

Ariana: Hello, today we are in the first floor of the “Glickman Library” at USM, in Portland, Maine. We’re in study room 1, it is 12PM on Wednesday, December 5th, 2018. My name is Ariana Wenger, A-R-I-A-N-A, W-E-N-G-E-R

Date, location, introduction

Johnna: I’m Johnna Ossie, J-O-H-N-N-A, O-S-S-I-E

Introduction

Sherry: And I’m Sherry Beck-Poland, S-H-E-R-R-Y, B-E-C-K hyphen, P-O-L-A-N-D.

Introduction

Ariana: Alright, Sherry do you mind telling us how old you are?

Question: Age

Sherry: I am 64 years old

Age

Ariana: And what are your preferred pronouns? Just so everyone knows.

Question: Pronouns

Sherry: They, them, theirs

Pronouns

Ariana: Okay, let’s see, do you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or something else?

Question: Sexuality

Sherry: Pretty much all of the above, but I would say lesbian is a hard word for my generation, because it was used as a bad, negative connotation, so I tend to go with gay.

Sexuality, Gay

Ariana: Okay, and you grew up in Western Maine, correct? What was that like for you growing up?

Background info, location growing up

Sherry: My mother was very fearful of who I was. I was the fourth of five children, in a very, I don't want to say conservative because there was not a lot of faith practices for us. My grandmother was Seventh-Adventist, that was the only church in town, but, in the local area. And, so it was very difficult. I played the part of being straight for many years out of being the good kid. I had older siblings that were being themselves, and, so I never felt like was myself. I felt like I was somebody other than.

Mother's concerns; Faith practices; Identity

Ariana: Yeah, was that difficult to hide that, who you were?

Question: identity

Sherry: I didn't know who I was, so it was, the struggle was more the gender issue. People thought I was very male, so, that was difficult for them to deal with, and just the, just the communication errors that occur when pronouns aren't even recognized. (laughter) You know, so, yeah that piece is more the difficult piece, playing the role of a straight female, my mother, my poor mother. I always use to say, my poor mother, always trying to get me to be a lady, and to this day I hate that word, lady. Because I couldn't be that, I didn't want to be that, and I wasn't going to be that. (laughter)

Gender identity

Johnna: So you knew you were gay from a young age?

Sherry: I didn't know I was gay, no. Actually I had, all my friends, once we grew up and we were opened up, we realized we were gay, my closest friends, and they live around here. I meet up with them once in awhile, but some came out and some didn't, because we were in that generation where within our town there's, it's not allowed. So, we didn't know the term when we, when I was a senior, I heard about two women making out in the back of a bus, and thought that was odd, thought that was different, laughed along with everybody else, teased along with everyone else. Until I went to college and had picked all my own gay roommates to live in my apartment, did I figure out that maybe I was too. (Laughter)

Ariana: So you said that your family wasn't very religious, but, did you attend church?

Sherry: We were, we were what we call drive-by kids. The neighbors, all our neighbors would drive by our house to go to church on Saturday mornings, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, so they would pick us up and we'd go. Our babysitter was, our grandmother was, but she had died when I was in my mother's womb, so I didn't know her. But, very much faith practice. It was very difficult because all the men in the family, was difficult for them to be Seventh-Adventist, because they needed to eat meat, they were deer hunters, they were farmers, and so that was a faith practice that was difficult.

Question: Sexuality

Friends; Sexuality realization

Question: Religion

Faith; Childhood, Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Johnna: Interesting, I also just want to interject, I forgot to say this in the beginning, but, just a reminder, you don't have to answer-

Disclaimer

Sherry: Right

Johnna: Any of the questions, and you can stop the interview anytime you want. At anytime we can be done.

Disclaimer

Sherry: Okay, thank you.

Johnna: Just want to make sure you know that.

Sherry: I am a pretty open book (laughter) as I said, I want people to understand the history because it still occurs, and people don't know, don't realize it happens. So I like to, you know-

Open book; Willing to share history

Johnna: Yeah

Sherry: Share what I know

Johnna: Awesome, great. So, just talking about church, when did you start feeling like you wanted to be involved in the church yourself? Or when did you feel a calling for that?

Question: Calling for church

Sherry: My first, I won't call her a girlfriend, she was a woman I followed. I had worked at Pineland Center, the state institution, for adults with developmental disabilities, and one of my friends, my best friends, had, was it. Her mother was a very

Friend; Baptist church; Accepting the Lord

devout Baptist up at Lincoln, Maine, which is north of Bangor, an hour north of Bangor. So, I followed her up north that way to go to work, and her mother prayed for me a lot, and prayed for me and invited me to go to church often, and finally I went. I accepted the Lord in a Baptist Church, May 18th, 1978. When I was driving home from a conference in Florida, and it was late at night, and there was a detour, and I didn't know which way to go, and I went "Oh Lord, I guess I'll just have to follow you, and trust you" and I went "ha, I believe in God!" (laughter). So that's when I realized church was important to me.

Johnna: Wow

Sherry: To learn about the Lord.

Ariana: So how long did you attend that church for?

Sherry: That church, probably three or four years.

Ariana: Nice

Sherry: It was a very conservative, Southern Baptist Church. Very, very conservative.

Ariana: So, you attended a church, and the pastor had told you to stop attending that church?

Sherry: Yep, this was, so I attended the Baptist church there, I moved down to Portland to go to school, and I attended the First Baptist Church here in town, and then I went to change in jobs and moving. I moved to Lewiston, and attended my now present wife's church, childhood church, up Methodist

Question: Timeline; Church

Time at Baptist church

Baptist church; Conservative

Question: Church; Pastor

Baptist church; Moving; Change of jobs; Wife; Methodist church; Fostering; Adopting

Church, it was very accepting. Then as we got started having kids, foster children, we wanted to try a neighborhood church, which was real close to our house. There was a lot of men there, and we walked in with our two baby boys, that we eventually adopted, two and three years old, but we walked in and the wives came up to us and said “This is a high testosterone church.” And we went “Good, our boys need that.”

(laughter)

Sherry: And didn't know, didn't know what that meant, but then the pastor came to our house, and told us that, you know, it was during the first vote, for gay rights, and he said “I know you're not being political, I know you're just coming for the right reasons, but, the, his powers in the church have told me you can't come to our church anymore.” So, what he didn't say the first time, the first time he said, “I don't see any, any victims here, I, you know everything's okay.” The next time he came, he said, “I told the men to get to know you” so one of the lead men got to know us, and invited us to his house, he and his wife and their daughter rushed up from, from Portland DHHS to help the communication between her very concrete father and us, and it turned out alright. He came to my son's birthday party, but he couldn't still, so, what ended up happening, that church ended up splitting. So the pastor didn't really believe that he should kick us out, but, didn't, but kind of did. I wasn't quite sure, so when we got kicked out of church I went to Seminary. I started Seminary. And because I have read the Bible a couple times, and I said “This isn't what I see in the Bible.” I see love and acceptance and Jesus standing up for people, that, to go into church, and, so I went to church, to that, to there. My

Pastor, leaving church; School, Seminary, Social Justice assignment, interview

advisor was a, was a gay man who was just wonderful, and my first Social Justice assignment was interviewing pastors, so I interviewed the pastor that kicked us out of church. We lasted about ten minutes (laughter). It was on power and control of the church, he's not gonna read my book, he's not gonna listen to me anymore, and that's enough, and get out. I said "That's fine." (Laughter) And so I wrote my paper on that, but yeah.

Johnna: Wow

Sherry: He was from Florida, the pastor when they split the church he moved more towards Turner, which is a very conservative, where almost near, next to where they have the redneck olympics. So very conservative redneck kind of area, which hunters and men like that would come to that church and, and they, they've been fine with their church. (laughter)

Pastor, church split

Johnna: Did you find a more open church to go to?

Question: New church

Sherry: We went back to our church, our loving church that loves us, and we love them. One of the first things that when we went to that church where there was probably the second week we went they handed us a brochure on homosexuality, and said "We're having a Bible study on homosexuality, we need you to come." (laughter) The Bible study, and there was a gay man there that had grown up in the church, his family was very supportive and very helpful,

Church, more supportive; Methodist church

so they were trying to help him find his place. He is now a pastor within the Methodist Church not ordained because it still doesn't allow, but he is working his way through to become a pastor when it all works out.

Johnna: Have you been at that church since then, or have you moved?

Question: Timeline; Church

Sherry: Pretty much, yep.

Johnna: How many years has that been now?

Question: Timeline, church

Sherry: Originally we started there 25 years ago, 26 years ago.

Timeline, church

Johnna: Wow

Sherry: Yeah, we've been together for 27 years

Timeline, wife

Johnna: So you got married at a Methodist church, was that in your church?

Question: Marriage; Methodist church

Sherry: Yeah, what happened was, the pastor, who was there was on sabbatical, she would have lost her job had I tried to do that with her permission. So she was on sabbatical, so I, we held a concert by Joe my son, and, oh, during that concert we got married. (laughter) So we kinda sneak, snuck into our church, and took advantage of that fact that I had a key to the church (laughter) and we had a big wedding, and we filled it with my family and her family, and, we invited about five friends because our families filled the church (laughter)

Pastor, sabbatical; Concert, wedding

Johnna: Wow, that's awesome

Sherry: So, and it was just when the law had changed, so everybody in Maine has the same year pretty much, when they were married.

Johnna: What year was that?

Sherry: 2013, yep, and so, yeah so we got married in July of 2013, the year it passed. I didn't work really hard on the first organization of planning the votes, but for the second one, I voted, I worked really hard, and my son who thought he was gay at the time, I don't know if he is, he's 18, hes figuring it out, he's almost 18. And he's going to a Baptist church now, so now he's straight because they told him how, what sex was like for men and I think it, you know he's just a nice kid that would, he loved us so much, and appreciated us so much for adopting him that he might have followed us being gay, and because we did so many things with Pride he had a lot of men that were gay examples, you know, so maybe he's really not gay. We told him it's okay to just fall in love with who you fall in love with (laughter) so, hes figuring that out.

Ariana: So, at your wedding were both families accepting and supportive?

Sherry: No not all, my nephew didn't come and my brother didn't come, and but their spouses came and their families came. I don't know if it was hot July, or, and I, my

Marriage equality law, Maine couples

Question: Year

Marriage, 2013; Son, Joe, questioning sexuality

Question: Wedding, support

Support; Nephew, brother

brother now has passed, and I could ask his family, but I never asked him why, and my nephew is, "I'm from Bethel, Maine and I went to Vermont to get my son a, to buy him a Lexus, and what did I see? A hispanic man and a black man up in Vermont, can you believe that?" So I'm thinking maybe he doesn't (laughter) accept everything about me. But, you know, that's, he's, you know, just, it's not that important. You know, he still loves me and I love him, and I helped raise him and you know, and so we deal with it.

Ariana: That's good

Johnna: So, you went to USM and Seminary, Seminary in Bangor, did you go to USM first and then Seminary after?

Sherry: I went, when I graduated from high school I went to connecticut for a two year degree in recreation therapy of recreation and leadership. Then, I went to Northern Maine, and worked, well I went to Pineland I went to Northern Maine to work. Then I went to UMO for awhile, and then that was just too long driving back and forth, taking classes, so I left that area and came down here, finished my Bachelor's degree, graduated with honors, and then went to Seminary after that.

Johnna: Wow, how long were you at Seminary for?

Sherry: What did it take me, about three years, I was just doing part-time, during

Question: Education; USM, Seminary

Education, recreation and leadership, UMO, USM, Seminary; Employment, Pineland

Question: Timeline, Seminary

Timeline; Employment; Kids

while I was still working and we had adopted the kids so

Johnna: Can you, so you were at USM when you came out, was that-

Question: Coming out, education

Johnna: Or were you in Connecticut?

Sherry: I came out to my family after I left USM, after I was, was secretly dating a person from my church, and then met another woman, and it's kind of secretly dating her for six years, and then when I met my partner 27 years ago, my wife 27 years ago is when I came out, because I felt like I finally found the right person. It wasn't just a girlfriend for fun, it was a serious relationship.

Wife

Johnna: Yeah

Sherry: So I came out to my sisters and they told my mother. Six months after I came out my mother came down with breast cancer, and I feel like that was the stress. Her small town, working in a factory was, was very stressful for her to think she raised a gay kid, she had done something wrong, and my father said "Ugh don't worry about her, she's just going through a phase." (laughter)

Coming out; Mother, ill, stress; Father's opinion

Johnna: Do you remember what year it was that you started being openly gay?

Question: Openly gay

Sherry: 27 years ago, so '91

Timeline

Johnna: Yeah, and what was it like being out in '91-

Question: Gay in '91

Sherry: In Lewiston, Maine it wasn't bad, you really had to be in the city or a town, I still have a friend that lives, that has a business up past, up past Bethel area, in the woods up there, and she still won't come out, and in (laughter) we went to the Oxford Fair two years ago, and there wasn't a democratic committee sign anywhere, but there was a Republican tent, a huge Republican tent. And we were there with our boys, and they were meeting their families there, and found out afterwards that another couple of ours, friends of ours were at a concert, you know, the concert of drinking beer and it was country, you know, it was really white kinda country living kind of that stuff, and spitting and drinking beer, and I can't remember, some song. But the, and the couple said, "Don't act gay" and don't act gay is. There's still times and places where you have to be cautious, in Western Maine and Northern Maine, in south-, down south (laughter) you know we're still cautious in various places, but in '91 in Lewiston it was wonderful, I was part of a softball team, we had gay bars, we had you know, just a very, we played, a girlfriend, all kinds of couples of girlfriends that would play volleyball every night of the week, and we, and you know weekends, and just play, played and when the rule, when the law changed we all went out to our restaurant, and the young girl said "I just love this" and we were just having fun, at, you know, at and we were listening to one of our girls that sang and stuff, and she says "We're showing the world that we are a bunch of gay people that are having a ball, and don't care about-"

Lewiston, Pride; Portland, Pride; Openly gay in public; Friends, extra curricular activities

and I hadn't even thought about it, and she said, "Let's do this more often" (laughter) But, you know, it's Pride, we've had our second Pride in Lewiston. I came to the very first Pride here in Deering Oaks, and have been to every one of them, well, two years ago I didn't go to one cause it was Pride, Pride was the same weekend as ours two years ago. I've seen it grow tremendously in Portland, tremendously, outrageously and tremendously, and in Lewiston it's brand new and it's very small, but it's very cool. You know, and we're just walking on the sidewalk as our parade, from Auburn to Lewiston, but it's still very cool that we're doing that.

Johnna: Yeah, that's awesome

Sherry: Closer to home

Johnna: Yeah

Sherry: You know, it's just that much closer to, to reaching everybody. And my sister works in Bethel as a teacher, has worked there 40 years, and she said, "Oh Sherry, you don't have to worry and all this, they get it now, you don't have to keep fighting, you don't have to always fight." I said, "Yeah there's pockets" (laughter) there's still pockets, so there's still education going on, and there will always be education.

Johnna: Do you remember the names of the gay bars in Lewiston?

Sherry: Yep, one was the Alternative, that was the one where I met my wife

Sister: Educate within the LGBTQ community

Question: Gay bars

Alternative: gay bar, wife

Johnna: Oh, you met at the bar?

Question: Wife and bar

Sherry: At the bar. I was, my girlfriend left me at the time, and for good reasons (laughter) I was, you know, just playing volleyball somewhere else, somewhere other than with her all the time, and trying to figure out my life, so I went to the gay bars here in town, and I was very pleased because I came home with a pocket full of business cards with all these different women who were introducing themselves, and I was feeling pretty good. And I said “well that’s all well and good, but I really want to be close to home.” So I should check out, and I heard about the Alternative, it was a garage that turned into a gas station garage they turned into a gay bar, and I went up to the girls that were standing at the bar, and I said, “So who’s single here?” and they said, “oh that one, that one, that one, that one.” And I said, “Okay” and then so one of them introduced me, and went up to Dee and said, “My friend wants to dance” and she said, “Well then tell your friend-” and she’s this really strong person, and I, I have been with a very indecisive person, so this was nice, tell her- “Well if she wants to, she has to come ask me.” So, I went over and I asked her, and we danced, and I went back to the bar, and these girls started closing in on me, and Dee’s at the corner, and she’s just sitting there looking at me, and I went, (laughter) and we’ve been together ever since. And, so it was, you know, it worked out very well. And I had been praying, praying, praying for a good woman. She had been single for three years, I had been single for three weeks, and she had in her Bible,

Ex girlfriend; Meeting wife at the bar; Alternative; Foster children; Adopted children

she had the things she wanted in a partner, and she had a list of, professional, likes her family, non-smoker, you know, just some ten, twelve things that she had gone through and some stuff, and, so I met all the all of her criteria. (laughter) and we've been out together ever since, and we've had over ten foster kids, and we've, and adults, and kids and adults, and we've took two boys in, two little boys, brothers, and we adopted them when they were, 2010, and they've been with us now what almost now 18 and 19 years old, so.

Ariana: That's amazing

Johnna: That's a great story

Sherry: It's been very fun

Ariana: So, how long have you been fostering children for?

Sherry: When I was 12 years old I worked in my aunt's foster home. She had a 12 bed foster home in a little town in West Paris, and it was the kids that would come back and forth from Pineland Center, the state institution, and there were some kids that were deaf and blind, and had seizures, and were ten years old but were this big (demonstrates with hands how big the kids were) and some without, I mean some teenagers and so we were paid a dollar an hour to do recreational things with them, and go play, and do bedtime stories on Sunday afternoons, and it just

Question: Timeline, foster children

Aunt's foster home, experience fostering

built, and we were just always there. My aunt would go away for a month in January, and my mother, and my sisters, and I would go down there and stay with the kids, and, and go to church with them, and send them off to school, and all the things it would take to run a home, and I've been in that field working with children and adults with developmental disabilities for 52 years. I've never worked less than two jobs and gone to school, and taken kids home, and adults home. I've just always had kids or adults in my home, I've always respite for short term things.

Johnna: How old were you when you first started fostering?

Question: Timeline, fostering

Sherry: I was, it was in, well I had adults from Pineland, let's see, 54 (counting) probably 30 years old, well actually when I lived in Northern Maine, I lived in, I, my quote girlfriend unquote girlfriend had taken a young man with Down Syndrome home to live with her and, so I cared for him when she went to work, and so that was even earlier, and I'd take guys from Pineland. I did the, you know, I got licensed and that sort of thing, 27 years ago, 26 years ago when we started the church, when we went to the church, the women's group invited a person that had a license, like a Spurwink kind of agency, and they came in and did election, that's when we had been looking to do something like that anyways, so.

Adult care

Johnna: And did you ever face any discrimination when you were trying to foster children for being gay?

Question: Discrimination, fostering

Sherry: Never

Johnna: Wow

Sherry: Never, what they're looking for is, well I won't say never. When we adopted the boys, the usually the judge will come out and take pictures with you, this judge wouldn't, and this judge knew me working with adults, and he even said, from Western Maine, he had even said one time to one of the folks that I was guiding for is, "Why don't you just think, what would Sherry do?" (laughter) so he trusted me professionally, but when he found out we were adopting, he walked out of the courtroom.

Adopting, judge

Johnna: Wow, was that in Port-

Sherry: So that was very unimpressive. To me it was very important for the boys to have that acceptance, the, we had a wonderful Guardian Ad Litem, and he played Santa Clause, he looked like Santa Clause, and he played Santa Clause, Michael O'Donnell, a lawyer from Bethel, and he was just wonderful, and he was there for the boys with pictures and stuff. But, I was grateful for that for them.

Michael O'Donnell

Johnna: Yeah, and did that happen in Portland?

Question: Location of court

Sherry: In Oxford county

Johnna: Oxford county, okay.

Sherry: District court, probate court it is.

Ariana: Yeah, so what age groups do you foster, is it all age groups? Or do you-

Sherry: Yep, we've had infants, we've taken in infants, we've taken in, I personally have taken in elderly people. Oh, when I lived in, I was going to say when I lived in East Millinocket, I lived in an apartment with two ladies, and then I faded out and they stayed living there, so that was the first transition in the state of transition, living situation, that was kind of listed. Katahdin friends. It was funny Mike Michaud, I don't know if you know Senator Mike Michaud, he was just a very young man at that time, and he, his first race, legislative race I helped stuff his envelopes and that sort of thing, and, so for him, and him coming out right before he ran for governor, and his mom dying shortly after that, I mean she was in her 90s, but that's stressful, his mom french, you know, Northern Maine, all those things that, you know, and influence you, so I, you know it's just a lot of that. It's not, it's not uncommon I guess I can say.

Johnna: And maybe you already mentioned this, but are you still fostering children now? Or is it just your two sons?

Sherry: Just the adopted two, yeah. That was plenty. (laughter) Our 19 year old has special needs and was very psychical, I always said he came like this to us, he came,

Question: Fostering, age groups

Ages: Infants, elderly; Mike Michaud, political campaign

Question: Fostering

Adoption, Joe and Jacob

he just, autism, ADHD, speech impediment, he was a headbanger, but he's come a long ways, but he, it's. And our other boy, they've both had failure to thrive, so they are just a little bit behind other kids, for other, you know for other intensive persits (phone chime) so he's been, it's been a handful for us. Sorry I just have to check this in case it's one of the boys, nope. Oh, yeah, Joe works at the YWCA as a childcare provider.

Ariana: Nice, alright, so for activism, you were involved in a lot of different political activism. What what it like speaking in front of 5,000 people in Augusta?

Sherry: It was pretty overwhelming, Joe was little and Jacob was in school, so Joe was probably four, five, six, something like that. We had our friend, Maria from Portland here take him to the childcare area, we walked in and, if you were pro-gay you would wear red, so that was very nice to see the red, sea of red, a lot of red. But when Joe walked in he could feel the tension, he had to get out. He's a very sensitive kid. He was a kid that when we went to church he would go sit with a guy and the guy would come up to us and say "Thank you, I needed that, he knew I needed that" you know, "How did he know I needed that at four years old, that I needed somebody?" (laughter) You know, but he was that kid, and so he had to leave, it was that tense you could feel how intense. We stood in line for a long time, waited our turn. Our church came, our members of our church came, and right before us was a

Question: Political activism, Augusta

Speech; Pastor from Bath; Marriage equality; Health insurance, tax

pastor from Bath, and he had his two kids right here (signals to sides) bald headed, high testosterone man with his two children, and they had to stand there and listen to him spout off about how gays was, you know, “what’s going to be next, bestiality?” and the senator is going “calm down, what are you doing? You got a kid right beside you, what are you doing?” and I was (angry noise) and Shenna Bellows, the really good people were saying, “It’s okay, stay cool, don’t get angry, stay cool.” And I had a lot of anger, a lot of anger, but we had to, had a speech they had helped us write, I guess I should have brought that for you, but, it was, it was, basically I paid my taxes, I’ve taken in foster kids, would you, I can’t, I can’t, I’m paying my wife’s, not only am I paying my wife’s health insurance, but now I have to pay a tax on that, through the state of Maine, it was like quite a bit of a tax too, so that was my argument is, come on I’m doing good work here, and you’re not, you’re not helping out. And I, you know, I think everyone of those stories, plus I think the biggest thing that changed it for everybody was that they did vote against us the first time, and they were asked, “Did you vote against?” and they said, “yeah”, “Did it cause you problems in your house?”, “yeah. I had a niece that was really upset with me that won’t talk to me still, so next time I’m probably voting the other way.” So I think that’s what changed it, but after we spoke, I went right up and gave everybody a hug from, you know, our church, and they were all there just to be there. It was, it was fantastic. So, it was pretty cool.

Ariana: How were you given that opportunity to speak?

Sherry: I remember Shenna and somebody else had came to our house, I forget her name. But we had, I don't know if it was Facebook, but was communicat-, or emails, but there was communication about, "Does anybody have any stories?" we are actually on one of the flyers, we have a picture of the two of us, and they wanted to do, take a picture of the kids with us but they were still on the DHHS state custody, so they didn't want to ruin our chance of adoption and stuff, so they said "Let's just take a picture of you folks." So one of the flyers that they sent out was all the families, of us and our story, just had been involved, and had been elbow to elbow with people, and we had a story. We were willing to say it, so.

Shenna, stories

Johnna: What inspired you to get involved in political activism?

Question: Activism involvement

Sherry: Paying the tax

Johnna: Yeah

Sherry: There was a lot of money coming out of my paycheck, you know and we were getting, you know ten bucks a day for the kids (laughter) you know, so, what, you know, that was the biggest part. I think also just being sick of, that, that we weren't equal, that it wasn't that we couldn't get married, that we couldn't you know, you know we still want a list of let gays get married, we deserve to be just as miserable as the rest of the country

Health insurance, tax; Marriage equality; Volunteer, church

Question: Speaking

(laughter) you know, or the rest of the world, or whatever it is. Is, it was that you know, treating us like second class citizens, and when we did choose to get married people at my work and, gave us a shower, and it was just people were there, people were ready, and, and Dee's niece said, "This law is for people like Dee and Sherry." Cause there's a lot of people don't need it, but we need it. That was, I just didn't, you know, you, you're gonna make history, you're gonna make history one way or another in this world, and which side do you want to be on? Want to be on the side that everybody should be equal, you know there shouldn't be rich people and poor people, there should be equal people, we should all be helping each other. In our church and, and in Seminary they talked about and they asked "Do you have a women's group?" and I said, "Yeah we got a women's group." And actually we got some of the women that would dress up as old ladies and they'll do a women's skit, you know and things like that, and our professor said, Yeah because what would happen is the men would make the money, and the women would spend the money. They would raise the money in the church and spend the money, and we still have 80 year old ladies, like four 80 year old ladies that, they have a rummage sale, and they practically give the clothes away to the old, you know the poor folks that are, cause we are right downtown Lewiston, giving the stuff away, and they make \$300, then they give that away. You know, so that was the main makeup of the church in, in years past when, was that the men would go off and be the tough, and women would baby them and

get them all off and go to work, and then the women would do the good work. You know, would do the, would understand there's poor kids that need mittens, you know they would, they would do that. That was, that was their job to do, and the women in our church, they'll talk about, women didn't get as teachers, they didn't get health insurance, cause you had a husband, he got health insurance.

Johnna: Right

Sherry: So

Johnna: What other kinds of political work have you done, if any other outside of that?

Sherry: Pretty much the, political, ref- we did a lot for Mike Michaud trying to get him going, lets see what else did we do. We were organizing, were part of the organization for Pride, every year, our church sets up a table at pride and we paint rocks. My wife's thing is she likes to paint rocks from the ocean, so we paint rocks with the kids, and they get to take a rock home, and it might say "faith," it might say "love," it might say something, on the side of the church we have a big LGBTQ, I was part of the social, I was head of the social justice, and because I was the gay person in the church (laughter) so, I continue to do some of those things. But mostly all the political were involved in the political, who needs to be voted in to defend our rights. And we talk, or I continue to talk, my son went up to, Augusta with Maine People's Alliance cause he worked with

Question: Political involvement

Mike Michaud; Pride, Lewiston and Portland; Church, social justice; Son, Lobbyist participation

Maine People's Alliance for awhile, but he went up there, and he was a lobbyist for the day for the conversion bill, against the conversion bill. So I talked to one of the old men that I knew, that I had worked with his wife in, from Western Maine and he said, "Why are you letting these kids go through this stuff? You keep making these kids go through this stuff." And you know, and really give him a hard time, you know.

Johnna: Awesome

Ariana: So, what was the most, like the best part in participating in this type of work?

Question: Feelings on work in political activism

Sherry: In advocacy work?

Ariana: Yeah

Sherry: I think seeing that it did work, showing my sons that it does work, that the political system does work, it's hard now in this present administration because people are very frustrated and, and things aren't well. You know, we are unwell in this, in this environment, but seeing that minds can be changed, that people can grow, when people still throw it in my face. I have a niece that's, and she'll still throw it up in my face that well "Obama didn't believe it the first time." I said, "Yeah he grew." and he learned, and you know there's nothing wrong with that. I, when I read through the Bible I was straight (laughter) in my eyes, then as I grew i went, "Wait a minute, that's not me. This is me." And I think we do that all our lives, and just the, you know, watch others grow and watch myself grow

Political system; Obama, learning and growing

Johnna: Totally, can you talk a little bit about working for DHHS?

Sherry: Yeah, when I was in Seminary, I should have brought it with me, I got it out in my car, if you walk out with me I can show it to you. When I was in Seminary, God said to me, "You will fight DHHS" and I said, "No I won't, it's too big. I can't. I got to keep my job til I can retire. I need this money for these kids." So I was cautious, when this present administration came on board, they knew that I believed in helping people, and working hard for people. We had worked on the 200 Main St is our big DHHS building, they had shipped us out where a different division, they had shipped us out a nice, a really nice location like half a mile away from my house, I can walk to work, it was wonderful. They said, "That's too expensive now, we got to put you back at 200 Main St." We had been in the basement of 200 Main St and, the gray water had spilled onto our files that we had to clean up. Two of my coworkers passed away with cancer, there wasn't air enough to breathe when we had staff meetings cause we'd suck all of the air out of the building, out of the room, we were in the basement. So they were teasing us that we were gonna go back to that basement and all this, well I said, "Okay, whatever. Okay Lord, you want me here, I'll stay." You know, and I thought I should, I thought I should be, going to Seminary, they were convincing me I should be a preacher, so I said uh- (phone) So I said, whatever, you know I've got to

Question: Working, DHHS

Working experience DHHS, poor working conditions; Faith; Harassment from HR

keep the job, so I moved back and my office was on the third floor, the sun would come in every morning and shine on eyes, and I have seasonal affective disorder, so this was like, this was glory. Well when the sun would come in, my first person that I had got out of a psychiatric unit and put her back in her trailer with her husband and child, and put all the windows back in that she had smashed. She had given me a present, and it had been a little sticker, on it with teddy bears, a metallic sticker with teddy bears hanging up Christmas decorations, decorating a tree. When the sun came in and hit it, it would be a perfect angel, I mean it like, it like, a picture of a perfect angel, and the light shining in its belly and I said, "Ahh this is sister Linda and Louise." The two girls that had passed away. "She's going to help me through to retirement." And I truly believed it. The girl took a picture with her cell phone and gave me a copy. Now I use it for cards when people are sick and I send it out and stuff. Gorgeous picture, I mean everything, we, I mean beautiful, and I said, "Well I guess I'm suppose to be here." And the reason I had that room was because there was a Jewish girl that nobody chose to share an office, and so I said, "Well I'll go in with her, in that room." I didn't know which offic-, she got to choose, she got to choose which office she was in cause she had been there most longer than us. So I got this beautiful office, and I got to be in with her. And then all of a sudden I kept getting harassed from human resources. They came down, they said, "You sent out an email that doesn't support what the governor and the commissioner is saying what should be done

Working experience DHHS, poor working conditions; Faith; Harassment from HR
(Cont.)

and I said, "I sent out an email that said if you're disabled, over 65, and in a domestic violence situation, you don't have to have your picture on a food stamp card, that my supervisor had forwarded to me." I forwarded it to people we are guarding for who are severely disabled that shouldn't have to be taken out of bed to take a picture on their food stamp card, and their staff buys their groceries anyways. I said, "And you two people from HR in Augusta, you just walked past the sign. There's two signs that say the same exact thing, so you're harassing me cause I did that?" "Oh well there's a guy in the community." I said, "Oh, you mean the man that I told him that he can't restrain clients, because he doesn't need to, because he figured out the reason the client was, was angry was because his A1C's were bad, now you've got his A1C's up, and his sugar levels are good, he's not angry anymore, he doesn't need a restrainer. So he's the one complaining about me, and you come down here saying I'm the bad guy?" So I'm okay with that, right, I, I get down there. A few weeks later they said, they said, naming some things what people had said I had said, and I said, "I didn't say those things, I never did those things." "Tell me you-" A little HR girl, failure to thrive - not failure to thrive, small man syndrome (laughter) "Tell me you did it, tell me you did it, tell me you said that" "I didn't do it, I didn't say that." "Tell me you didn't tell that provider that-" something, and I said, "No, that was my coworker who had left. He got her mixed up with me." and "What are you talking about?" and they harassed me for two years straight, put me on a five

Working experience DHHS, poor working conditions; Faith; Harassment from HR
(Cont.)

week suspension. During that time, 34 year old woman who I had taught to bike in her community and get her involved, physically involved, died, because there wasn't somebody taking care of her in this administration. They don't like me because here I am saying, "What in the world are you guys doing?" I said, "I'm helping people get off Mainecare, in a good way, I'm helping find couples that are married so now they are getting health insurance, I'm getting people jobs so they're paying less, they're getting less in social security, I'm the bad guy because I'm helping people?" "So why don't you just sit down and shut up until your retirement." I was told, and I was told, "We don't give Sherry people because she does too much for them." (laughter) So, yeah DHHS was um, was terrible. When, when we were the beru, years ago we were the Beru of Mental Retardation, then we were the Beru of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse, then we got sucked in to DHHS. And I call it a hostile takeover, and the, the, all they did was fire people, and point fingers, and blame people, and do all that for the last eight years. So you figure out why this occurred, and to get rid of staff people. And what I was saying was, we need, they, they hired a fraud division, so they can get ya, instead of helping people follow the rules they'd wait until you, and, and some of them they found out, they got, they've got one case that was thrown out of court because the DHHS workers falsified his records, a somali man. Falsified his records and put down what they thought he wanted to say. I

Working experience DHHS, poor working conditions; Faith; Harassment from HR
(Cont.)

said, you know, I went in, we tried to get my wife, cause I'm still paying her health insurance, trying to get her health insurance on the, on the ACA, and they said "Oh Sherry you're eligible for DEL." Low income prescriptions for seniors, and I said, "No I'm not." I said, "All you've done is taken our income, you haven't taken our savings, so I'm not eligible." "No, I'm going to put that down, no I'm going to put it down." So I wrote to Nate Libby, my senator and said, They put it down there because they want to be able to say we got you, you got a prescription, and you weren't allowed to have that. And that's how they continue to work, and it's not, it's sometimes it's not the direct line workers, it's somebody who thinks they're going to move up and look good, and stab somebody in the back so they can move forward. So yeah it was, it is a, it was, you had to have your head on right on your shoulders right to work there. And they knew each other, everything, my coworkers, I see, you know everyone. They'll pick one, and pick on somebody just so others could see what they are going through, and I'm hoping that our new governor will change that whole, I've worked with a good governors, I got a picture of me standing with Angus King, you know I've worked with McGovern who was wonderful. We had Republicans and Democratic governors that have been wonderful, and the last few years I think we have seen what anger and blaming and that sort of thing can hurt people, psychically hurt people, so yeah.

Johnna: So are you still with DHHS now, or are you retired?"

Working experience DHHS, poor working conditions; Faith; Harassment from HR (Cont.)

Question: Retirement

Sherry: I retired a year and a half ago

Johnna: Congratulations

Sherry: Oh it's wonderful. I cherish everyday, everyday I cherish.

Johnna: So what are you doing now that you are retired?

Sherry: Mostly my boys, taking care of my boys. Joe is deciding between USM, and Saint Joes, and a college in California, Young Americans, and so doing all of that college stuff, and then we've just, we finally got Jacob into a community support. They are trying to help him get a job again.

Johnna: Awesome

Ariana: Lets see, did you also work with individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and personality disorders?-

Sherry: Mhmm

Ariana: What was that like, and was that difficult?

Sherry: Actually, I just met with a young lady today, I was her guardian case worker and then she moved to Portland from Lewiston, and so we went for a walk today, I believe my sister that's 18 months older than me has a lot of those same, growing up had a lot of those, she ended up at AMHI (Augusta Mental Health Institute) and to me it's like coming home. It's having somebody

Question: Retirement

Sons: Joe, college; Jacob, job

Question: Working with behavioral health individuals

Guardian; Sister, mental health; Mother, head injury

that's, that's having a sister almost, you know in the feel. So once a month or so we go for a walk to say hi. She has no family, she went through very similar things that I went through. I was dropped on the head as, as a kid. My mother let me know before she passed away, that that's probably what's wrong with me (laughter) she showed me. She had a picture of the bassinet that I fell off, you know those days the bassinets were this high (references how high), and she said, "That's that's where you fell off Sherry, that's probably why." (laughter) So, I said, "Yeah no, maybe not mum." So you know, and she had been head injured by her mom, so, you know it's just, it's just, being there for somebody who has nobody else, I mean she has her wonderful foster family and foster group of people, and wonderful, wonderful, it was, it was actually, I placed her in a home where she had been living with their aunt as a teen, as a kid, so she got to come home to their family, so it's kind of cool. But, you have to be, you have to know, I do things instinctively, I say and do things instinctively, I treat people instinctively from growing up in that, so, you have to be careful.

Johnna: I'm trying to see if there's anything else we haven't talked about, do you think we've covered it all?

Ariana: Hmm, we can talk about, lets see, have you ever been like attached to your foster children, or anyone you worked with, and it was hard to let go?

Question: Attachment to work/ individuals

Sherry: Yep, and I still have, lets see, one, I think it's only one person on Facebook, but I've got her whole family, you know, like I've, her adopted sister I worked alongside. Her mom and her aunt and all of these others, and you know, so I'm on Facebook with her aunt, and her mom, and her and stuff like that and the, we still, we still don't, we had reunions of the women, the girl- the little girls that had lived in my aunt's foster home. We had reunions with them, I was case manager and guardian for some of them, so I knew them as little girls, and my aunt gave me their Bibles and their storybooks, and their dolls, and things like that so I was able to give to them as adults and see them again and stuff. So, and whenever I see them it's you know, they're part of my family in the essence, they lived with my aunt and my uncle, and grew, you know, and their kids and their grandkids, and so they're still part of that family. And the guy that I used to take for respid care (weekend for relief for families) ride on my motorcycle, his dad is the janitor at my son's school, so he watches over him, and I watch over his son. You know what I mean, we're still, we're kind of buddies that way.

Johnna: Awesome

Sherry: Yep

Johnna: You've lived in Maine for a long time, can you talk about any changes you've noticed in the LGBTQ community, or how people are treated from, I mean, the 80s, 90s, to now?

Question: LGBTQ community, 80s, 90s, now

Family, reunions

AIDS epidemic; Education, GTSA in high schools

Sherry: Yeah, definitely. I had friends that died in the AIDS, the era, era of the AIDS, and gay people were always second class citizens, if you were out very seldom did you hold a prominent job, and that's changed a lot. I think in general, people are past the vindictive, and I'm saying in general, people have passed the vindictive revenge, get you kind of thing. I think we've done a good job in our high schools with, and we've, we know that, that if a high school has a GSTA that there's less violence overall, I see kids that are, are disabled. They get just has, they have special needs, they get just as, just as damaged or beat on as gay kids. You know, so I think we've grown stronger, we as a community of gay people, and our allies, so I think we fought back. You know, Charlie Howard in Bangor, we haven't seen that for a lot of years, but I still think we need to educate around that because it can still happen. People thinking they're doing the community good and they're gonna be the hero for the community, they're not. You know they end up being ostrichsized themselves, so I think we've grown a long way-

Johnna: Awesome

Sherry: On both, on both sides

Johnna: Yeah. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about, or anything you can think of that we forgot to, to bring up?

Sherry: Let's see. No, it was very thorough. Good questions, did you come up with the questions?

Johnna: She did

Sherry: Nice, very good.

Ariana: Thank you

Sherry: Yeah

Johnna: Awesome, cool, then we can turn
this off