

City of Savannah Municipal Archives  
Proud Savannah History Project  
Interview: Robert Dunn  
Interviewed by Lacy Brooks, November 4, 2022, 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.**

Lacy Brooks: Today is Thursday, November 4th, 2021. It is 1:15 PM. I am Lacy Brooks, representing the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives. I am interviewing Robert Dunn for the Proud Savannah History Project. We are conducting this interview in Savannah, Georgia via Zoom. Thank you for joining us today. We'll start by having you tell us your full name, and please spell your name.

Robert Dunn: Sure. My full name is Robert Dunn. D-u-n-n, spelled for the last name.

LB: And please tell us your pronouns, and how you identify.

RD: I identify as a gay man, and he/him is fine. And, you know, it can be switched up. I'm really—no preference.

LB: And when and where were you born?

RD: Wow. So, I was born in 1961 in Utica, New York, although that's not where I grew up. I'm pretty much—I say a gypsy because I left, and I was like two, and I grew up from two to ten in Huntsville, Alabama, and then after that point, probably moved about on average every three years. So, I have lived in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Minnesota, D.C., Maryland. So, it's—North Carolina as well. So, all over.

LB: Wow, cool. When did you come to Savannah, and why did you come to Savannah?

RD: So, my husband and I moved here twenty, almost twenty years ago. So, 2003. And we moved here by way of Charlotte—meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina. And then Chicago, and then just outside of Philadelphia, New Jersey. But we moved here for a number of personal reasons. One, we were going to get out of the corporate world, and this was a good transition

point. But we had been coming down here since 1992 almost annually because my mother was here. And my mother lived at the time out on Tybee Island up until about 2006. But so, from that period of time (1992 to when we moved here in 2003), we would come down and spend time with her at the beach. Liked Savannah, and it was a good place to be close to my mom, who was here alone without family, and to be close enough to my husband Todd's family who's in Albemarle, North Carolina. So, it's about a four-hour drive from there.

LB: When you were visiting your mother on Tybee, did you have any experience with the LGBT community at that time?

RD: So, interestingly not. Although we, you know, I think at the time when we would come down, we would look to try to find some kind of connection because coming at the time, being in Charlotte, you know, there was a larger community, in and out community. There were places that you could go that were very—people were aware of. Outside of—I think Club One at the time was the only club, and, you know, driving into Savannah from Tybee and spending the, you know, late hours and having to drive back is not always that fun. But we did find like, there were, there were at the time, there were rumors that the north side of the beach was gay friendly. And, you know, there were also rumors that Fannie on the Beach was gay friendly. Not a lot of advertisements. So, we really had no real connection.

And I think maybe the first time that we had a real interaction with the gay community within Savannah prior to us moving here was in maybe '96, '97. I really want to say '96. And there was a Savannah Pride event taking place at the Roundhouse, I think it was. And it just felt, you know, coming from Charlotte to Chicago, you know, and the community in Chicago being huge and to have this, you know, very small Pride event taking place in what felt like a very secluded closed part of the city. But I think that was our first real engagement, and we did it because my mother had retired and was opening up—you know, she was she was trying to, you know, find some other things to do and was doing some things where she rented a booth at the Pride event. And we, we purposely came down during that time to really help her and be a part of it. So.

LB: Oh, cool, so after you moved to Savannah in 2003, what were your early experiences in the community at that time? When you moved to Savannah?

RD: Wow, so, so, we when we moved here in 2003—and as I said, one of, one of our driving factors was we wanted to be closer to family and get out of the corporate world. And Todd and I at the time worked for the same company, based out of—headquarters out of New Jersey. The ADP (Automatic Data Process). And Todd came down first. And the game plan was that I was going to come down, you know, we would get things settled, and then I would leave my job and come down and make the full transition. Well, that transition really didn't—it took almost two years, maybe three for that transition to happen in its entirety. I, I got—I, I became nervous about

leaving the corporate world. And we had two children; one that was getting ready to go into college. And just felt like, maybe that was—you know, leaving the corporate world wasn't the smartest thing to do at that time. So, anyway, so, we, we went back and forth.

And so, I think my real engagement didn't begin until 2006. We—you know, I would come down, I'd spend a week working remote. Todd would come back with me, and he'd spend a week up North in, in northern Jersey with me. And then he would come back. And so, we'd have a two-week separation. And now, so, there wasn't a lot of opportunity to really engage in the gay community down here, so it wasn't until we bought the house in 2005. You know, coming, we lived in a little neighborhood south of, of Daffin Park; it's called Parkside. And we bought the house in 2005. And I think once, once I've made that full transition and having the house, you know, began to feel a lot different and gave more opportunity to be engaged with Savannah as a broader community but also the LGBTQ.

And, you know, I, I will tell you this. When we were moving, and we told our friends from Illinois and New Jersey and Philadelphia that, "Hey, we're coming to Georgia." There were, there was a lot of questioning our thought process, and, you know, "Hey, you know, do you guys really—I mean, you're really going to do this? You, you know, Georgia isn't the most accepting place, right?" But you can say that about a lot of places in this country, even today. And, you know, change comes slowly. And it some—it comes with a price, but it wasn't, it was, it wasn't a big concern for us. We just felt like things were changing, you know, here it was early 2000s, and their work—the country was seeing change. And it would continue.

But we did both, having grown up in the South, we did—when we got back here from a race perspective thought that perhaps we made it—this is a bad decision. We felt like that there was this very underlying racial tension that lived within the city, and that was concerning to us. And it felt like we had just stepped back in time, thirty years ago, you know, back into the sixties and seventies, just around the race relations and tension within the city.

LB: Wow, okay. So, when you first—you, you were talking a little bit of about children. So, can you talk about the time when you were influenced in coming out? Can you—are you able to talk about that?

RD: Sure. So—

LB: I guess—I guess the question is, have you been married before? Were those children from a previous relationship?

RD: Yes, so, my—our children are from a previous relationship. I was previously married to a woman, who off and on was elementary, junior high, high school kind of a friendship that both

romantic and and non-romantic over those years. And in our early 20s, we got married. You know, I have always said, “Hey, do I marry for the right—I married for the right reasons of loving her.” And—but we were, we were, we were children. We were kids playing adults, and, you know, we were, we were young. I don't think—hindsight, I, I, I didn't—I'm—I loved her when I married her. I didn't love her the way that you—I feel like you should love somebody to spend a lifetime with. It was a different type of love, and it was—you know, we were friends. We had fun. We, you know, enjoyed a lot of the same things. We had a lot of the same friends. And if it—you know, we were kids, and we were living in our 20s. The—my children are now thirty-six and thirty-three. They were five and two when we separated.

And it was throughout the separation that I felt I, I did my own self inventory and felt like it was more than just the fact that we had grown apart and that we matured differently. There was other things that had to be addressed. And as a result, you know, one of those things was my sexuality. And I will say, you know, from the time I was in—a little child, I knew I was different. When, you know, high school, junior high school, college, I, you know, had relationships with other boys, and I had relationships with other girls. I think there's a lot of things that play into that, based on the time that I grew up. That an environment that you grow up in, that you, you end up making decisions that may change over time. You, you, you have these pre-conceived ideas based on what you were exposed, and what you should do or shouldn't do. And, you know, if you're lucky enough to break that mold and, and expand your environment and expose yourself to other things, I think that you learn different perspectives. And I think for me, my coming out in my very late twenties—twenty-nine—was, was the fact that I ended up having all this time by myself when my former wife and I separated, and really trying to think about what else is going on, and, you know, why, what other things am I not happy about. So.

LB: Were you out at work, or did you keep that to yourself?

RD: Kept it to myself. And I'll tell you, my husband, when we first got together—when we first met the first time, he was actually meeting the kids. We had gone to my office, and, you know, this is my own internal homophobia, is, you know, driving up to the office from our apartment with kids in the back. I'm thinking of, you know, “How do I, how do I make this happen where I'm going in, people want to meet my kids, but not bring in my friend at the time.” Right? Because we were really just dating but living together. And how do I, how do I exclude him from this process without hurting his feeling and without feeling like, you know, he's gonna out me. Right? This is again my own internal homophobia, thinking like, “Oh, like I probably totally passed for straight, and he totally passes for gay. And if, you know, people meet him, they're gonna think I'm gay. And then, oh my God, you know, I'll lose my job.” And part of is also around the whole time frame. The time frame that I was coming out, judges around the country were giving children who were biological children of gay parents to some other family member

because their parent was gay. Right? So, you know, like there were all these court hearings and where all these children were—custodies were taken away from their biological parents, you know. So, that played in my head.

But I was not out at work. And it was, I think, that moment in which I created this whole, “Hey, why don't you run to the store? I'll take the kids in, and we'll meet you back here.” And, you know, Todd is, you know, generous and astute as he is. He, you know, went to the store and back. Picked us up. We all got back in the car, and he said, “Hey, you know, you need to come to terms with how you want this relationship to be. I've never been in the closet. I'm never going in the closet. And I'm never making you come out. So—but it—you know, you have to figure it out. You're either with me, or you're not.” And I think at that point it became my motivation and the catalyst, you know, to, to find the ways to come out, and, you know, to be comfortable with it, so.

LB: Can you talk about your work with the First City Network. Have you done work with the—?

RD: So, I, I, I have done work with—I partnered with First City Network. So, I think my real involvement with the gay community was catapult—catapulted by my mom, who helped Standout Youth, which was a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender organization for youth, sixteen to twenty-three. Kind of a support group. And how she became involved with them or connected I'm—it's not clear to me, but she became connected with them and helped them from her experience in her past career to create a 501(c)(3). And she would—you know, when we moved down here, she would ping me, and as mother's often do, tap you on the shoulder and say, “Hey, you really should go look at this.” Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, in any case, I ended up getting involved with Standout Youth. First as a volunteer, and as a volunteer, as a volunteer board member, and then as executive director over the course of time. And it was probably a ten-year span.

And so, during that time, I did some things. I partnered with FCN (First City Network) and outside of that relationship organization-organization, you know, I, I supported—I gave support to First City Network through my husband being a board member for First City Network. And, you know, that organization today, you know, still exists as part of the First City Center, the Pride Center here in Savannah. They—but they were very instrumental, I think, in being bringing, you know, the gay community—the Savannah gay community to the forefront. You know, they would have these Saturday socials first Saturday of the month hosted at somebody else's house, in a different house every month. It was a way for people to come together of like mind and share, you know, conversation and community. They had done so much for the community. I think that without them, I'm not sure that we would be as far along as we are. You know, they were the first supporters of Savannah Pride. And the Savannah Pride, you know, came out of that First City Network umbrella, as did Standout Youth. And I sent you a bunch

of—a list of a whole bunch of names that I thought that are all connected with First City Network, Standout, Savannah Pride that I thought people if they're not on your list about this project, who would be very important to have on your list, and probably very excited to be a part of the project.

LB: So, we get it. For the record, what is your mother's name?

RD: Marianne Brouillette. It is spelt B-r-o-u-i-l-l-e-t-t-e.

LB: Oh, okay. And she was instrumental in organizing, even the weekend—or excuse me—the First City Frida—of the gatherings, didn't she? Was she a host?

RD: No, she was not a host.

LB: Oh, okay.

RD: We, we did host. I shouldn't say that. She, she, along with Todd and I, hosted a gathering for First City Network at Tybee. She was very instrumental in helping Standout Youth. Ernie Lee, Orlando Montoya, Jamie Murray—a group of people create the organization and get their 501(c)(3). She did sit on the board, Standout Youth, for a long while. She advertised in the First City Network. She would come to the socials with us when, when, you know, there was a social that we would go to. And, so, she's been very supportive of the community.

LB: In relationship to Standout Youth, can you think of any of—you said ten years that you were on the board. Were there events that stand out in your mind that you want to make sure are recorded?

RD: Wow, God. There's so many. You know, when I first, I—you know, when I first started with standout as a volunteer, I sat there for three months with not a single person at the meeting, other than myself. You know, so, I would sit there and read and read. And when—one day two kids showed up at once. And then, you know, over the course of a year, it grew to ten. And the next year, it just got bigger and bigger. But I would say—I mean, there's so many events.

2008, we brought the film *For the Bible Tells Me So* to Savannah. And we did it. It was an independent film. Won awards at the Sundance Film Festival. A number—very interesting as, as we're bringing it to Savannah, we learn a little background of the film and the people involved in it. So, I cannot remember the gentleman's name, but he was a teacher. I believe at Savannah Country Day. And he would run like independent films and rent theaters. So, we connected with him—Standout did—to bring the film to Savannah. Standout actually rented one movie theater at the Victory Stadium Theaters here off of Victory Drive and Skidaway. It became, it became—we

sold out on the tickets. I forgot how many people we could hug—we could hold. Anyways, we had to then rent a second theater directly across from the first and show the film simultaneously to two full, you know, theaters.

And we brought the film producer and director, Dan Karslake to Savannah. We brought two of the families who were part of the film documentary. And Mary Lou Wallner and Reverend Poteat, I believe it is. Then we had Billy Hester, who is the reverend here in Savannah at the Asbury United Methodist Church—was on our panel. So, so, after the movie, we, we hosted a question-and-answer session.

The—it, it was a phenomenal event. The first of all, have sold out on one theater, and at the last minute have to rent the second theater. And to, to, you know, for Savannah, I think it was just so unique because you had a line of people waiting outside this theater to see this, this film called *For the Bible Tells Me So*, which really discussed the history and the evolution of theology and how theology presented gay people. And, you know, kind of a different view, and how it became the way that it did.

And it starts out very I'll say very confrontational. I think if I recall, started out with Anita Bryant's and, and, and the conflict, you know, her save the children campaign and, you know, some—an activist hitting her in the face with pie. But the film didn't really—you know, the film wasn't specifically about being an activist, as much it was about what people were preaching about homosexuality and how it was so on, you know, Christian life and on, you know, non-religious in every format. And while it followed four families through their journey of a family member being gay, coming out as LGBT or not. Let's just say non-heterosexual conforming. Some of the families did great in their journey. Right? And, and during the documentary and others were still making that journey and trying to reconcile their faith with this, you know, family member that they love. But so, it's a film that we at Standout watched numerous times. It's a film that was well received here in Savannah.

And another—a couple of things that were very pivotal in that event was, was a—to have such a huge desire for people to see it. Secondly was that WTOC sent a, a news reporter to cover the event. And you could tell when that reporter came in and got set up, you know, he was not very comfortable about being there, not wanting to be there and not really wanting to do an interview with anybody. But almost as though he was assigned to do it and didn't have a choice. He spent all of a minute and a half doing it. And on the news that evening—or I think maybe thirty second clip. Are you from Savannah?

LB: Yeah.

RD: Okay, I'm sorry. I apol—so, so, so there's a, there was—so you may—people may recall it. Was a news reporter Don Logana and—who's from Buffalo, New York. Right? And well, Don saw—Don had come to the movie. Don had saw the thirty-minute clip and was livid by because he felt like it didn't, you know, meet—it really didn't cover the purpose of the event and the goals. It just didn't do it just. And he insisted and spoke to the WTOC management team, insisting that, you know, they'd do a new story and that he would do it. It was awesome. So, so I think that in itself was very telling. And as a result of that, Don was also—became very supportive of Standout Youth and actually came and spoke to the youth a number of times as a guest speaker. So that would be one of the things that I'd say really stands out with my involvement, Standout Youth.

Another one here in Savannah that I would say, and I believe this was somewhere around—so, the film was around 2008. This event would have been, I think, somewhere around 2010. And this was with an event that occurred in Savannah with a gay bash, and it was with a young man. His name's Kieran Daly, and he was attacked. I can't remember what was going on at that point in time. But anyways, there was—I think there was something else going on in the city. But there were two Marines that were here. They attacked him. Turned into a big, you know, issue here in Savannah. It also created some division within the gay community for a number of different reasons. The—but the event, as a result, one of the things that came out of this, this horrific attack was what I would consider the first activist march or protest, loudly and visibly in Savannah.

And they all met down, you know, on Bay Street. There was a whole bunch of youth. But it was organized by a young college student out of Armstrong, and I—his name is Jesse Morgan. I believe Jesse Morgan. And the other person that assisted was, I believe, the faculty advisor of the Armstrong Diversity or LGBT group at the time. And if I recall correctly, her name was Laura—or is Laura Cahill. And I think she also sat on the First City Network board at one point in time after that.

But I think what was significant about that is that it created a divide within the community, but at the same time, it created a forum and a platform for a lot of the younger generation, the gay youth. Because I think a lot of, a lot of that protest was, was attended by more gay youth than the older, you know, generation. And while I would say I'm an old—I would be considered part of an older generation, I'm referring to a generation that was older than me, and a generation that was probably more socially conservative in regards to “Hey, we shouldn't talk about those things,” or like, “It's okay. You just don't have to show it.” Right? Or, “It's okay. You just don't have to throw it in somebody's face.” Right? So, I, I think it created a, a divide, but also it created a platform, you know, and that's good.

And then I think maybe the only the other big event for me, which I'll always hold dear to my heart is, is in 2009, Standout Youth, along with partnership with Savannah Pride. Some, some board members at Savannah Pride brought—did a caravan of gay youth, the Standout Youth, going to the March on Washington Marriage Equality. And so, it was a whole weekend of these kids. They stayed at a campground for the most part. And then they would take, you know, this light rail system in, in D.C. into the city to be a part of the different events that were going on. And they would—they participated in, you know, no hate campaign and making signs and learning some of the history from some of the older activists, the older generation activists. You know, they would go to these seminars and learn about these laws that have been overturned or about, you know, the Florida orange juice boycott and the power of a voice. And they just had such a great time. But nothing was so overwhelming and memorable that my husband and I, we had all agreed to meet at this one square for the start of the march. And everybody was, you know, coming in that morning from a little bit. The kids from the campground with some of the chaperones that went with them, and those of us who spent time in a hotel [laughs].

And we got there, and we got there early. And, you know, there might have been a thousand people at this square. And we're waiting for the kids to show up. And, you know, an hour goes by, and now there's probably four thousand people in the square. And another hour goes by, and there's probably seven thousand people at the square. And we're just at the top of the escalators. We're, you know, where we're trying to wait for these kids, and all of a sudden, they come up and there's got to be ten thousand people. You know, it's packed. And you just, to see their face and the tears. And like, and the story of them coming in. They got on the train and the subway, and, you know, it was just them. And every stop, it got bigger and more signs and more rainbow flags and more, you know, people. And they just couldn't—they were astonished. And it was probably the most rewarding thing, the experience that I ever had. These kids were just—you know, their eyes were just—. They couldn't believe the size of crowd. So many. Right? And that they were—they're all fighting for the same thing.

LB: Well, currently are you still active with the Pride Center downtown? Do you still work?

RD: No. No, I, I don't. You know, I left. I got—probably say 2018 is—I step back. And two individuals who were volunteering for Standout, you know, took over the organization. They eventually, you know, have left, and somebody that was volunteering with them—and I don't know that individual's name—took the youth organization over. And then has since renamed it from Standout Youth to Jeffrey's Place. They meet at the Pride Center. I, I, I'm not sure if they're, if they're a separate 501(c)(3), or I don't know what the, the independence or non-independence from the Center is. But I do understand they still have a youth group that goes on. It's called Jeffrey's Place. I think they meet once a week, but I'm sure the information is on the website.

But when I stepped back, I had a lot of things going on. Number one, I was kind of burned out from not only my job, but from the volunteering that took place. I, you know, just felt like I needed to step back all together. And I did that, you know, and I'm still at that point. I'm still—I, I—very little involvement. I'm very happy that the Pride Center's there. I'm very, you know, happy that FCN is still around, and Jeffrey's Place is still there. I just haven't had the energy to get back involved in the community.

LB: Are there other organizations that you were a part of in Savannah or helped create?

RD: I—no, ma'am. I—Standout. I did—Standout became my passion. And I would, you know, I—probably most people—anybody that is in—I say this a lot: anybody who's in social work, had they, had they stepped in and watched what was going on, probably would have said, “Hey, like you guys are doing this all wrong. Especially you, Bob. You, you know, you're emotionally involved. You know, you, you know, every kid can't be a part of your heart.” Every kid was. Every kid was like a piece of heart. You know, we—Todd and I—have helped with kids having places, not a place to live, to not have a job, to trying to get citizenship. You know, it—but it was my passion. And they—it was it has certainly been the most rewarding for me personally because so many of those kids, even today, you know, twenty years later, I still keep in touch with some of the, you know, the first group of kids. And, you know, hear from them like on my birthday, or Father's Day, or, you know. And it's always good to hear what they're doing, to know that, you know, I was impactful to them.

I was at—I went to the club the other night to watch Todd perform, and somebody came up to me, said, “Oh my God, Mr. Bob, do you remember me?” and I'm like, “Oh my God, I do.” This individual—and we were talking, and, and this individual tells me how important Standout was to them, and how it saved their life, and how their family has made their own journey to a place of acceptance and full acceptance. And not only as that individual at the time coming out as gay/lesbian, but later coming out as truly being transgender and transitioning. And, you know, so we spent the next, you know, thirty minutes not only talking about that, but talking about, you know, Standout and some of the other youth that, that, that individual is still in touch with, how important it is.

LB: Do you think at this time that you would consider Savannah more inclusive or moving toward a more inclusive community? Since you brought—since your first time here? And now, what, fifteen, twenty years now?

RD: Yeah. So, I, I think there's areas what I would say would be more inclusive, and some areas that probably haven't changed at all. You know, you think about, you know, twenty years ago, we probably had a couple of—I mean, we had LGBT people on City Council who weren't out. I—now we have LGBT people on City Council who are out. You know, when we moved here, I,

I would say that probably City Council as a whole wouldn't even breathe the word LGBT, much less show up in an event. And then you have, you know, Mayor Otis Johnson. Right? Who I think was extremely instrumental in opening up closet doors, and, and saying to people, "You know, we, we need to be inclusive. You know, we can't—we're gonna leave one group behind, we're leaving everybody behind." You know, I think it was under Mayor Otis Johnson that we got domestic partnerships. Right? And then, you know, he—Edna Jackson or—and Van Johnson, like, they showed up. They would. They didn't have a problem showing up. They didn't have a problem talking to the LGBT leadership or community members.

And I'll say for me personally, Van Johnson, from the time I was involved in Standout Youth to, you know, today, he's, he's never wavered. He's never wavered on support to gay youth, to youth in general. He showed up at every Standout Youth event, with some of his Savannah Youth Commission kids at times that nobody at City Council wouldn't show up. Mary Ellen Sprague, Otis Johnson, and Edna Jackson. Like, but he showed up. And he was always consistent. He had Standout come to, you know, the Youth Commission Council and talk to youth. He—but, you know, so, from that perspective, I think yeah, things are getting better.

You know, we, you know, when I think her name Tracy Walden was the first LGBTQ Liaison that the city appointed. I think it was under Otis Johnson. The—but, but that was very controversial. Right? And I think that whole—I think her, her, her existence and that, that liaison position lasted—it was a short breath. But now look. We have this whole new council that's not just putting the burden on the shoulders of one individual. Right? You know, you have to say, "Wow. She, she had to—you know, she was the police, community liaison, out lesbian. She had so much burden, responsibility put on her that people were looking at her for, for all these things. Now, you have a team." Right? So, yeah, those things are getting better.

But you also have to ask yourself like, "What about with the youth, and what about the transgender?" Okay. It's, it's still not easy to be transgender. Now, it's not easy to be transgender and non-Caucasian and out. Right? It's not. If you look at schools, how many, how many schools in Savannah have a diversity program? Have an, you know, a kind of Gay-Straight Alliance? How many of them have a curriculum in which gay history is taught as part of history? Right? So much of that—and, you know, that's why this project is so important. So much of history, good or bad, is not told. And consequently, there are so many lessons and opportunities I think lost because of it. So, it's a mixed bag. Depends on which, which bucket you look at, how much progress has been made, and how much progress can still be made.

LB: What would you say to young people today? Young LGBTQ+ people that are coming along? And how—you know, what would you use to inspire them, I guess? Or just say to—for the future for them?

RD: Oh my goodness, it depends on what the, what the conversation would be around. You know—

LB: Just in general—.

RD: From my experience with Standout Youth, you know there's a—I probably would not say anything different than what I said in the past. Number one, you're not an adult until you're thirty. So, don't make—don't feel like you have to have the answers, and don't make a real big life decisions. Your twenties are for living and experience and learning lessons. And your teens are for growing up and joining where you're at. It's going to be challenging, but you have to learn to like yourself because from beginning to end in this life, you are taking nobody with you but you from start to finish. Be kind to yourself.

Be kind to parents. You know, it's always a struggle when it comes to coming out. “Oh, they don't get it.” And you have to “You're right, they don't.” You know, sometimes as parents, we, you know, we for so many years, we project our own future. You know, what we see for our children. And then when we learn something new about our children—and if they, you know, that we we didn't. Right? And it might change the dreams we had, and that can be a hard pill to swallow. As well it can also be a hard pill to swallow that “Oh my God, my child kept this from me, and they must have been agonizing over it. And they must—.” You know, there's so many different things parents have to also go through. So, if you don't get the response that you're really expecting, give them time. Because you took time. Right?

The religion has always been a tough place, tough spot for the kids because they've heard so many negative things. Right? That don't affirm who they are as, as an individual, as a child of God. And I, you know, I have often since *For the Bible Tells Me So* have given that film, bought the DVDs, you know, back before streaming. I can't tell you how many DVDs Todd and I have bought and given to kids to watch. Always been the intent that they should give it back to us, but they want to keep it, so you let them keep it.

There's also a book that that is—it's called *For the Bible*—or no, that's the movie. It's called the *God Box* written by Alex Sanchez. And it is a phenomenal book. And it—you know, for a child that is a teenager who's struggling between reconciling their faith and their sexuality, it is an awesome book. And again, it's a book that Todd and I have bought a hundred times over. Always with the intent that we ask for it back, always with, you know, having to let it go because they like it so much. And, you know, so I would tell kids, you know, like, don't, you know, don't—“If you're struggling with it, you know, don't walk away. You know, find resources to help you learn.” Help you walk through that challenge.

Asbury Memorial—you know, I'm not—I would say I'm not religious, I'm spiritual. And—but Asbury Memorial. Todd and I had been parishioners there. I stepped away from Asbury, but it is one of the—it is a safe place for me. I, I believe. I have a lot of, I have a lot of belief and faith in community prayer. I just don't know that I need to do it every Sunday. That I find, you know, my same spiritual foundation and doing things that I like that, you know, are quiet, and quality time in my head and my heart, you know.

So, but I have taken kids to Asbury because they've struggled, and they see a different type of religious community, a faith, a different type of family. And Billy Hester, you know the pastor at Asbury, has done numerous things with standup youth. He's come and talked to the kids. He's been part of a question-and-answer session and help bring, you know, *For the Bible Tells Me So*, help host families that came. The church—he—the church—they hosted a Halloween party that the gay youth wanted to do one time. Attended it, like we probably had twenty kids attend.

But, you know, we had twenty kids who had nowhere else to go. You know, so I think that I would tell them not to, not—you know, they're struggling with religion, don't just walk away. There are places that could help them with that journey and help them make more better-informed decisions. Sometimes we walk away because we're disenchanted, but we haven't heard any—you know, we have—we don't have anything to help us change that opinion or view. Right? And you know, things do get better. You know, when I—life was tough. Life was good when I was under thirty, but there were challenges. But life started to fit together when I became thirty. And every year has gotten better and better, easier and easier. It makes more and more sense. Right? So, over time, if—you may not think that it's you're going to get through this, but you will. So, those would be the things that I said.

LB: Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences in the LGBTQ community that we haven't talked about? Was there anything that you wanted to make sure was part of your oral history today that we didn't discuss?

RD: Oh, I, I don't think so. I think, I think I covered it all. And, you know, I think that I, I would hope that this project somehow finds its way into the broader community. And that it's not, you know, it's, it's not something that somebody just has to go and search for. It—with this type of a project, and hearing these stories from different community members, and what it was like, where we are, where we were, we came from, where we, and where we are today, and how that journey transpired can be very helpful, you know, for, for the youth growing up today. It would be great if somehow this found its way into, you know, curriculum. Storytelling is very important.

LB: All right. Well, thank you very much for sharing your history with us today. I really appreciate it. I enjoyed it.

RD: You're quite welcome. Thank you for including me.

**End of interview.**