

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Kathy

COLLECTION: 4700.2114

IDENTIFICATION: Former high school teacher and coach; Longtime Louisiana State University employee

INTERVIEWERS: Hope McPhatter, Whitney Craig

SERIES: Baton Rouge's LGBTQ Community: Then and Now

INTERVIEW DATE: October 14, 2009

FOCUS DATES: 1970s-2009

ABSTRACT:

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Introduction; Kathy is fifty-six years old, has lived in Baton Rouge for twenty-six years, was born in South Louisiana; spent twenty-two years as a high school teacher and coach, has been employed at Louisiana State University for the last twelve years; has undergraduate and master's degrees; has five sibling, two step-brothers and many nieces and nephews; her mother is still living, biological father and step-father are deceased; was raised by her grandparents; she was involved with Friends for Life and other community organizations; didn't come to terms with her sexual orientation for a long time; first exposure to gays and lesbians in college; prejudice of the time led her to keep her feelings secret; dealing with her own homophobic issues, thinking she must be confused; slurs aimed at gay men and women; there wasn't gender androgyny back in the 1970s, there's much more crossover now, behavior and dress were different then; it was frightening knowing that her family would not accept her lifestyle; mother discouraged her from playing basketball in college and being a coach; her own tremendous fear that she was lesbian and did not want to be; was in graduate school when she had her first relationship with a female, still didn't consider herself lesbian; was frightened of fallout and made a pact with herself that she would try to live a straight life; had lots of friends in the heterosexual world; as she got older, she was very lonely, had no one to give her love to; was hard to have female friends without people suspecting they were lesbian; lost a friendship when a husband got jealous of her close relationship with his wife; a memory she has from her childhood, realizing that she would probably spend most of her life alone, and being very sad knowing she was different; lived for thirteen years in Thibodeaux, almost married a man who she loved, but she wasn't happy and knew she couldn't make him happy; would have liked to have had children; moved to Baton Rouge and met a wonderful friend who helped her through depression, suggested counselling; realizing she was lesbian but not knowing if she could live that life; would have been fired from her job if her orientation was known; came to terms with who she was in her later thirties or

early forties; regressing to teenage behavior, going to bars, drinking to deal with what she was going through; difficulty of meeting professional women in Baton Rouge; felt safer in New Orleans, dated some women there but long distance relationships were hard; difficult having relationships when families are unaccepting; process of coming out to her mother after her step-father's death, help from books and speaking with her gay step-brother; her mother took it well at first, but later started making snide comments; mother later admitted fears that Kathy would be unhappy and alone, that the lifestyle was hard for her to understand; her mother is better now, but she's had problems with other family members; discrimination is still prevalent, current partner has been told that she may not have lesbian friends visit her home; people who say they accept gays and lesbians but make derogatory comments; she still worries about openness because there's "a lot of rednecks around here"; incident of lesbian women being physically assaulted near Splash Nightclub; former Charlene's bar in the French Quarter took security measures and paid off the police to avoid harassment; vague memory of Stonewall Riots; news coverage of such incidents was skewed; even in San Francisco and California there's a lot of prejudice; Baton Rouge voters opposed being known as an accepting city; recalls large support for organizations like Friends for Life and the Human Rights Campaign by gay and straight citizens; event where attendees turned their backs to a film crew to avoid being on camera, film crew couldn't believe it; people can still be fired for their sexual orientation; feels that Baton Rouge has a don't ask, don't tell situation; people aren't as judgmental now, but there's more fanatical religious groups protesting in the public eye; she doesn't hide her orientation anymore, but will remain cautious as long as her mother is alive; at the high school where she worked, the principal, a nun, was very open-minded and had an openly gay man on the faculty; younger generation today embracing the term queer, which was so derogatory in her day; recalls first visit to a gay bar with friends, it was a smoke-filled dive with loud techno music; got more comfortable with subsequent visits; people travelling from a distance to go to Splash; incident in college when she and a group of friends went to a gay bar but part of the group was there to make fun of patrons; gathering places were bars or parties; great bars in New Orleans included Rubyfruit Jungle and Metropolitan Nightclub; lots of drinking, smoking, and drugs in gay bars; the Met was her all-time favorite place, she still has friends that she met there; greatest injustice is gays and lesbians not having the same civil rights as heterosexuals; was scary to see Proposition 8 pass in San Francisco; our country is affected by discriminatory religious factions; LSU does not offer partner benefits to same-sex couples; Kathy thanks interviewers for speaking with her; conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T3966)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 50 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 24 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: No internet posting. No last name given for privacy reasons.