

**City of Savannah Municipal Archives
Proud Savannah History Project
Interview: Robert Dunn & Todd Mauldin
Interviewed by Lacy Brooks, November 12, 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.

Lacy Brooks: Today is Friday, November 12, 2021. It is 10 AM. I am Lacy Brooks, representing the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives. I'm interviewing Robert Dunn and Todd Mauldin for the Proud Savannah History Project. We are conducting this interview in Savannah, Georgia via zoom. Thank you for joining us today. So, let's start by having you each tell us your full name, and I'll let you pick.

Robert Dunn: I am Robert Dunn.

Todd Mauldin: And I'm Todd Mauldin.

LB: Okay. And then if you would each tell us your pronouns and how you identify.

RD: He/him. Gay male.

TM: Same. He/him. Gay male.

LB: And then if you would tell us, Robert, when and where were you born?

RD: Born March 11, 1961, Utica, New York, Oneida County.

LB: And Todd, please.

Todd Mauldin: I was born in Albemarle, North Carolina, which is in Stanley County. May 22nd, 1965.

LB: And if you would talk to us about when you moved to Savannah, and why you decided to move to Savannah, Georgia?

RD: [points to Mauldin] 2000—2003 full-time. [points to himself] 2003 part-time. Our whole purpose of moving to Savannah was really kind of get out of the corporate world, make a change in our overall, you know, life projection of where we wanted to be and what we wanted to do. And be closer to family.

TM: Yeah, both of our—I had left my corporate job, and Bob had intended to leave his. We had talked about moving. And I think I said in my last interview, Bob's mom lived out on Tybee, and our vacations for a decade had been to tackle her to-do list. So, Savannah and the Tybee area were kind of a natural progression for us. Both of our parents were aging. My family was still in North Carolina. So, it was just easier and simpler to be here closer to family. Bob's mom, you know, is a block away from us now, so.

LB: When you moved to Savannah, how long had you been together?

TM: Well, we met in 1991. So, I guess that gives us twelve years.

RD: Twelve years.

TM: And we just celebrate—

LB: How did you—

TM: —our thirtieth anniversary.

LB: How did you meet each other?

TM: We met at a bar. A bar called Scorpio Lounge in Charlotte, North Carolina. And it was kind of—we played cat and mouse. Like, we were there on Wednesday nights. We looked at each other from afar for a few weeks. And we have slightly different versions of the story, but [laughs].

RD: Our entire life together has slightly different versions.

TM: One Wednesday night when I was leaving with some friends, Bob came out, and he said, “Are you going to be here next Wednesday?” And I said, “My name is Todd. And yes, I will be.” And—anyway, like we had, like, had seen each other over the course of a number of weeks. We had not gone out. We'd barely even spoken obviously, and I was already performing as a female impersonator at that time. And Bob showed up at the bar on a Sunday night, and I was performing in the show. But he didn't recognize me right away.

RD: But I was—but I, I showed up, and I was looking for Todd. I had just come back from a visit with my former wife and children, and it was somewhat of an explosive weekend with my former wife. And so, I just kind of thought, “Well, maybe Todd will be at the, at this club.”

TM: And anyway—so, the show happened. I am going back to the dressing area, and we caught eyes. And Bob was like, “Todd.” And I'm like, “Yes. Don't go anywhere. I'm going to go up front and get paid. I'll be back in a second.” And we ended up going back to—Bob was living in a hotel. It was in Charlotte. On a work project. And we ended up going back to the hotel. And his version of the story is I went to his hotel room and never left [laughs]. There's a little grain of truth in that.

LB: Wow, so you have mentioned a former relationship—your former wife. Can you talk about an early experience that you maybe had in deciding to get married to a woman?

RD: So, so, my former wife, Laurie, and I were in our very early twenties. But we had met when we were—I'm, I'm gonna say thirteen, twelve, thirteen. We—both our families had similar paths. We both from upstate New York. Both their families moved to Minnesota within, you know, a very short period of time of each other. And we became boyfriend and girlfriends in elementary school and, you know, sixth grade. And then off and on for the next years—I don't know, seven years, eight years. And our families ended up moving to different parts of the country right about the same time as well. But we always stayed in touch. And when, when we physically were in the same place again—which was Washington, D.C. or just outside of D.C.—I was twenty-two, Laurie was twenty-two. But we—I mean, we had a lot of fun together. We had history together. We had, you know, common friends from school. We, we genuinely enjoyed each other, and we loved each other. I just don't—not then, although not then, but later, realizing it's not—it's a friendship type of love. It's not the type of love that takes you through a lifetime. And—but there was a point in time throughout all of that, that I had had experiences with same gender, other boys. And—but never really gave a whole lot of acknowledgement to it.

The—but there was a moment just months before we were getting married. And we were at the movie theater. And the movie, I believe, was called *Making Love* with Kate Jackson and Harry Hamlin. And it was really the first LGBTQ— or the Q wasn't even around at that point in time. And the first gay, you know, themed movie that was playing, you know, in the big screen theaters, right at pretty much the start or height of the AIDS epidemic. And it was about a man who, he and his wife married. He later just, you know, comes out through this very tenuous relationship of an affair. And I remember sitting there thinking, “Oh my God, like, this is my life. This is. And how do you stop, you know, this, this marriage that's about to happen in, you know, two months.” But as a child, you don't really think—you get a—you don't think of that far ahead. Or you, you, you—it's a lot easier to embrace the fear and, and freeze. Right? And part of my thought process was I did love her. I just didn't understand the type of love. And, you know, like, “This would go away. This isn't really going to happen. And it had been a long, you know, a long period of time but since I had last been involved.” But I think that was my first realization that, that potentially I had a bigger— there was a part of me that I needed—that I wasn't paying attention and being honest. [dogs bark in background] Sorry for that.

LB: So, you guys met in 1991-ish and then—so, you were in a larger city before you moved to Savannah, Georgia. What was that experience like, coming to a smaller community in the South?

TM: Well, we migrated all around the country. In the nineties, Charlotte was probably more of a big town than the city. Was like, you know, it hadn't grown up yet. So, it didn't feel like it feels today. But we moved from Charlotte to Chicago in... '94? I feel like '94.

RD: '94.

TM: And we were both kind of like kids in candy stores, I think. That was my first experience with big city. I've never been on public transportation. You know, I've never been in a city that was so diverse. And, you know, really loved everything about it. and we stayed there for two

years. And then we migrated to Morristown, New Jersey, right outside of Philadelphia. So, we still had all the opportunities and access to things that a big city provided. So, I was a little concerned about moving back to the south because it had been so easy and freeing to be a young gay person in a big city, you know, with all of everything that it had to offer. And I grew up in the south, you know, kind of in the middle of nowhere North Carolina. And so, our experiences had changed as we moved around the country. So, it was a little concerning to come back down south. And there were obviously advantages, you know, from our personal lives and personal aspect to, to come back down south. But it was I think concerning for both of us.

RD: Yeah, I—look for me, coming out in Charlotte was a very slow process, but yet it was also very exciting. Like, I remember going—with the lounge that I met Todd at, I remember the first time I went there, and I thought every man in the city of Charlotte was—and I mean there was just no parking for blocks. Right? in the—probably a three-acre parking lot, and it was full. Right? And so, I just thought like, “Oh my God.”

Then we went to Chicago. And, you know, by that point in time, I had started to ease my way out professionally at the same time. And when we got to Chicago, it was what Charlotte had to offer, Chicago had by a hundred-fold. You know, you could walk out our front door and go to any one of a dozen different ethnic restaurants. You could go to a small theater, live theater and see a show. You know, at least a different show at least, you know, five, six times a month and for a reasonable price. You had a whole path, a whole part of, section of the city that was LGBT called the Gay-borhood. Right? So just experiencing things and seeing men and women, you know, publicly showing displays of affection, holding hands, and going on dates, and things that you just didn't really see a lot of in Charlotte was just exhilarating.

And then we moved to this little Quaker town outside of Philadelphia. While we lost some of, some of those things from Chicago, we also—as Todd said—easy access to New York City, Philadelphia. you know we—

TM: Rehobath [?] beach.

RD: Rehobath [?] beach. We found friends within the company that we were working at that, you know—a whole circle of LGBT people. And made connections there. It was a different type of experience, but it was still awesome. And coming back to the south. You know, we came back during the Bush Administration. We came back, you know, with a lot of other tensions rising politically, and some setbacks in the LGBT community. And we both have been raised here, were comfortable, but we had friends questions us. “Really? I mean, do you really understand what you're doing? And, you know, you're not really opened and welcomed in the South.” And I think we got a little bit of that experience when we were here. When we—you know, Fannie's on the Beach. I remember going there and realizing this is not really your typical heterosexual family-oriented kind of bar at night. And, and I asked one of the staff. I said like, “Is this a LGBT, gay bar?” And she said, “Well, why do you ask?” And I said, “Well cause I'm gay, and it just seems awkward.” And she said, “Well, we are—we are family supportive and owned. But we don't advertise.”

TM: That was also twenty years ago.

RD: Right. Yeah. But that was common. I mean, even when we bought this house in 2005, like, there were a number of LGBT people who lived in the neighborhood. And it was—it wasn't relatively known widely in the neighborhood, but they were here. Nobody flew a pride flag. Nobody had an HRC sticker on their bumper, or a Georgia Equality sticker. So, there were a lot of questioning moments about “did we set ourselves back?” And we both also grew up in the South during much more, you know, heated racial tensions. Me and Alabama during the sixties. And there was a point time—I said, “Wow.” We felt like we had stepped back twenty, thirty years when it came to racial relationships, and, you know, from both sides, you know. So, yeah, there were some concerns.

TM: Even within the LGBTQ community here. When we moved down, we said the community was quiet. They were here, but they were just quiet. They were much, it seemed to me, just my perspective, that they would—the community would much prefer to socialize and commune at someone's home than they were comfortable in a more public environment. And even the first Pride we attended here, you know, was kind of tucked away, down in the old railroad house away from, you know, the tourists. And it, it just seemed like it was more of a private event. All of that has changed. But it was—we didn't meet people at bars here when we first came out. And I think the transition was a little more difficult for us because not only were we kind of moving separately—I was coming down first, and Bob transitioning later on—but when we moved to Chicago, we had a ready-made social circle. Bob had been there on the work assignment. He'd stayed in the BnB, and the guys who own the BnB became our friends, and their friends became our friends. So, it was a relatively easy transition for—especially for someone like me who had never been more than an hour away from their mother. When we moved to the Philly area, we had a work family. And we, you know, did that. And we had a church family there. Also had guys that we had worked with, or Bob had worked with at the time. So, we had people to hang out with or socialize with or go visit on the weekends.

And when we came here, it was just us. Like, we didn't know anyone here. So, it was—we got involved with the First City socials and we—so that's—and then a bowling league and then FCN and then Standout. So, that's kind of how we developed, you know, a social circle here.

RD: And I, you know, I can recall our first—we weren't living here for the first Pride event, but my mother had rented a booth at Pride event to hawk her wares in her new post-retirement game plan. And we came down to help. And we later went to a bar called Faces that was on Lincoln Street—

TM: Abe's on Lincoln.

RD: Yeah, yeah. It's now Abe's on Lincoln. But they—and I remember, astonished, hearing these older gentlemen—who at the time were probably my age now, you know, in their sixties—and saying, you know, some very southern draw and how, how inappropriate it was, and they would never ever go to a public, you know, gay, homosexual event, and that it should never—it should never happen. And, you know, so overhearing this conversation, “Wow, like what a different place from Chicago.”

TM: And I think there are two sides to that as well because we weren't immersed in the community at that time. We didn't know anyone, so that was our experience. On the backside of that, you know, FCN was already happening. That, you know, Lawrence Marley, and Ben Blank, and Julie Blocker, and all of the old guard were working, you know, to change things for Savannah and develop—to develop a sense of community. And so, I think that's important to know too.

RD: Yeah. And we—you know, when we moved here, we met a lot of those people. And that certainly helped. You know, there was a—I think you look at a lot of things over the years. I mean, it's far different today than it was twenty years ago. And there are multiple factions like in any community, not everybody fits in the same, you know, pod. And, you know, there are those who organize in a very more comfortable—or non-aggressive or agitating wagon. There, there are others that do just the opposite. And while you may not have always fit in one or the other pod, together those different factions all seem to continue to move forward, no matter what the challenges were. And sometimes they join forces, and sometimes they just move forward in parallel but separate paths. Right? But things are very different.

TM: Absolutely.

RD: And, you know, the Pride's no longer tucked away behind the walls of the Roundhouse, and it's out in the open, and it draws big crowds.

TM: And we have a First City Pride Center now that was only a dream for twenty years—twenty plus years probably. And so that came to fruition. So, there have been a lot of changes.

RD: And, you know, you think—I think it was Otis that—Otis Johnson, Mayor Otis Johnson—that we got domestic partnerships, you know, came to fruition with.

TM: Or was it Edna?

RD: Maybe it was Edna, yeah. But I mean I remember, we went to I think it was Otis Johnson's second inaugural.

TM: [nodding] Yeah.

RD: And I remember we danced together on, on the dance floor. And maybe a few heads turn, but we had more people come up to us and say how, you know, refreshing that was and to see the, the change of diversity and openness happening in this state. And—

TM: And even then, we were invited to the inauguration with contingency people. Karen Bowden, Deb Reiny, Pam Miller. Like a slew of people that—

RD: Kevin Clark.

TM: Kevin Clark. That, that had actually helped get the mayor elected, you know, by mobilizing and encouraging our community.

LB: So, when you guys came to Savannah, did you look at a church? Joining a church at all in the Savannah area? Have you ever been members of church?

TM: We did not look initially. We had gone through some life changes, and we're both seeking something, and we had a lot of friends that went to Asbury. And so, we gave it a shot. And we loved it because I, I'm not a terribly religious person, but Billy is a great orator, and no matter what was going on in your world, you know, sitting in that church for an hour and listening to him talk—whatever he was talking about was related to on a personal level. And I think every week for a year I showed up with pride and just listening to him. Because, you know—and then the God on Broadway series was fantastic and so we got involved in that church for a while. We met a lot of people there. It was a great experience and, and that community is very strong. And that church is extremely welcoming to everyone.

RD: Yeah. And, you know—I mean, I've always think—I've always, as part of my coming out process and growth, has had—yeah, I have a hard time with the institutional of organized religion. And we had since our thirty years together, we have attended a Catholic church, we've attended an Episcopalian church—trying to think. I think maybe that's it. A Catholic Episcopalian, and then, you know, the United Methodist. And I think Billy has by far the most inspirational and thought-provoking in how you look at religion, spirituality. And so, even to, even though we're not involved in that church today, we maintain a kinship to it. We often—anybody who's struggling with religion, especially with youth, we have taken them there to give them a different perspective. And, you know, it's—it was the time that we spent here as part of the parishioner family. I think that's just, you know, it's very loving and very memorable in our hearts.

TM: It's interesting. I did not grow up in a particularly religious household or environment, so I didn't come to the table with any sort of baggage. For me, I guess it was all kind of exploratory. And I think when we went to the Episcopal church in north Jersey, you know, for me, it was just about the folks that I knew who went there. Like, it was communal; it wasn't really religious. I didn't have—and when we went to a Catholic church, like, I'd never been to Catholic church, so I was not familiar with any of the customs or even the theology, and then all of the, you know, up and down and kneeling. Like, it was foreign to me. Like, I think my experience with church growing up was we lived on the same street as the Baptist church that my mother sent us to. I don't ever recall her really going, but she sent us there. And on Wednesday nights, like you know, I just wanted to finish youth group so I could run up the street and watch the *Sonny and Cher Show* that's happening at home. So, so, the church here for me was therapeutic in a lot of ways. It was just an opportunity to sit, and be quiet, and listen, and then have coffee and cookies afterwards [laughs].

LB: So, have you married? Are you—did you two get married? When did you get married?

RD: We did. We got—so, so, we actually got married in—on March 24th, 2011, which the 24th—so again, we'll have two different versions.

TM: Mine's way funnier.

RD: I had basically said at one point as we waited for marriage equality, and it, you know, patchworked across the country, I had said several years before that is that like “By twenty, you know, we’re either getting married or not.” And—but that I really wanted to mark it. Our twentieth anniversary with being married. And so, we went to Waltham, Massachusetts to get married. It was—you know, Massachusetts really had no significant meaning for us to go there, other than it was the first state to sanction marriage equality. The—so we went on March 24 and with the understanding that we were going to get married. It was just us. Nobody else. And—but we were going to have our true ceremony on our, on our twentieth anniversary, September 18th. And we would do it here, and we would have family and friends. And so, that’s—so, that’s what we did because I, I, I felt like I wanted to have just our moment. And so, that’s how that happened. And then, you know, six months later, we have this huge, you know, celebration with family and friends and from all over the country. I think about a hundred fifty people.

TM: About a hundred and fifty people.

RD: We, we had our ceremony and reception at the Belford’s Seafood Restaurant over in the Square.

TM: Yes, City Market.

RD: City Market. And it was awesome. It was a little—we did have a little bit of caution as we look for places. And we would ask, you know, “Hey, you know, we’re—it’s the same sex marriage.” You know, Belford’s was great. They said, “You know, we’ve never done that before. We have no problem and excited to do it.” And they worked with us great. They even said, “Can we fly the pride flag? Would that be okay?” And we put out a sign that says, you know, you know, “Private event: the wedding of Bob and Todd.” I mean, they were just—.

TM: They were awesome.

RD: It was their first one that they did, but they were awesome with making sure, you know, every—we were okay, and that they were okay with what they were about to do, being in City Market.

TM: It was an awesome year in 2011. We—when we went to Waltham, Massachusetts, I always tell people like the coolest part of the entire process. Because marriage equality, like Bob said, was kind of patchworking itself across the country, and it wasn’t nationwide at that point, obviously. But when we went to City Hall to fill out our marriage license, there was this very young heterosexual couple next to us doing the same thing. And like, the one thing I remember was that she kind of nudged her fiancé and said, “Move over, honey, so they can fill their paperwork out too.” It was just a non-event. And I thought it was so cool. Like, it wasn’t like, “Oh my God, these two men are trying to get married.” It was just like, “Move over. Let them have some space to do their thing too.” And what was supposed to be just us—Bob’s mom decided to fly up, and she had a relative—a cousin—there, and so, they ended up coming to our ceremony with the justice of the peace or whatever you call it.

RD: Right, right.

TM: And it ended up being really cool. Like, you know, we had a very small group of people there. It was, it was a great experience, except that I got food poisoning two days before. But we had a young man that had gone to Standout who was in the Navy and been stationed there, so we got to see him while we were there. And then, like Bob said, we wanted to have like, just a big celebration, and so, we invited, you know, people from every city we lived in. So, we had friends from our lives in Charlotte, from Chicago, from Jersey, from here—our neighbors. And, you know, here in Parkside, former coworkers. Everybody came. It was like the coolest thing in the world, and it was an incredible day. Like, maybe the best day ever.

RD: Yeah, it was nice.

LB: So, do you feel like today in 2021 that things have changed? But where do you think Savannah needs to move in the next twenty years, let's say? Can you think, for the future, what you hope Savannah will be like?

TM: There's a retirement home for old gay retired men [both laugh].

RD: The—for—you know, I, I, I'll say cautiously optimistically hope that Savannah would find itself being far more open and welcoming to all walks of life. And, you know, not just specifically LGBT, but interracial relationships and international relationships. And I—and, and, you know, off—I also think that they—you know, I would like to see more visibility. Right? And, you know, I think about Philadelphia and even Chicago was awesome and everything. Philadelphia has this whole—their entire summer is built around equality. They—you know, EqualityFest, the OUT Fest, the gay Pride, the film festival, the LGBT film festival. And it runs from, from, from May to October, which are, you know, May around, you know, Harvey Milk assassin. People—Harvey Milk's birthday to October, which is, you know, National Coming Out. In spirit, I think spirit day is in October as well.

But they're not afraid to put out the pride flag. They're not afraid—you know businesses are not afraid to show that they are LGBT friendly. And you do—I can remember when we first came to Savannah, very rare did you see a business that said, you know, that had like an HRC Equality sticker.

TM: Right, or a gay pride sticker.

RD: Or a gay pride sticker in the window. You see more of them now. But in comparison, if you look at other cities that might be similar in size or diversity as Savannah, you don't see as much as you could. And, you know, I, I think I always feel like there's a backlash every time we make progress, whether it's, you know, around civil rights and, you know, the Black community or civil rights and the LGBT community. But any portion of our greater human population that is suppressed and they tend to make progress, there's some kind of backlash. And, you know, I feel like we've seen that now. I think that's another reason why this project is so important is because, you know, what, what you see are—I mean these are laws. The positive change that has been,

you know, people putting in laws and protection showing the disparity and the unfair persecutions that may happen and trying to change that. But those laws can be changed too, if we're not all—you know, we don't guard them. And we don't give them, you know, the, the value and protection that they need. Right? We need to stay engaged. So, I think I would like for Savannah to be a little more open and a little more welcoming to every walk of life. But I think it's going to take all of us to protect what progress we've made. In order to do that.

TM: I think in Savannah—and maybe it's a sort of projection of our country larger—there's a huge disparity here between sort of the haves and have nots. And there's racial inequality. There's inequality within our own community. There certainly is gender inequality. We haven't even touched on gender identification and the trans community here. I just think there's a lot of work to do and, and the larger city and within our own community as well. I think progress has been made. I think there are a lot of services that are provided around town. I think the Pride Center provides a lot of services. The Health Department provides a lot of services for, for—on the HIV front now. But I think it's going to take a concerted effort within our community and outside of our microcosm of this community to really see change be affected in the long term. And it is scary.

I agree with Bob that we make progress and then you do see some sort of backlash happening because people come out of the woodwork because, you know, giving you equal rights somehow seems to take rights away from it, which is just mind-boggling to me. So, I, I hope that we see our community stand up. I hope that we become even more visible.

RD: But for everybody.

TM: For everybody. I hope. I am excited that—and I've said this for quite some time—I think that gay bars and gay businesses and, you know, all of that certainly serves a purpose within our community. But in Savannah, a lot of people—you feel welcome everywhere. You know, its people go to wherever they feel comfortable, whatever restaurant is, whatever the club is, whatever the, you know, coffee house is. And that's encouraging and exciting. And I don't see, you know, a lot of people, you know, screaming derogatory terms at people on the street and—which happened to us when we first moved here downtown. But I, I think there's been a great deal of progress. But like with anything, you have to keep trying to move forward. And you can't rest on your laurels. You really have to like, really look at what's next. [illegible]

LB: Quickly, can you think of one event that maybe was a turning point for Savannah that—in the time that you've been here, can you think of one event? Whether positive or negative, that was a turning point that seemed to push Savannah one way or another?

TM: I think with some—it's not like one specific point, but I think that with a lot of the political leaders that we've elected—particularly in, in the position of mayor with Otis, Edna, and now Van—that they've been extremely supportive of the community. They have championed equality. They have championed, you know, non-discrimination clauses for city employees. For, for jobs. And, and so, I'm excited about our leadership in that aspect.

RD: Yeah, I don't—you know, I can—I don't know that there's one specific event because I feel like there were a number of events over a number of years. But each of them having provided their own value of paling Savannah forward. Some of them with a little bit of drag, and some of them with, you know, a lot of speed. And every one of them was valuable, whether, whether you were part of that event or, or faction. They each contributed to getting us from where we were, walking down the street holding hands and having somebody yell derogatory remarks, to where we are today, in many cases being able to walk down Broughton Street holding hands and not—maybe you'll get some looks. I mean, it's been—I, I've avoid Broughton Street as much as possible just because of, you know, people in general. But so, I don't know if somebody would say anything in today's climate because there's so many, you know, extremes right now. But for the most part, I don't—you know.

TM: I, I think also like just the increased visibility of our Pride Festival. Although we're two years now without that happening due to COVID. But moving from kind of the side streets and the quiet to way more visible, visible locations and like kind of being officially sanctioned by the city. And it's a festival that takes place that, you know, we welcome people to. I think that's probably the most visible thing that our community does because it's a big party. And I think that being right, right downtown, whether it was at Forsyth Park or now in City Market at Ellis Square. Like, the visibility of that just allows people to, to see what—you know, to, to experience something from, from our own culture. And, I totally lost my train of thought.

RD: That happens with our age.

TM: Yeah.

LB: So, is there anything else that I haven't or you haven't spoken about that you guys experienced together in Savannah during your twenty odd years that needs to be documented? Something—whether it was positive that you want to, you know, talk about? Can be—? Feel like we—.

RD: Yeah, I—.

LB: Or negative. Was there anything?

RD: I think that we kind of touched everything. I think that, you know, Todd and I—I think overall my, my experience in Savannah overall has been great. And despite some of the challenges and, you know, having stepped back, I felt—you know, when we first moved here. In the long run, it's been good. I mean, I think that, you know, you can find newspaper articles even going back into the early 2000s. And Hart wrote a number of articles about acceptance of a child, a gay child. And, you know, I think, you know, with Standout—our involvement with Standout Youth. Remembering the challenges that they had before trying to get billboards. Nobody would sell them billboard advertisement because of the topic. To having billboards. You know, you know we have a Pride Center now that we don't have. We have, you know, the Price Center hosted a block party. Right?

TM: Right.

RD: What—two years ago, maybe?

TM: Two years ago. Yeah. 18? 2019, I guess.

RD: 2019. That was just phenomenal. Right? That—and looking forward to the next time they can hold—you know, host that outside of just the Pride Festival. But, you know, there, there were positive events, and there were negative events. I think that, you know, it's sad that there were a number of gay bashings that occurred while we were here. And those events—out of those events came change. Right? And even in it—and it created a lot of push and pull within the, you know, gay community itself. But never split the community, I feel.

I think that seeing the new youth organization—from my understanding has a bigger population of transgender, which is a need that—you know, a service that is needed. And that's great. When you think twenty years ago, like, it was gay or lesbian. Right? And the transgender kids, you know, really didn't have a place. And, you know, now they—there's a bigger acceptance for them. And I think with them will come, will come more positive change, as they evolve and grow and make a bigger presence.

TM: I, I actually, think that this particular project might be the catalyst for, for change and acceptance because I'm a big proponent of people seeing who you are and how you live. And I think once folks recognize that, "Oh, we have a house and a dog. And, you know, sorrow, and tragedy, and celebrations just like everyone else." You know, it, it makes us not so different, you know. And even in this day and age, people are still afraid of things they don't understand, or don't know, or that is not just like me. So, I think that this project that people happen upon, however they find the videos, you know, I think that they start to listen to people's stories, and they understand their, their tragedies, and their triumphs, and their struggles, and their celebrations, then that makes a difference on how they've perceived and, you know, how people start to find us, as well.

LB: Well, thank you very much for sharing your history today. I've really enjoyed it.

RD: Thank you.

TM: Thank you very much. Have a great day.

End of interview.