

Oral History Center  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

The Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

John Newsome

*John Newsome on “And Marriage for All”*

Interviews conducted by  
Brad Bailey  
in 2016

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John Newsome

**John Newsome** was active in the freedom to marry movement through regional activism in the San Francisco Bay Area and Northern California and on a broader stage in the Civil Marriage Collaborative. In this interview, Newsome discusses his upbringing, coming to terms with his homosexuality, education, and political awareness. He worked on the “And Castro for All” campaign which addressed racial bias in San Francisco gay bars and then on the outgrowth of that campaign, “And Marriage for All,” which sought to mobilize communities of color around marriage equality.

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## Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

In the historically swift span of roughly twenty years, support for the freedom to marry for same-sex couples went from an idea a small portion of Americans agreed with to a cause supported by virtually all segments of the population. In 1996, when Gallup conducted its first poll on the question, a seemingly insurmountable 68% of Americans opposed the freedom to marry. In a historic reversal, fewer than twenty years later several polls found that over 60% of Americans had come to support the freedom to marry nationwide. The rapid increase in support mirrored the progress in securing the right to marry coast to coast. Before 2004, no state issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples. By spring 2015, thirty-seven states affirmed the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. The discriminatory federal Defense of Marriage Act, passed in 1996, denied legally married same-sex couples the federal protections and responsibilities afforded married different-sex couples—a double-standard cured when a core portion of the act was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. Full victory came in June 2015 when, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution’s guarantee of the fundamental right to marry applies equally to same-sex couples.

At the very center of the effort to change hearts and minds, prevail in the courts and legislatures, win at the ballot, and triumph at the Supreme Court was Freedom to Marry, the “sustained and affirmative” national campaign launched by Evan Wolfson in 2003. Freedom to Marry’s national strategy focused from the beginning on setting the stage for a nationwide victory at the Supreme Court. Working with national and state organizations and allied individuals and organizations, Freedom to Marry succeeded in building a critical mass of states where same-sex couples could marry and a critical mass of public support in favor of the freedom to marry.

This oral history project focuses on the pivotal role played by Freedom to Marry and their closest state and national organizational partners, as they drove the winning strategy and inspired, grew, and leveraged the work of a multitudinous movement.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley first engaged in conversations with Freedom to Marry in early 2015, anticipating the possible victory in the Supreme Court by June. Conversations with Freedom to Marry, represented by founder and president Evan Wolfson and chief operating officer Scott Davenport, resulted in a proposal by OHC to conduct a major oral history project documenting the work performed by, and the institutional history of, Freedom to Marry. From the beginning, all parties agreed the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project should document the specific history of Freedom to Marry placed within the larger, decades-long marriage movement. Some interviews delve back as far as the 1970s, when a few gay activists first went to court seeking the freedom to marry, and the 1980s, when Evan Wolfson wrote a path-breaking thesis on the freedom to marry, and “domestic partner” legislation first was introduced in a handful of American cities. Many interviews trace the beginnings of the modern freedom to marry movement to the 1990s. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Hawaii responded seriously to an ad hoc marriage lawsuit for the first time ever and suggested the potential validity of the lawsuit, arguing that the denial of marriage to same-sex couples might be sex discrimination. The world’s first-ever trial on the freedom to marry followed in 1996, with Wolfson as co-counsel, and culminated in the first-ever victory affirming same-sex couples’ freedom to marry. While Wolfson rallied the movement to work for

the freedom to marry, anti-gay forces in Washington, D.C. successfully enacted the so-called Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. The vast majority of the interviews, however, focus on the post-2003 era and the work specific to Freedom to Marry. Moreover, OHC and Freedom to Marry agreed that the essential work undertaken by individual and institutional partners of Freedom to Marry (such as the ACLU, GLAD, Lambda Legal, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Haas, Jr. Fund, and the Gill Foundation) should also be covered in the project. Once the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell* in June 2015, the proposal was accepted and work began on the project.

After an initial period of further planning and discussions regarding who should be interviewed and for roughly how long, an initial list of interviewees was drafted and agreed upon. By December 2016, 23 interviews had been completed, totaling roughly 95 hours of recordings. Interviews lasted from two hours up to fourteen hours each. All interviews were recorded on video (except for one, which was audio-only) and all were transcribed in their entirety. Draft transcripts were reviewed first by OHC staff and then given to the interviewees for their review and approval. Most interviewees made only minimal edits to their transcripts and just a few seals or deletions of sensitive information were requested. Interviewee-approved transcripts were then reviewed by former Freedom to Marry staff to ensure that no sensitive information (about personnel matters or anonymous donors, for example) was revealed inadvertently. OHC next prepared final transcripts. Approved interview transcripts along with audio/video files have been cataloged and placed on deposit with The Bancroft Library. In addition, raw audio-files and completed transcripts have been placed on deposit with the Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, the official repository for the Freedom to Marry organizational records.

The collected interviews tell a remarkable story of social change, the rate of which was rapid (although spanning more than four decades), and the reach profound. Historians of social justice and social movements, politics and policy, and law and jurisprudence will surely pore over the freedom to marry movement and Freedom to Marry's role in that for explanations of how and why this change occurred, and how it could happen so rapidly and completely. Future generations will ask: What explains such a profound transformation of public opinion and law, particularly in an era where opinions seem more calcified than malleable? What strategies and mechanisms, people and organizations played the most important roles in changing the minds of so many people so profoundly in the span of less than a generation? Having witnessed and participated in this change, we—our generation—had an obligation to record the thoughts, ideas, debates, actions, strategies, setbacks, and successes of this movement in the most complete, thoughtful, and serious manner possible. Alongside the archived written documents and the media of the freedom to marry movement, this oral history project preserves those personal accounts so that future generations might gain insight into the true nature of change.

Martin Meeker  
Charles B. Faulhaber Director  
Oral History Center  
The Bancroft Library

December 2016

## **Freedom to Marry Oral History Project Interviews**

Richard Carlbom, “Richard Carlbom on the Minnesota Campaign and Field Organizing at Freedom to Marry.”

Barbara Cox, “Barbara Cox on Marriage Law and the Governance of Freedom to Marry.”

Michael Crawford, “Michael Crawford on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Scott Davenport, “Scott Davenport on Administration and Operations at Freedom to Marry.”

Tyler Deaton, “Tyler Deaton on the New Hampshire Campaign and Securing Republican Support for the Freedom to Marry.”

Jo Deutsch, “Jo Deutsch and the Federal Campaign.”

Sean Eldridge, “Sean Eldridge on Politics, Communications, and the Freedom to Marry.”

James Esseks, “James Esseks on the Legal Strategy, the ACLU, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Kate Kendell, “Kate Kendell on the Legal Strategy, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Harry Knox, “Harry Knox on the Early Years of Freedom to Marry.”

Amanda McLain-Snipes, “Amanda McLain-Snipes on Bringing the Freedom to Marry to Oklahoma, Texas, and the Deep South.”

Matt McTighe, “Matt McTighe on the Marriage Campaigns in Massachusetts and Maine.”

Amy Mello, “Amy Mello and Field Organizing in Freedom to Marry.”

John Newsome, “John Newsome on And Marriage for All.”

Kevin Nix, “Kevin Nix on Media and Public Relations in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Bill Smith, “Bill Smith on Political Operations in the Fight to Win the Freedom to Marry.”

Marc Solomon, “Marc Solomon on Politics and Political Organizing in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Anne Stanback, “Anne Stanback on the Connecticut Campaign and Freedom to Marry’s Board of Directors.”

Tim Sweeney, “Tim Sweeney on Foundations and the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Cameron Tolle, “Cameron Tolle on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Thomas Wheatley, “Thomas Wheatley on Field Organizing with Freedom to Marry.”

Evan Wolfson, “Evan Wolfson on the Leadership of the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Thalia Zepatos, “Thalia Zepatos on Research and Messaging in Freedom to Marry.”

## Interview 1: May 5, 2016

01-00:00:20

Bailey: Today is May 5, actually, 2016. This is Brad Bailey interviewing John Newsome for the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project, and we're here at the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library in Berkeley, California. So let's get started. All interviews we begin the same way: tell me your name, when, and where you were born.

01-00:00:41

Newsome: My name is John Newsome. I was born in 1972 in Washington, DC.

01-00:00:47

Bailey: Okay. And so tell me a little bit about the type of family you were born into, and then what kind of work your parents did, and where'd they come from.

01-00:00:56

Newsome: Sure. So my mother was an English professor at the University of DC. My father was a lawyer. My mother was from just outside of Chicago, from an upper middle class black and Jewish suburb. And my father was from a very poor family in Dallas, and they moved to Eastland, Texas when his parents separated.

01-00:01:25

Bailey: Oh, wow. And you said you were born in Chicago?

01-00:01:30

Newsome: Born in DC.

01-00:01:31

Bailey: Sorry, born in DC. And how many years before your parents met before they moved to Washington, DC.?

01-00:01:38

Newsome: Many years. So they met in Chicago in the late fifties, maybe early sixties, lived in the Bay Area for many years. My mother worked for the school district as an assistant to the superintendent, and my dad was at Boalt, and then at Hastings. And they moved to DC in the late sixties, early seventies.

01-00:01:58

Bailey: Okay, and so essentially they would be, I guess, considered middle class, or upper middle class. What was your upbringing like?

01-00:02:08

Newsome: My upbringing was complicated. So while my mother was raised upper middle class, which was unusual for a black family in the thirties, when she was born, and my father was raised very, very poor, and joined the military as a way to get the GI Bill and go to college. They had very different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds, and so I think, in hindsight, it was a tremendous achievement that he went to college, went to law school. He

eventually succumbed to alcoholism, and there was a whole downward spiral, and they divorced, and by the time I was a kid we were struggling, and so socioeconomically, upper middle class; economically, barely getting by. We didn't have a car until I was sixteen. There were times we didn't have food. So a very complicated situation.

01-00:03:05

Bailey:

And what area of Washington, DC did you grow up in?

01-00:03:08

Newsome:

Just outside [of DC, in] the Maryland suburbs. So my parents moved to Montgomery County because the schools were good, and public, and that was important to them.

01-00:03:16

Bailey:

And can you sort of describe to me the demographic sort of breakdown of Montgomery County, and what type of school did you go to, and what type of neighborhood did you grow up in?

01-00:03:28

Newsome:

Sure. So, very much to their credit, they moved to a mixed neighborhood, like the one my mother had grown up in, so at that time a predominantly Jewish neighborhood with a probably 20, 30 percent black population, and we were districted into an explicitly multicultural elementary school that in the mid-seventies was doing multicultural dinners, and the year after I started kindergarten created a Spanish immersion program. My mother was one of the founders. And so I spent my elementary years, one through four, in full-time Spanish instruction. It was a very interesting, progressive school, long before those things were the norm.

01-00:04:22

Bailey:

And so what year was this basically around?

01-00:04:25

Newsome:

I started kindergarten probably in '77, '76, '77, somewhere in there.

01-00:04:30

Bailey:

And so how did that inform your early views on race?

01-00:04:34

Newsome:

So, in hindsight, I think my perspective is very rooted in the multicultural exposure that I had then. I, in many ways, identified more with Latino culture than I did with black culture for a long time. That was taught explicitly to me, whereas black culture was something that was in the ether and in my family but wasn't something that I was so explicitly exposed to. I was also in a very Jewish community, so identified closely with my Jewish friends. And then ended up taking karate as I approached middle school, and so I was a hodgepodge of all of these different identities, and still am in some ways.

01-00:05:29

Bailey:

But Washington, DC also has a huge, large African American demographic, and so how did you interact, then, with that demographic, especially once you went to the city and sort of interacted with those populations more, as you were growing up?

01-00:05:44

Newsome:

I had a very complex interaction with black community growing up. So my parents were very connected to black culture and community, in ways that I didn't fully understand until I got much older. I learned just before my father died that he had been the vice president of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] at Howard when he was in law school, and my mother had chosen to teach at the University of DC because it was a black university, or a university that catered mostly to black students. I was surrounded by black faculty, black professionals from Howard, and were part of their lives. I took that for granted growing up, at the same time that I was in schools that had newly desegregated, and where a lot of the black students were trapped and ostracized, and I was less so in elementary school, absolutely so in middle school and high school, one of a few black middle class or upper middle class students. And so I experienced a lot of, in hindsight, trauma around being black, and being targeted for speaking white, or being more academic. I played the violin. I think people could tell that I was gay. And I didn't have a very positive experience.

01-00:07:01

Bailey:

And so we're going to briefly touch on that, but tell me about your father's role in SNCC, if you can remember.

01-00:07:09

Newsome:

You know, it's funny: I know very little. Both my parents followed civil rights and followed politics closely. My dad was—many people say, his colleagues say, my mother, family friends say—just a brilliant lawyer. He was certainly a brilliant man. He would read three, four newspapers a day, and had a stack of books he was reading simultaneously. Somewhere in there was a little bit of mania and mental illness that probably the alcohol was intended to blunt. So I knew that there was a deep interest in the law and civil rights, and just a general curiosity. It's only later that I learned that he had been involved in any way, and I didn't get much by way of detail. I know that he went to the March on Washington, as did my mother. I knew that he was in the famous class, the Howard class, law school class of '68 that produced Secretary of the Army, produced the first judge here, first law partner there, a lot of luminaries, former Mayor of DC Sharon Pratt Kelly. So I know they were part of a broader movement of black intelligencia, yeah, but his specific involvement, don't know. He did talk about riding the train down from New York down to DC, and then DC further south, and I don't know if this was him with a civil rights leader, or retelling a story, but that the trains would segregate in DC, and so at one point a civil rights leader was on the train, and the black porters,

the staff, rather than have the leader segregate and go to the colored car, hid the leader so they wouldn't endure that humiliation.

01-00:09:08

Bailey:

Wow. And so you said your mother taught at the University of DC Law School?

01-00:09:18

Newsome:

University of DC. She was an English professor. It is DC's public university. It, at that time, and I think still probably so, serves primarily students coming out of the DC public schools, and then a surprisingly large number of students coming from overseas, many from Africa. And so my impression—I haven't looked at the data—my impression was that the school was probably upwards of 90 percent black, and many of the students coming directly out of the DC public schools with what at that time was a DC public school level of preparation, which is not great.

01-00:09:58

Bailey:

And so your parents seemed, then, to balance themselves between sort of Washington, DC, and a, so to speak, black culture, and then the suburbs, which were much more mixed and much more multiracial, in a sense. But your own sort of balance with that, though, seemed to have been a bit challenging, so can you sort of express some of the challenges that—you touched on it briefly before, but some of the challenges that you faced? You said talking white, and playing violin. What type of issues did you have to deal with in order to find your own identity?

01-00:10:36

Newsome:

Well, my own day-to-day was heavily influenced by school, and the types of activities I gravitated towards. And that world was not very black, not very black middle class. My school was very segregated, very tracked. And I played the violin, and so I spent a lot of my music time in environments that didn't have a lot of black kids. I was in the DC Youth Orchestra, which was always mixed. But as I became more serious about the violin, and taking private lessons, and joining more elite ensembles, black students disappeared. And so I didn't really develop a strong sense of black identity until I went to college, and actually experienced a lot of conflict around being black, and internalized the messages I was getting from black students, from white students, that I wasn't black, I wasn't black enough, I didn't belong. It was pretty ugly.

01-00:11:42

Bailey:

Okay. And so let's get to high school. And where'd you go to high school?

01-00:11:48

Newsome:

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

01-00:11:50

Bailey:

And so did your experiences change a little bit? You mentioned that a lot didn't change until you got to college, but what were your experiences in high school like? And then let's talk about, I guess, being gay, or your sort of identity as gay, also. Did that come into also shape during high school?

01-00:12:10

Newsome:

It did. I am forever grateful to my high school, because I got a world-class education. It is, to this day, one of the best high schools in America. I'm very grateful. It was also incredibly segregated. I was perceived to be a talented violinist. I don't know how widely perceived I was to be smart, and so it wasn't until our PSAT scores came out, and the rankings for National Achievement Scholarship, or National Merit Scholarship, came out that people really took notice that I was more than just a violinist. And then, in some ways, it became more challenging, because people would notice me and say, "Well, you're getting recognition because you're black and affirmative action..." This was a very complex experience. And that continued even as I applied to college, people telling me, including friends, classmates, parents of classmates, when asking what schools I was applying to, to remind me to be sure to check out the University of Maryland, because I was applying to some pretty competitive schools, and I might not get in. Meanwhile, I was being recruited by all those schools. It was really toxic. But I didn't have enough context to understand everything that was going on, and I internalized a lot of it, and I felt ashamed to be black, and I distanced myself from black students, and didn't really make contact with that in a significant way, in a positive way, until I was in college. And some of that was related to class.

So because the neighboring school district, Prince George's County, allegedly—I should do the research; I'm only recounting hearsay from my family, but they allegedly were forced by court order to desegregate. And Montgomery County, the neighboring county, allegedly saw that and realized they'd better move quick, and so they quickly desegregated without a court order. And so my high school was mixed by virtue of busing, and middle school, as well. So middle school, I took a bus about forty-five minutes to an hour out of the neighborhood, past a closed middle school, maybe two, to a school that we were integrating, and then the high school had been, I think, a little more mixed to begin with. But there was a whole zoning scheme to add diversity and poor, and most of the black students in my high school were working class and poor, and most of the white students were incredibly wealthy. Chevy Chase, Maryland is one of the wealthiest ZIP codes in America. And there was a small sliver of people who lived right on the border, and there's a little neighborhood, Rock Creek Forest of – couldn't be more than a couple hundred houses, and we were literally on the border between Chevy Chase and what at the time was low-income housing in Silver Spring.

01-00:15:26

Bailey:

And so what year was that?

01-00:15:28  
Newsome: So I think the desegregation was probably '75 in PG, and somewhere around that for Montgomery, and I started in '77, so—

01-00:15:38  
Bailey: And PG, I guess, is Prince George's County, for—

01-00:15:41  
Newsome: Yes.

01-00:15:42  
Bailey: And so talk about your gay identity in high school. Can you sort of reference that a little bit, or sort of discuss when did you start becoming aware of it, and then what happened in high school to sort of help develop it? We'll get to college in a second.

01-00:15:57  
Newsome: Sure. So an early memory I have of being gay—and I wouldn't have named it as gay—of being different in honestly a positive way, I remember watching TV with my parents and seeing a black boy, around my age, maybe a little bit older—I was maybe seven, six—and he just had this sparkle. And I remember thinking, wow, how cool, he's got this energy about him, and he's like me, and feeling excited but also a little embarrassed, and surprised that no one else saw it. We're all watching this, and I'm thinking, we're the same, and thought that someone else would say something, and no one did. But I didn't experience him as gay, and I didn't experience him in any way negatively. I just saw this really neat energy, as different from later—I think it was around the *Bowers v. Hardwick* [1986] decision, and there were several other points along the way when I was watching the news, and watching gay men talk about being gay, or the AIDS epidemic, and feeling discomfort watching them on TV, and not relating to them, knowing that they were considered stigmatized, and wanting as much distance from them as possible.

01-00:17:24  
Bailey: And so how old were you when you saw the young man on television?

01-00:17:27  
Newsome: I was probably six or seven.

01-00:17:28  
Bailey: Six or seven. And then I think *Bowers v. Hardwick* was '86, correct?

01-00:17:36  
Newsome: I think you're probably right. I think it's probably '86, but I'm not sure. But yeah, I was by then in high school, and had more context. I'd been, starting when I went to seventh grade is when I went from my neighborhood school and was bused across town to the middle school that was being desegregated in hindsight. And that school was much more affluent than the elementary school I had gone to. And yet, I ran for class president and won, and was popular to begin with. And then my popularity started to wane, as I think

people realized that I was gay, or realized there was something about me. And maybe I wasn't fun, I don't know, but my sense is that, if I think about the messages I was getting, there was a little bit of friction around being black and nerdy and smart and violinist, and with gay subtext. And then that became more explicit. I had a couple of run-ins with other students that could be interpreted as—I wouldn't say gay-bashing, but where there was some element of gayness involved in physical attack. And then the most explicit, I was in eleventh grade and some classmates painted on the wall around our football field—it's called the Green Monster; it was probably three-story tall—painted "The class of 1990 says John Newsome is a fag," in letters that were a foot or two tall, each letter. And it happened over the weekend, and we came in on a Monday, and the administration called me into the office and said, "We're getting it painted over as quickly as possible." But that was really all they had to say, and then over the course of the day I had my favorite teacher pull me aside and say, "I'm so sorry that this happened to you, John. I know it's not true." And then another teacher, who was adored in the school, and later went on to become school leadership, pulls me aside and tells me who had done it and gossips with me, "Oh, so-and-so did it," but didn't report it and didn't do anything.

Well, and so that was a devastating experience, and my mother and I thought hard about me transferring and going to boarding school. I lost almost all of my friends. I had been popular in seventh grade, waning, and then when that happened I could count on one hand the people who really stood by me, and I'm forever grateful to them. And then recovered a bit, so by the time I graduated from high school people were coming to me and apologizing for lots of things. And interestingly, a lot of black students were saying how proud they were of me. In hindsight, I think how unfortunate that I endured a good ten, fifteen years of messaging that I didn't belong, and then once I'd crossed the finish line was getting support. That's not how that should work.

01-00:21:14

Bailey:

But it usually does. It usually does, unfortunately. And so quick question, though: did you ever confront those people that did it, either during high school or maybe later?

01-00:21:27

Newsome:

No, I never did. I would be interested to have that conversation with my classmates, because I think we all know who it was. He was a relatively popular kid. I don't know what that would look like. I don't know if I could do that, even to this day.

01-00:21:44

Bailey:

Really?

01-00:21:45

Newsome:

Yeah. But yeah, I think I still have healing to do around it, on the one hand. On the other hand, I think in some ways I've moved beyond it. I'm pretty sure

that my life has turned out better than his, so it just seems complicated. I did follow up with my school. I went back probably a year or two after graduating from college to talk to the new principal, and he was an African American man, and it was so nutty, because I recounted my experience, and it turned into a processing session for him, because his wife's best friend was maybe gay, and kind of closeted, and that was okay, he didn't find him too weird, but he got kind of uncomfortable. And I was like, ugh, [laughs] you are not the one to help address this in this school. So then, after that, I just dropped it.

01-00:22:49

Bailey: Wow. So let's talk about college, then. So where did you apply to college, and, well, just where did you go to college?

01-00:22:55

Newsome: I went to Stanford.

01-00:22:56

Bailey: Okay. And so that must've been a big change, then. I guess you didn't want to stay East Coast?

01-00:23:03

Newsome: So it is relevant why I went to Stanford and not elsewhere. Some places I visited and felt that they weren't as much of a fit, just for culture. I was intimidated by the wall of alums at Yale, dating back to the French and Indian War. I thought, well, I'm not going to be relevant here at all, so I don't need to do this. And I went to Northwestern, and they'd had a prospective weekend for black students, and I spent the entire weekend only meeting black students, and I thought, well, this is crazy, because I know the school isn't exclusively black, so why am I only seeing black people? And the very first day they had an info session where they explained to us what the criteria were for admission, and reassured us that you didn't have to be that accomplished to get into Northwestern, that so-and-so over here, he got into Northwestern, he had a 2.4. And I was like, "Okay, well, I've only seen black people, and clearly you don't value people's accomplishments, so I'm out." And I didn't feel that way about Stanford. I felt like Stanford was an overtly multiracial environment. And when they booked me into the black residence for admit weekend, I went to the director of admissions and said, "No way am I doing this. I want to have a holistic experience." And she got it immediately, and she was apologetic. And that helped convince me that it was a good place for me.

01-00:24:40

Bailey: Okay, great. And so what was your experience like at Stanford once you got there? How did you feel, I guess, during those four years there?

01-00:24:48

Newsome: My first year was tough. I had a roommate who was—I experienced him at the time as immature and kind of bigoted. We ran into each other a few years later and mended fences. He was young. He was young and insecure, and I was too, in different ways. But as a result, I moved out of my freshman dorm

and into another dorm, so I had a lot of instability freshman year. On the other hand, I met really great people. It's the first time I was in a likeminded black community, and realized, oh, I guess I am black, and I do have strong cultural connections and ties, and that was really affirming. And it's the first time that I met openly gay people who I identified with, and so by the end of freshman year I came out. I came out the day after my birthday, so June 11, and it was, I think, the last day of classes, and got a big hug from my RA [Resident Advisor]. And it proved to be, the following three years, a really great environment to be me, and to integrate the pieces of myself that were black and gay and political and all of that.

01-00:26:09

Bailey:

And so how did that news come to your parents then that summer after your freshman year? Did you tell them immediately, or did you wait?

01-00:26:19

Newsome:

So I came out June 11 and I moved home June 13, something ridiculous. And I had a job teaching at a summer camp, second grade, or camp counseling, I guess, and decided to join a coming out group, SMYAL [Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders], in DC. And I found them, I think, through the *Washington Blade*, and I'm not sure how I found the *Blade*; probably Lambda Rising, a gay bookstore. But within a couple weeks my mother found a copy of the *Blade* under my bed, and she asked me if I was a homosexual—not my favorite word—and whether this new group I was going to on Saturdays was for homosexuals, and I said yes. And then she asked a series of really, in hindsight, funny questions. And my mother, she was an academic, and she was kind of quirky, and everything was said deadpan, but one of the things she asked—and I feel like she asked this while she was driving me to the summer camp where I was working—was whether I was a child molester. And in hindsight I have to laugh, because if you think I'm a child molester do you really want to drop me off at summer camp? [laughter] So she was really trying to make sense of my being queer. In hindsight, I had a lot of poise for someone who was newly out. I kind of decided that I was doing this, and I was going to do my best to support her through her process, but didn't really back down. And we'd wanted to see *Les Mis* or *Phantom*, I'm not sure which one. We'd been planning to see it for years. And I insisted on bringing my new boyfriend, and she hated that, but I was like, "He's coming." She off and on threatened to cut me off, and didn't want to pay for school, and I thought, well—I called Stanford and was like, "Just so you know, this might happen, so what's plan B?" So I was really self-possessed in a way that surprises me today.

And then, my mother was an amazing woman. I think for her the real issue was she had endured such a trial with my father, and she wanted my life to be perfect, and easy, and had invested so much in that. And I think for her, me coming out jeopardized that vision. But she did some work on her own. We didn't talk much about it, but she joined PFLAG [Parents and Friends of

Lesbians and Gays], and when she came out for my college graduation I was very strident, and said, “We gays have organized our own little graduation theme, and we’re wearing hats and balloons, and we have a graduation event for ourselves, and you can come or you can not come.” [laughter] And she’s like, “Oh no, I’ll come.” And she came, and she gave out cookies, and she continued down that path. And the week before she died—I moved home in ’98 because she was sick, and she died in February of ’99, and the week before she died we went to a PFLAG lunch together, and she clapped louder and harder than anybody. So she went on a real journey, and I’m really proud of her.

01-00:29:58

Bailey:

So what about your father? During that summer, did you inform him?

01-00:30:04

Newsome:

No. [laughs] So they separated when I was about six, and then my mother and I moved out of the house and lived with another family, and he stayed in the house. And by that point he’d been disbarred for a combination of the drinking and stealing money from clients, so he was not practicing [law]. And my mother couldn’t afford to rent rooms in someone else’s house and pay the mortgage and everything else, and so she had to make choices about what to pay. And so she paid the mortgage, she paid the electric bill. She couldn’t pay gas, which was heat, and she couldn’t buy food for two houses. And so when I stayed with my father, we had potatoes. And so I know how to make potatoes lots of different ways. And we boiled water for baths, and we used the oven for heat, and we’d run to the bedrooms, or run to the bathroom, where there wasn’t heat. And to me, it felt like a game. The divorce was finalized. We moved out of the other people’s house and back into our house, and my father moved into the basement. And so we had this crazy situation with the troll in the basement, who was my dad. My mother and I lived on the top floor. And then things got super crazy, and lots of conflict, lots of violence, and eventually escalated to a point where—I don’t think it was intentioned to do serious harm, but my father bashed my mother’s head into the dishwasher and cracked it open, and I called the police, and he was banished from the house, and only came back on Christmas Eve every year, where he wasn’t allowed past the kitchen. He could go to the bathroom, but he wasn’t allowed further in the house than that.

01-00:32:10

Bailey:

So in Stanford I guess you didn’t talk to him, really, or see him pretty much during that entire time, or did you?

01-00:32:17

Newsome:

So he was always a prolific letter writer, so he would write letters, and then I would see him once, twice a year in high school, and then I don’t know how much I saw him during college—maybe not at all, maybe once or twice—and then he came out to graduation. And that was pretty much our rhythm until my mother died, and then after that we had a lot more conflict because we had

a house in common, and so there were lawsuits and drama. And then he got sick, and I'm an only child, and I was, at that point, forty, and had done a lot of reflection, and had settled the house, and could really help him through his care and transition.

01-00:33:14

Bailey: Okay. And so after college—well, so basically I guess when he came out to your graduation, by that time he'd sort of known you were gay.

01-00:33:23

Newsome: No, [he] still didn't know I was gay. So—

01-00:33:25

Bailey: Even at the gay graduation, or the—?

01-00:33:28

Newsome: We didn't have much of a relationship, so I didn't do much to tell him what was going on when. He came to the minimum set of events. He came to the day of graduation. He came to the departmental graduation. I think that's it. So he wasn't engaged. It didn't even occur to me until you asked the question. We were living parallel lives, but yeah, we were at graduation. My mother was experiencing my whole gay life. My father was seeing none of it. And it wasn't intentional. I wasn't deliberately cutting him out of my gay life; I was cutting him out of my entire life. So I eventually came out to him in a letter. He had written a letter somewhere around '96 or '97 in which he intimated an apology for having attacked my mother. And I took that as an opportunity to just put everything on the table. And so it was supposed to be a coming out letter, and it ended up being a purge, the entire relationship. And by the time I got to the coming out part I was like, well, this is easy. The stuff we really have to talk about is the violence and the craziness. And then his response was solely focused on the coming out, kind of buried the lead around everything else. And his reaction was, "It's fine that you're gay, just don't tell anybody." And by that point I'd been out, and was doing media interviews, and it was like, okay, well, let's see how that works.

01-00:35:16

Bailey: So let's sort of move then to the activism aspect, or the early activism aspect. You mentioned that you were doing interviews, media interviews. What were those for?

01-00:35:30

Newsome: Sure. So after coming out freshman year of college, I came back to campus and was semi-out, so I was out within the community, worked as a volunteer at the LGBT center. I guess I was on staff at the center, but still wasn't really out. And because my family had lived in California, we had family friends, and so I didn't want to be publicly out. And so the student newspaper, the *Daily*, came and did an interview on background about gay life at Stanford. And when the article came out, they quoted me on the record, and so I was outed in the school paper, and at that point I was like, well, I guess I'm out.

And I think very shortly after there was a religious conservative on campus, a conversion advocate, gay conversion therapy, and so we organized a carnival, and we said, “Well, if you’re going to come and spread this freakish lunacy, we’re going to have freak show carnival and welcome you, rather than a picket,” and it was fun and great. And so that was the beginning of [my] activism, with a pretty amazing cast of characters. This was during the peak of Queer Nation and ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power], and there was a lot of intersection between students on campus and grad students and folks working in the community, and so we learned a lot and collaborated and borrowed from that universe, and so that was my first exposure to activism.

01-00:36:57

Bailey:

So the encompassing of the activism that you did at Stanford was basically what? With what you just said or what?

01-00:37:11

Newsome:

That was the beginning. That was my first experiences as an activist, and I continued to do activism through college, and have been an inconsistent activist ever since. I don’t identify as an activist. I got my first taste in college. And then I wouldn’t even say I did much activism until after business school. I worked in social justice, but I wasn’t an activist. So I worked at Stanford for a couple of years, supporting student groups. I did a little work on the [No on] Prop 187 campaign, but still didn’t do it from an activist standpoint; I did it from more of a policy advocacy standpoint. I would say I identify more as an advocate than as an activist.

01-00:38:04

Bailey:

So when was your time working with student groups right after Stanford? Was that after graduation, or what was the timeline there?

01-00:38:13

Newsome:

First two years after graduation. So I graduated in ’94. I worked at the Public Service Center for two years, in ’94 to ’96.

01-00:38:18

Bailey:

All right, great. And so a Public Service Center at Stanford.

01-00:38:20

Newsome:

At Stanford.

01-00:38:20

Bailey:

Okay. And so can you talk to me about that period then? You said you worked with Prop 187. What is 187, for the record?

01-00:38:27

Newsome:

Prop 187 was an initiative to bar undocumented immigrants from accessing services like basic health services. I think it probably attempted to bar access to education. I don’t remember what else. It was gross. It passed. It was devastating, overridden by the federal government, for the most part.

01-00:38:51

Bailey: What year was this?

01-00:38:52

Newsome: This was '94.

01-00:38:53

Bailey: Ninety-four, okay. So basically the same year you graduated from—

01-00:38:56

Newsome: Same year that I graduated.

01-00:38:56

Bailey: —from college. And so basically for those two years you worked on Prop 187, and what other issues at the Public Policy Center?

01-00:39:05

Newsome: So I worked with student groups who were doing mostly community service projects, and helping them think about the rigor of the program design, the relationship with community, the training provided to volunteers. My role was really created as a result of a conversation between the president of the university and the mayor of East Palo Alto, because Stanford has a long history in East Palo Alto of creating new volunteer programs, tutoring programs. A well-intentioned college dorm, starts it on week one. Students form relationships with cute third graders. They get to midterms, they quit, rinse and repeat year after year. And so the then mayor said to the president, “If you all don’t clean up your act, we’re going to throw all of Stanford’s programs out of our city.” And so my job was to work with students and faculty and community and alums to really understand what it means to be a good partner, and to build programs that were as respectful and rigorous and impactful as possible, which is actually what I do to this day.

01-00:40:22

Bailey: So after the Public Policy Center, what was your next step?

01-00:40:25

Newsome: I went from there to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, where I was the associate director. I was in that role for six months. It was not a fit. It was much more operational, and I’m not a great operations person. I’m much more of a strategy person. And then I went to the Center for Third World Organizing, where I was the development director, and I was there for over a year, and I was there when my mother got sick. And so I had already applied to business school, and knowing that I wanted to stay in the sector but be a more effective leader or manager in the social sector, but my mother got sick. I deferred, moved to DC, randomly, at the same time that Congresswoman Barbara Lee had gone to DC to work on the Hill, and applied and became her press secretary. So, happenstance that I ended up working for her. And my mother died about nine months after I got to DC. She was the reason I was there, and so I stayed in the job until it was time to come back to school, and then I went to Stanford.

01-00:41:49

Bailey: Okay, for business school.

01-00:41:50

Newsome: For business school.

01-00:41:51

Bailey: For business school. And so what year did you graduate from Stanford for business school?

01-00:41:55

Newsome: Oh-one.

01-00:41:55

Bailey: Oh-one. All right, so tell me then about your activism between '01 and then '04, I think, when you started working around the Civil Marriage Collaborative.

[brief interruption; not transcribed]

01-00:42:35

Newsome: So I was working in management consulting for nonprofits, with a variety of mostly education reform organizations.

01-00:42:43

Bailey: And so in that period of time, was your activism sort of informed, or was it sort of—because I'm trying to understand what led up to sort of working with the Civil Marriage Collaborative in 2004. What led up to working for them?

01-00:42:57

Newsome: That's a really good question. So I had met Evan Wolfson somewhere around '99, on Fire Island, at, I think, Andy Tobias's house, and we became friends. He became a mentor, and still very much so to this day. And at some point, that summer or after, I remember him talking about the Hawaii case, and that marriage was the next fight. And I remember thinking, that's ridiculous, [laughs] and not a priority for me, so have at it. And obviously, he was right. And we stayed in touch. And I think I started And Castro For All before I joined the Civil Marriage Collaborative Advisors. So, important to add what prompted me to reignite activism. So a friend of mine was working at a bar in San Francisco called Badlands.

01-00:44:06

Bailey: Sorry, and what year was this?

01-00:44:07

Newsome: This is 2004. And he thought he had noticed a pattern of race and gender discrimination in hiring and in service, and he told a group of friends over brunch, and we encouraged him to report it, and we sort of left it at that. And he tried, and got nowhere, and it just felt like this lingering stain. And so we decided to launch a campaign to educate the community that this was going

on, as a way to hopefully spur some accountability. That turned into a two-year campaign of collecting stories and filing complaints with the city and with the state, and that culminated in a settlement that I won't describe. And so I think as a result of that work I became more of an activist, and I think as Civil Marriage Collaborative was looking for people who were sitting at the intersection of LGBT advocacy and race and inclusion, I think Evan and the Collaborative reached out to see if I would join as an advisor.

01-00:45:23

Bailey: Okay, and so, for the record, Evan Wolfson is who?

01-00:45:29

Newsome: Evan Wolfson worked at Lambda. He litigated the Boy Scouts case. He is one of our great LGBT heroes, and went on to found Freedom to Marry.

01-00:45:41

Bailey: Okay. And so basically you started, or essentially you worked with the sort of starting or founding of And Castro For All. And so you say the resolution for the Badlands bar was you weren't happy with it? What were your thoughts about the settlement for it?

01-00:45:58

Newsome: I haven't stopped to think about it in a while, so how do I feel about it today? I guess I still feel mixed about it. It was the first case of its kind, so as far as we could find no one had used statutes for antidiscrimination in accommodations. So you can't be barred from entering a bar or restaurant on the basis of race and protected categories. That's what a lot of the sit-ins in the sixties were about, right? There were no cases that had been prosecuted where people had been barred admission that we could find. And San Francisco's human rights ordinance is even more explicit about prohibiting discrimination using multiple forms of ID, which is a way that bars in the LGBT community in particular had targeted African Americans, Asian Americans. So the San Francisco ordinance said you explicitly cannot require multiple forms of ID. And at that time, Badlands had a stated policy, and posted, that they could ask for multiple forms of ID. And one of the allegations was that, and there were several reports of them asking for multiple forms of ID as a means to racially profile. How did I end up on this?

01-00:47:19

Bailey: I just sort of wanted to understand what the Badlands case was about, and sort of the resolution of it, in a sense. And so let's get back to—and so at that point—

01-00:47:28

Newsome: Well, so thirty seconds on the resolution. So we filed complaints with the Human Rights Commission because the city's law was seemingly being violated. The Commission did an initial investigation, ruled in our favor. Then we went to mediation. The city never issued a final finding, because we mediated a settlement. We'd also filed a complaint with the state Alcohol and

Beverage Control Board, which issues licenses. They reissued Badlands' license with restrictions. I think the restrictions are confidential. I'm not sure the [Alcohol and Beverage Control Board] settlement itself is confidential, and it's an unprecedented settlement using the Human Rights Commission and the ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control], and we would have loved to have seen maybe more and different.

01-00:48:15

Bailey:

So what did you learn from that experience?

01-00:48:19

Newsome:

I learned how to organize across communities. So we spent a year before launching a boycott of meeting with community groups, mostly locally, but also national groups, to build a coalition and a consensus. A lot of African Americans had experienced discrimination, not just at that bar but all over the Castro, and so wanted immediately to picket and organize. And we had a lot of allies who hadn't seen it and hadn't experienced it and weren't ready. And so we spent a year building a fact base, and building will, and negotiating, and allowing the City to do its investigation and issue its finding. And it took that year for there to emerge more of a political consensus that something had to be done, because it didn't seem that there'd been enough of a remedy. So I learned a lot about that, a lot about collaboration, and we built a community of people who cared about these issues. And so that is what, once that had been resolved, enabled us [And Castro for All] to move on to issues like inclusive Employment Nondiscrimination Act, and then ultimately marriage equality.

01-00:49:33

Bailey:

Okay, so when did you start officially working with the Civil Marriage Collaborative?

01-00:49:43

Newsome:

So I was never employed either by And Castro For All or by CMC [Civil Marriage Collaborative] or any marriage group. So I continued to do management consulting through 2005, then went to the Oakland Public Schools. I was the executive officer for strategy. It was kind of a chief of staff role. So I was doing that when I started at the Civil Marriage Collaborative, and then started my own consulting practice. And so I led parallel lives where I was doing my day job as a management consultant and my night job as a community advocate.

01-00:50:13

Bailey:

So And Castro For All really, I guess, started around that Badlands period, around 2004, and the Badlands sort of issue lasted, you said, until 2006. And how long did And Castro For All last after that period?

01-00:50:35

Newsome:

Yeah. It lasted through about 2009.

01-00:50:41

Bailey:

And your work also continued with them during that period.

01-00:50:43

Newsome:

And the work continued. So the Badlands campaign was a couple of years. Then we worked with the Horizons Foundation. We launched a scholarship fund for activists of color, and supported other community programming. We then became involved in the inclusive ENDA [Employment Non-Discrimination Act] campaign, because a lot of it was, I'll say, directed at leader Pelosi, because she was our home leader. But there was also a whole Hill strategy. And watching from afar, it seemed pretty clear that even our national groups were wrestling with how best to approach a Hill advocacy strategy. And as someone who'd worked on the Hill and still had friends on the Hill, and had, in some ways, more independence, I could ask questions and consult backchannels and try to find out, well, what's really going on in the Hill right now, and what should we be doing strategically, and so worked more closely than I would've ever expected as just a very, very small grassroots organization, with folks like Kate [Kendell]. I'd gotten to know Kate Kendell because of the And Castro For All Badlands campaign, but Kate and Mara Keisling at NCTE [National Center for Transgender Equality], and Masen Davis at Transgender Law Center. So really got to know and work with many of those folks.

01-00:52:21

Bailey:

And so can you give me sort of a brief—what year was the ENDA campaign?

01-00:52:26

Newsome:

I think that was '08 when Congress was considering passing a non-inclusive Employment Nondiscrimination Act.

01-00:52:34

Bailey:

And so can you give me just sort of the brief background for the record of what the ENDA act is, and how important it was to sort of the gay rights movement?

01-00:52:47

Newsome:

Sure. So, to this day, I think we don't have employment protections in some thirty-odd states, and there was an attempt to introduce Congressional legislation at the House level, at least, to protect LGBT people from employment discrimination. There was a rift within the LGBT leadership between those who believed we might get a lesbian and gay, maybe LGB bill through, and so believed that we should take that, [laughs] and those who believed that any legislation had to include gender identity and expression. And HRC [Human Rights Campaign] went one way, and everyone else went the other way. But HRC had so much clout and muscle on the Hill, and, candidly, the rest of the community did not have a Hill presence, and so some of us were watching from afar thinking, wow, the rest of the community is trying to organize on the Hill and is doing it, in some ways, for the first time. And so that's how I became involved. I was one of those people watching

from afar and calling my friends on the Hill and saying, “What the hell is going on?” And my friends were saying, “We have activists coming in here who’ve never been in here, and they’re yelling at us, and they’re threatening us, and they don’t know how to do this.” And so I would backchannel that back to people and say, “Hey, folks, we need a much better Hill strategy than this,” and “Do you have someone on the inside,” and “Are we doing vote counts?” And so that was the story there. Ultimately, the non-inclusive bill, I think, passed the House, but the president was George W. Bush. He was never going to pass a bill. I don’t think it even made it through the Senate. Whether it did or didn’t, it died, and I think it’s a good question whether it was worth the fight, and we still haven’t seen federal employment non-discrimination. There’s still many of us who feel the community is divided as a result, and are mistrustful of HRC.

01-00:54:52

Bailey:

Okay. And so we’re going to touch on that in a little bit, because I’m curious about HRC’s role with the gay community, and how it sort of conflicts with—I guess you can discuss that. Why are you distrustful with HRC? Or why, at that point, were you distrustful with HRC?

01-00:55:09

Newsome:

So I should say when I worked on the Hill, I was a press secretary, but I also had an issue portfolio. I had the Judiciary Committee, so I had civil rights, I had LGBT rights, I had HIV and AIDS, issues that were really important to me. And so I worked with the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and I worked with HRC, and those two organizations were far and away the most effective, the most responsive. And so I came to the work with a lot of respect for HRC, and then I went out into the field and found that they didn’t have a reputation for collaborating. I watched other organizations build things and then HRC put its name on them. And then the ENDA campaign, HRC really went its own way, and wasn’t forthcoming about doing that with the rest of the community, literally had sat in meetings and said, “We’re with you and we’re working with you,” and then had literally done the opposite. And so we organized in San Francisco a massive boycott of the HRC dinner. I think one San Francisco elected official went.

01-00:56:30

Bailey:

What year was this?

01-00:56:32

Newsome:

This was ’08. The mayor of LA was supposed to be the keynote speaker, and Robert – Gabriel -- then Robert Holland, now Gabriel Holland, who is a proud and awesome labor organizer, mobilized the labor community in San Francisco, and the labor community contacted the LA labor community, and they contacted the mayor’s office, and the mayor of LA was not the keynote speaker. I think one Member of Congress showed up for the HRC dinner, and one San Francisco elected official, who was on HRC’s board. It was a massive walkout. So I think there was a real sense of betrayal in the community, and a

real backlash against HRC. And they haven't, even with changes in leadership, really done much to remedy that. And even most recently, there's a perception that they have claimed credit for work on marriage equality that— I think Evan Wolfson walks on water. I love Kate Kendall more than I can possibly express. There are people who have put in a tremendous amount of blood, sweat, and tears. And I'm very appreciative of—and this is as someone who is so far removed; you know, my part in this work has been miniscule, and I absolutely give credit to the legal team that litigated the case here at the Supreme Court, the city of San Francisco—credit where credit is due, but any sense of branding of successes, of over-attribution really troubles me. And I think HRC has done that in the past, and I think has run the risk of doing that in the marriage movement, as well.

01-00:58:42

Bailey:

All right, so I'm going to sort of move then to the marriage movement, and sort of try to understand what was your work like, then, with the marriage movement specifically during the ENDA campaign and during the Badlands Act. And sort of if you can just give me a brief synopsis of your work with it, I guess leading up to 2008 and then, of course, into Prop 8.

01-00:59:03

Newsome:

So the work with marriage equality?

01-00:59:04

Bailey:

Yeah.

01-00:59:05

Newsome:

So, somewhere around probably '05 or '06 I was invited to join the Civil Marriage Collaborative as an advisor. I was a community voice, I think, and a voice with stronger linkages in communities of color, hopefully also someone who works in strategy, and advised as the group of funders looked at the different policy opportunities, or policy challenges, political challenges rolling out, and made investments on a state-by-state basis in infrastructure, in education program, and campaign. And so did that right up until probably early 2008, and stepped off the advisory board. And then decided, independent of that, that we wanted to—we being And Castro For All—wanted to play a role in marriage equality education in light of the Cal Supreme Court's decision legalizing marriage equality, and fear that there might be a backlash. And so we launched a campaign. Let California Ring, graciously was willing to fund it. And so we created a program to enlist spokespeople and train them to speak to media effectively, did educational events, and really tried to create an infrastructure that could be responsive to a backlash.

01-01:01:03

Bailey:

And so Prop 8 sort of came into effect in what year?

01-01:01:07

Newsome:

Prop 8 was passed November of 2008, same year that Obama was elected president.

01-01:01:15

Bailey:

And so basically what was your role, then, in trying to prevent? When you heard that the legislation was coming about—and Civil Marriage Collaborative was in DC or California?

01-01:01:27

Newsome:

Civil Marriage Collaborative was, I guess you could say, based in New York, but part-time staffed. It was a coalition of funders who came together to make strategic investments on about a quarterly basis, in the hottest button opportunity or place. It's a way of collaborating that I had not seen this movement, or, frankly, any movement do, and was tremendous. And the meetings would happen all around the country, site visits to look at the organizing work, or the organizations. And in the scheme of things, pretty small investments, as an attempt to build infrastructure where it was most needed. One tension that Civil Marriage Collaborative had, and about which I have opinions, was a commitment to building infrastructure that's pretty exclusively committed to marriage equality, a concern that if the investments were too broad that they would dilute. And so build an infrastructure to fight for marriage equality, hope and plan for that infrastructure to benefit the movement more broadly, but really stay focused on marriage equality. And I think in some ways we built up a great infrastructure for marriage equality, and my fear was that it might go away and not benefit the broader movement. And that fear lingers as new fights emerge, and the organizations that were there, and the best leadership and the best systems, they aren't there to respond.

01-01:03:16

Bailey:

All right, no, no worries. And so can you tell me then, so Prop 8, you basically said, was essentially passed in 2008, but what was your work to try to prevent it from taking place? Like, how were you involved in that, and then who were you involved in that process with?

01-01:03:34

Newsome:

So I'm not sure what could've been done. So I'll try to describe what I think was going on prior to Prop 8. So we get a landmark ruling from the Cal Supreme Court, and people start getting married, and that's amazing. And then we realize that there's—we don't realize—it's clear, that there's opposition gathering signatures to put a proposition on the ballot to rescind this new right. And so there are two things happening: one is there's a campaign that's being developed to respond to Prop 8, to fight Prop 8. That is a political campaign. And I didn't actually have much involvement in it. It was led by Kate Kendell, Geoff Kors at Equality California, a group of CBO leaders, community leaders from across the state. They were really directing the Prop 8 response campaign. What I developed was a separate (c)(3) public

education campaign, and that was necessary for legal reasons. We were a (c)(3). It's also more consistent with that commitment to building long-term infrastructure that's not so campaign-driven. And so there was actually no collaboration and coordination between us and the Prop 8 campaign.

I was asked sometime in the summer if I would work on the Prop 8 campaign, and I got an email and a phone call asking if I would consider being a field director for the No On Prop 8 campaign, and that was the first sign for me that we probably weren't on track, because I think that was June, and June is really late to be hiring a field director for a massive statewide campaign. So that was concerning. And I'm not the right person to run a statewide field campaign. I'm smart enough about some things, but that's not my skill set. And so that, to me, was a giant red flag that we were looking really late and not in the right places.

01-01:05:54

Bailey:

But your work, though, was with And Marriage For All, correct?

01-01:05:57

Newsome:

Yes.

01-01:05:58

Bailey:

And so can you tell me about that?

01-01:06:00

Newsome:

Sure. So Andrea Shorter and I—and really, she led the operations—we laid out strategy where we would enlist African American LGBT couples and individuals as spokespeople, train them, and Let California Ring provided TA, so they could be spokespeople in the media, organize education events in partnership with clergy and community leaders, write op-ed pieces. And so a real effort to educate the California electorate, and the California public, about the importance of marriage equality. Again, we were (c)(3), so we couldn't speak to Prop 8, per se, but we had just received this right, it was an important right, and we knew that it was under threat. And so to educate people about the importance of marriage, and its sanctity in general.

01-01:07:03

Bailey:

In what year did And Marriage For All get underway?

01-01:07:11

Newsome:

And Marriage For All started, I would say, spring of 2008. So we had, in terms of a field operation, we had a head start on the Prop 8 campaign, in terms of starting to build out field.

01-01:07:26

Bailey:

And so this was essentially, though, focused in which areas, And Marriage For All? Where was the focus of And Marriage For All, specifically?

01-01:07:35

Newsome:

Geographic, or—?

01-01:07:35

Bailey: Geographic, yeah, sorry.

01-01:07:36

Newsome: Geographic was Sacramento through, I would say, San Jose. We had a cluster of leaders in Sacramento, many in the Bay Area, San Francisco, Oakland, and then we went down as far as San Jose.

01-01:07:51

Bailey: So no Central Valley area?

01-01:07:53

Newsome: Well, so technically there were a couple of organizations doing work in the African American community. There was one in LA, and then we were in Northern California. So technically we were everything from Sacramento to LA, but in reality I think the work was focused between Sacramento and San Jose.

01-01:08:13

Bailey: And so with regard to Prop 8, so essentially did you work in parallel to them with And Marriage For All? Because you were essentially educating African Americans about marriage equality while Prop 8 was also being campaigned in the state. So what was the overlap with those two campaigns, in a sense?

01-01:08:31

Newsome: What was the overlap? As a (c)(3) campaign, we [couldn't] coordinate with a political campaign, and didn't, but we did the kind of education that I would love to think causes people who are supporters of marriage equality to take note, and to mobilize opponents to think twice, and that ultimately in the aftermath of Prop 8's passage you see that many of the people who were involved through And Marriage For All are the same people who the media turned to after Prop 8 passed to ask them, well, what happened? There was this whole allegation that Prop 8 passed because of the black community and the Latino community and communities of color. And so media, while in many ways we had struggled to find, to ensure that folks of color were seen visibly as advocates for marriage equality, in much of 2008 after Prop 8 passes there's all this outreach to communities of color to try to understand, what's wrong with your communities, that people voted for this toxic proposition? And so many of the people we had trained were the people who got those calls, so in that sense I'd like to think that we [helped] —and they rightly said many of us are deeply committed and supportive, and there hasn't been enough engagement with and in communities of color, and there hasn't been enough investment. And people like Andrea Shorter went on to then work more deeply in the LGBT community as an LGBT person of color.

01-01:10:31

Bailey: So what then was the major impetus for really starting And Marriage For All to focus on the African American community? Like, what was the major goal of that? Because obviously it all hit the fan when Prop 8 passed, but what was

the major impetus in the beginning for even going with that group, or trying to educate or deal with that group with regard to marriage equality?

01-01:10:54

Newsome:

Well, African Americans are very much a part of the LGBT community, and so we're an important constituency, and benefit from marriage as much as, if not more so, than any other part of the LGBT community. Given our rates of poverty and marginalization, and higher rates, as I understand it, of parenting, marriage is an important protection. So it's a community that's heavily impacted, LGBT African Americans. There are African Americans who are very supportive, straight allies. There are many who had not had conversations, and so if you want to see a shift in culture you have to engage people. You have to ensure that the people who are deeply affected feel supported, are empowered to be advocates and spokespeople, and probably are the best people to reach across to straight allies: parents, friends, family. And so that needed to be an even bigger part of not just the ongoing community conversation, and still does need to be, but needed to be a much bigger part of the Prop 8 campaign conversation. As I said, I wasn't very involved in that campaign, but I certainly watched the campaign. And there wasn't enough work done to reach out to communities of color. There wasn't much work going on in Oakland.

So in my volunteer capacity, outside of the And Marriage For All campaign, I did a little bit of volunteering on the No On Prop 8 campaign, and went to the Oakland office. And the Oakland operation was nested in with a local Democratic Party operation, and there were a couple of people calling Oakland and Alameda County voters about Prop 8. And this is in one of the most progressive cities in the state, and yet we had a campaign headquarters at Market and [Noe] that was packed with people, and we had signage at Market and Octavia, and we had people walking around in circles at Market and Octavia, and nowhere near that visibility in Oakland and Alameda County. And so if you're trying to run a statewide campaign, where you actually need the progressive Bay Area to counteract more conservative pockets in the Central Valley and LA, you need to mobilize Oakland. You need to mobilize Alameda County. And that simply was not a part of the plan, or at least it wasn't part of the execution, and I saw that with my own eyes.

And that was hard. I can't say this strongly enough: I have so much respect and love for the people who worked on that campaign. They put in insane hours and heart and sweat and tears, and were incredibly resource-constrained, and not just during that campaign but from inception. To be successful, we have to invest in long-term capacity, in long-term infrastructure, and systems, and talent. We run our movement on shoestring organizations that look like neighborhood boys and girls clubs. The kinds of clients that I have, almost all of them, even at a neighborhood level, are bigger than our largest state organizations and some national organizations. It is criminal, and even worse in the aftermath of marriage equality where some of those organizations are

going away. Even with that said, we missed some real opportunities for engagement. And obviously, we won, and it's a tremendous victory. I worry that there are next chapters in the fight, and I want to ensure that we are better prepared for the next chapters, and not less well-prepared for the next chapters. And as we see anti-trans legislation roll out across the country, as we see trans women of color murdered, I want to ensure that we have the infrastructure to respond to those, as well.

[brief interruption; not transcribed]

01-01:16:56

Bailey:

All right, so let's sort of talk about around that period of time, 2008. Where did you go to sort of do this outreach? Was it churches? Was it homes? What type of places did you go to? And then we're going to talk about the messaging in a second.

01-01:17:18

Newsome:

So Andrea Shorter is probably in a better position to speak to this than I; I was a little more removed. But Andrea was, and maybe still is, co-chair of the Bayard Rustin Coalition, so she had a built-in network of African American leaders, and so she tapped that network to identify especially African American couples who would be good spokespeople for marriage equality work, and so, through those networks, identified a set of people who might benefit from message training, support, and might be deployed as advocates in their communities, and in communities across the region.

01-01:17:58

Bailey:

And can we talk about messaging, then, for a second? So what type of messaging was going on at that period, and then how did it transition to other models, like either love and commitment models or other type of models?

01-01:18:11

Newsome:

You know, I was not close enough to the messaging to know. Having said that, our friends at Let California Ring were super helpful at making messaging available. I think they really provide the backbone for the training, and then I think we played more of a role in the delivery. And then our friends at Fenton Communications also played a critical role in training people in speaking to press. So it made it much easier for folks like us to simply connect with people and deploy.

01-01:18:45

Bailey:

And so from Prop 8 to after that period, what happened? Just tell me what happened next during that period. So once it was passed, 2008, what did you do next?

01-01:19:01

Newsome:

So I went back to my day job, as a management consultant, and got a job opportunity in New York, and I moved. I think the cumulative effect of the Badlands campaign, which took so much out of me, and out of all of us, and

made what had been a home—and the Castro really had felt like a touchstone neighborhood for me—had turned it into a really problematic space with complex memories, and difficult to visit. And so my experience of the Castro had changed. My experience of the city had changed. The politics around the Badlands campaign were fascinating in some ways, but also really toxic in others, and seeing behind the curtain of San Francisco politics, and money, and power, and how that really worked was eye-opening, and discouraging. And if someone can say that coming from Capitol Hill – I just did not expect some of the things that we learned along the way. So that, and then the Prop 8 campaign, which was so disappointing. The result was so disappointing, and in some ways, the campaign, too. I think tremendous work [was] done, heroic effort, but gaps that we all felt, and felt deeply. I was done. And when I had the chance to move to New York, I took it, and I left, and, I think, made a break with activism and politics that I haven't reconnected.

01-01:20:59

Bailey:

And so what type of recent activism have you done, or I guess where are you at now, in a sense?

01-01:21:09

Newsome:

So I care deeply about justice issues, and that will never change. I think the best way for me to play a role is in my day job, as an advisor. I work with organizations that are doing, I think, some of the most important work in the world, and I think I can empathize, I think I can bring a set of weird analytic tools that nonprofits and community-based organizations usually don't avail themselves of, and I think I can be most effective as a consultant at this chapter, and build a sustainable life. That's still a struggle, but the emotional rollercoaster that is direct advocacy is too much for me at this stage of my life. That might change. I may swing back. Certainly Donald Trump compels me to do something this year.

01-01:22:26

Bailey:

And so what organizations are you working with? You mentioned organizations that you work with. I guess if you can give me a sample of just a couple of them.

01-01:22:36

Newsome:

Sure. So, including some in our community, so I worked with the Transgender Law Center on their strategic plan actually just before I moved to New York. I've worked with GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] Network on their strategy. Many of my clients sit at the intersection. They're not LGBT organizations. They're justice organizations. So San Francisco Foundation is a recent client. We've just worked with them on an equity strategy, increasing access to opportunity for especially poor folks and folks of color across the Bay Area, and that's work that really speaks to me. It clearly overlaps with the kind of work that And Castro For All was doing, and is very much informed by that work. Who would have thought that And Castro For All and And Marriage For All would inform the San Francisco Foundation's grant-making strategy?

But it does, and in some ways feels like a potentially more impactful way. If we can get more foundations to redirect their investment, you can build the kind of long-term capacity that I mentioned a bit ago. And so that's maybe not activism and advocacy in the traditional sense, but I think a really important part of the movement building that we need in order to sustain work long-term.

01-01:24:08

Bailey:

And so, lastly, what is your reaction then to the recent Supreme Court marriage decision that was passed last year? What were your thoughts leading up to the decision, and then once the decision was made what were your thoughts at that point?

01-01:24:30

Newsome:

I was very optimistic that the Court would rule in our favor, and so I wasn't surprised. I was surprised how moved I was when New York passed marriage equality, when the court ruled in California's favor, and then once marriage was the law of the land – was really surprised at the emotion I felt, because on some level I never believed it would really happen. I have an ex, a dear friend and an ex, who lives in Nebraska, and Nebraska has so few protections for LGBT people, and he called me after the decision and he couldn't make sense of it. It literally didn't compute. He asked whether it applied to Nebraska. [laughter] And it's not that he intellectually didn't get it, but the groundwork hadn't been laid, so that it was so completely foreign. It was out of context for him. And that made me so happy, that he had access to something that he never could imagine; but it also broke my heart, because he and lots of people have been deprived of so much for so long. And having access to the right doesn't ensure enjoyment of the right, and there's so much work to be done to build the cultural context and the political context so that people feel free to actually exercise the right. That feels like the important next chapter, and there'll be so many more chapters after this one. And we can't underestimate the work required at each of those steps. And I think my biggest fear is that those of us with access and privilege will take the successes and celebrate them and move on with our lives, and leave the other 70, 80 percent of our community behind.

01-01:26:57

Bailey:

Well, thank you very much. Thank you. Anything else you'd like to add?

01-01:27:05

Newsome:

No.

[End of Interview]