, I had just gotten tired of sort of the personalities involved, and it was just not worth my time. I was putting a lot of time and effort into it.

Oh, by the way, I started the website for First City Network: Firstcitynetwork.com. So, I did the whole website, all the graphics, all. I responded to every email that ever came into that website for many years. They didn't have a website, so I did that. I organized several trips, like there was a trip that we did—we had an entry in the Atlanta Gay Pride Parade. So, what Gene and I did is, we organized a group of us to go up there and have an entry, and it said Savannah. Because what happened was, I went to the Atlanta Gay Pride Parade one year. It might have been early in 1999, 2000. And I noticed that here in the Atlanta Gay Pride Parade, we had a Columbus gay group coming through, you know, Albany gay group coming through (and I'm making this up, but you know what I'm saying), we have Athens gay group coming through. I'm like, where's Savannah? Why isn't Savannah here? And so, I organized that trip up there. We had a, an entry, and we had to get a banner and everything like that. I'm trying to think what else. That's a lot.

CJ: Yeah. And it's, it's incredible what, what a small group of people can do when they put their minds to it and get together. So, I really thank you for sharing all of these experiences and reminiscence with us. And unless there's anything else, I'm going to close out the interview.

OM: Oh, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure.

CJ: All right. Thanks. Bye-bye now.

End of interview.