

LGBTQ Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Leslie Edwards

Interviewed by

Alexandrea Penn

December 3, 2016

Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography

Leslie Edwards was born in New York, but spent the majority of her life in both Michigan and California. She received a Bachelor's Degree from Michigan State University and a Master's Degree from Wayne State University. She is the mother of one daughter and currently works as the archivist at the Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research.

Interviewer

Alexandrea Penn is a graduate student at Wayne State University working on her Master's Degree in both Library and Information Science and History.

Abstract

This interview with Leslie Edwards discusses her life in East Lansing and San Francisco as a member of the LGBTQ community. She focuses on what it was like coming out, and dealing with the issues of her time, including the AIDS Epidemic, and the process of dealing with a complicated adoption process.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on this collection.

Original Format

The recording exists in both WAV and MP3 format.

Transcription

LGBTQ Oral History Project

Walter P. Reuther Library

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted December 3, 2016 with:

Leslie Edwards in Detroit, Michigan

By: Alexandra Penn

Penn: Today's date is December 3, 2016, and I am here with Leslie Edwards the archivist at Cranbrook. My name is Allie Penn and we are going to get started. So, Leslie where were you raised and what was your family like?

Edwards: Well I was born in Middletown, New York and my father died when I was young, about eighteen months old, and my mother who was from Detroit, had a decision to make was she going to stay in New York or move back to Detroit where her family was from and that's what she did. So we lived in Detroit at like Southfield and Joy Road and we lived there for about 5 years until my mom remarried and then we moved out to Birmingham so I was raised basically in Birmingham.

Penn: Alright, when did you know you were gay?

Edwards: That's a tough question because when I was a kid no one talked about being gay, the word lesbian was like a foreign land-I never even heard the word. There was no Oprah or Phil Donahue talking about gay issues, gay communities. You know I had crushes on teachers and even in grade school I can remember. I went to a summer camp I had crushes on girls but I didn't know at the time it was a crush, didn't know really what it was, I thought I just liked them. So probably it wasn't until college that I started really understanding what these feelings were and what that meant. I had a friend-there was a group of us, there were six of us-and we had apartments, we lived across the hall from each other and so this one friend, we ended up just having a relationship and that was my first girlfriend.

I worked at Clara's Train Station in Lansing, Michigan, and had some co-workers, a gay boy and a woman who was bi-sexual and they took me to my first gay bar.

Penn: And what was that like?

Edwards: Joe Cavello's. It was scary because it was exciting and scary at the same time. What was scary about it was that it was a dive, and you would walk in and on the left-hand side was the bar, and on the right-hand side were all these booths where all these old men were sitting and you're thinking okay I thought this was supposed to be a women's bar and here are all these old men. Then you walk passed them and turned left and then there were the women and there was the dance floor and that was--it was great. I mean it was great to actually be in a space like that and to be able to dance with women and that was--I call it the disco era. It was great.

Penn: Was there a sort of separation between the sexes?

Edwards: Absolutely. The men's bar was just down the street--I forgot what it was called--I went there a couple of times. It was super nice. They had these like aluminum palm trees, it was really clean, and Joe Cavello's was a dive so that was kind of interesting too. I mean this was in the late seventies and Title IX was 1976 so there was a big, there was a whole difference too at the time.

Penn: Were there only the two bars in Lansing, that you knew of?

Edwards: There was actually a third one, I don't know if it was around for very long. I remember going to it, maybe that was a mixed bar. I have vague memories of it so apparently I didn't go there very much.

Penn: What was it like coming out to your parents?

Edwards: That was interesting too because I didn't really come out to my parents. I had this girlfriend and I was home for Christmas and I was all kind of moping around cause I missed her and so my mother asked me, do you have a relationship with her? And I started crying, yes, I wanted to tell you but I was afraid to, so my mom pretty much told everybody. She told, you know, everybody -- my relatives, our family friends, and so I didn't really have to come out to anybody except for my little brother and that was scary because he's--I'm really close with him and I was afraid of what he would think. I just remember it being scary -- I don't remember what his comment was but it hasn't, it didn't change our relationship any so that was fine.

Penn: So your parents were really supportive then, your mom was?

4:59

Edwards: I wouldn't say supportive is the word--I would say my mother certainly accepted me because I was her daughter. It took probably six months really for her to sort of come to grips. She was concerned, she said to me you always take the hard road. She didn't want me to have a harder life. I don't think they weren't happy about it. My mom was pretty cool. My dad I don't even remember what his reaction was, quite frankly. My step-dad, I don't really remember. But they always accepted my partners, even if they didn't like them, they still, welcomed them into their homes. My mother used to give my partner's really thoughtful birthday presents, she took the time to get to know them. We went and visited them on vacations and so yeah I guess supportive is a word, maybe not in the beginning but later on for sure. I have not had any trouble with any family members, any of our family friends, so in that regard I was really lucky. Really lucky.

Penn: You said that you had crushes on girls all growing up, but did you ever date guys?

Edwards: I did. Probably because, you know, you were supposed to.

Penn: Right.

Edwards: I had a—I dated a guy in high school for a year or two. I had kind of an up and down cause you know you are trying to find yourself, and you're trying to figure out what is going on, where your place is in the world. So one time I was in this phase where I was a Jesus freak, so I would go to these religious meetings and that sort of affected that relationship with that guy—he was not interested in that and so that ended, which I am sure would have ended anyway. When I went to college I did date a couple of guys.

Penn: Was that awkward for you?

Edwards: It was more like you know you read all these romance novels and it's supposed to be these bells go off, and oh! and-

Penn: The hearts in the air

Edwards: And I was thinking are you kidding me? This is what everyone is la la la about. There was nothing. It was almost like it was a duty that I was supposed to do.

But I do want to say that one of the things that was in East Lansing—at least East Lansing in college was we were able to go to concerts. At the Kiva they had concerts and it was all the women's music at the time so it was like Teresa Trull, Cris Williamson, Holly Near and to go there and be in that space, with just women, in that intimate space, listening to women sing about women's music and women's issues and it was just this whole space of a lot of lesbians, but probably not all, it was just—that was just amazing. That was where I finally felt like this is me—this is what I want is this feeling of being surrounded with that energy. Everyone would start singing and the whole room swelled up with music (ooh I got goosebumps right now). It was just um—that was really something.

Penn: Just the overall acceptance of being in that space?

Edwards: Yeah and it was a safe space, there were no men there and it felt safe. The same thing was true when we would go to the women's music festival, which I can't remember what town it was in—it's not in the same place now, it's still going on. To go to that and there was not—you didn't see a man anywhere. The only time in the whole weekend of that space where there would be men on the land is when they came to change the port-a-potties. Then you would here this murmuring through the—across the property cause it was a campground with—it was a big space—and then you would hear “men on the land, men on the land.” You know everybody was in various stages of dress and undress and so most of the women would put their shirts back on or whatever. Then they would leave and that was, that was an awesome experience too, going there. I really... cause it felt safe. It felt safe and accepting and like okay this is me.

10:06

Penn: Alright

Edwards: I know I skipped a little bit.

Penn: It's alright. What was school like for you, both high school and college?

Edwards: High school was pretty awful in a lot of ways I was kind of isolated. I was an athlete so I did sports after school and then I would go home and basically go to my room and I didn't really do—I didn't really have a group of friends that I went to the mall or hung out with or anything.

College was a bit different because you know you go from this smaller unit to—you know I went to Michigan State there like 60,000 people on campus. And again I was in sports the first two years I was there, so I really hung out with that group of people. You know that was a great experience, but you know it wasn't, at the time, that was really at the time I was exper... That was at the time I was dating guys.

Penn: What sport did you play?

Edwards: I was a diver. I was a diver in Big Ten and that was pretty awesome. Because I was on the varsity team we worked out with the guys' team so you know we all partied together and all that stuff.

Penn: Did you face any issues being a girl sort of working with the guys' team?

Edwards: No because the coach at the time there he had recruited women to be on the women's team so he had this core group and they worked out together. There was a JV team who worked out with the girls' swim team. The swim team with that the JV divers worked out with them at the women's IM but the varsity divers worked out with the men's team.

That was interesting because, again, it was pre-Title IX so in 1976, that was Title IX, I was offered a partial scholarship and my coach at the time said to me, because I was a walk-on and I was not recruited—I had to try out for the team, I'm only going to coach the women that I recruited because I don't get paid for coaching women. I was like are you kidding me? So here I had been offered this partial scholarship and I quit diving. I quit the team. That was a big, that was a big change because here I had been this is what I was, this is what I did, and then I wasn't doing it at all. You know we worked out three times a day so that point was really when I started probably really exploring more the lesbian in me because I didn't have this other thing I was focusing on.

Penn: Was there anything you could have to fight it or was it sort of you have to accept it?

Edwards: You know, I don't think I was at that time confident enough in myself to think of that. I mean he said you can still be on the team but you have to work out by yourself. I thought to myself screw you, I'm not working out three times a day by myself with no coach. No, I'm not doing it. So, it was meant to be, there you have it.

Penn: Right? So, you described the campground, and the women's music festival, but you said they were not specifically gay events—

Edwards: Oh, absolutely the women's music festival was.

Penn: The women's music festival was?

Edwards: Oh absolutely. One hundred percent lesbian. Well maybe there were a few straight girls there I don't know.

Penn: Tag-alongs?

Edwards: Yeah.

Penn: The question marks?

Edwards: Maybe. I don't know. It was just you camped there. Everybody worked while you were there. Everybody had a job. You might work in the food tent or whatever, and there were day stages and night stages where all different kinds of women's groups, you know, again, Teresa Trull, and all these people would come and sing and perform. I can't think of some of the other names at the moment but it was—that was amazing. You would stand in line for your food. I met this really cool woman from Chicago and then I went to visit her in Chicago so you know it just opened up some things that were certainly not on my radar.

Penn: Were there any other gay groups or gay events that you participated in while you were in Lansing or Michigan?

14:51

Edwards: I did. I was, I was in a lesbian chorus. I tried to find the name of it. I saw one mention of it in one of my journals but I don't know what the name of the chorus was. I know that there was a lesbian woman who led, led it. We sang all different songs. There was maybe twenty of us in it and we actually went and performed. I know that we went one time to Ann Arbor, and I don't know if we sang at the Ark. We sang somewhere but I can't remember. But that was really fun. That was really fun.

And then I played softball so there were lesbian softball teams. I coached a lesbian softball team and that was great. I worked at a printing place on camp—just off-campus and we did resumes and stuff for students. Everyone in the office was a lesbian so that was fun. We would have parties. Just to be in that space was exciting.

Penn: Was that intentional? Everyone in the office being a lesbian?

Edwards: Well it was owned by a lesbian so I think probably.

Penn: Just a safe place to work?

Edwards: I don't know. It was just in those days it was like that. You could have those, you know separation of spaces, and it wasn't politically incorrect, it was actually great.

Penn: So, you started to describe it, but what sort of support system did you have in Lansing?

Edwards: In Lansing? Just my friends, you know, or who I worked with or whatever. I mean just these things that I am describing, just these different groups. I mean I was close enough to still come home. Once I went to school I never moved back home. It was just too different. Like who wants to live at home after you have experience freedom. I would come home, we had a month off, like the month of August, we had off of school and Michigan State went back to school late so I think the first year I came home that month. You know I was studying, I was in art so I was hanging out with some artists. I don't know what else to say about that.

Penn: Was there any support system that you wish you had had? Was there anything you felt like you were missing?

Edwards: I had no idea what I was missing. I mean you know I was just like—I don't know.

Penn: Right.

Edwards: I can't think of that because I was just experiencing everything.

Penn: So when did you move away from Lansing?

Edwards: I moved in 1982. I had broken up with my first girlfriend and I had a second girlfriend and she had gone out to—she was in business school and she had done a project and she went out to San Francisco to do some—a school project and she came back and she said let's move to San Francisco and I said okay. So, I had this little orange Horizon, which is a pretty small car. We packed the car to the gills, we had a camper shelving, or a camper—I don't know one of those things where you put your camping equipment and stuff on the roof. We had two bikes on the back of the car and we drove across the country until—to San Francisco.

But you know you asked me about—I had some other friends. I had this friend who I knew you know, I knew she was a lesbian. She would never say she was, still to this day she won't use that word, but she lived in Colorado in Snowmass outside of Aspen and I would go to visit her sometimes and they, one summer I went—usually I went in the winter to ski—one summer I went and she played softball. So, she went to a softball tournament and I was like oh softball, there has to be lesbians here. So, I'm looking around and I see this group of women sitting in the stands and I'm like I'm going to go talk to them. I go over and talk to them and some of their friends were playing and my friend was absolutely aghast that I had gone and approached this group of women. They then invited us over to their house and we—they had food and we cooked. It was awesome. The funny thing was that my friend ended up remaining friends with those women for a long time. But that was awesome too to just be able to—and that I guess that was just my growing sense of self that I was able to and that I wanted to seek out other lesbians while I was other places. That was sort of around that same eighties, early eighties time period. That was before I moved to San Francisco.

20:29

Penn: It sounds like they were very accepting. The way you just describing hanging out with, trying to fit into this group of lesbians. It seems it is almost like acceptance that quickly happens.

Edwards: Yes, yes, because you were looking for other like-minded people. It would sort of be like—I don't know what you would equate it to now—maybe some ethnic group now, that you are looking to find someone that you have something in common with, that understands you and your sensibilities.

Penn: You said that moved up to San Francisco because of your girlfriend. Was that it or did she have a job out there?

Edwards: She didn't have a job. Neither of us had jobs, which was kind of crazy right? You're just moving to this huge city with no job. I worked in the restaurant industry so I knew I could get a job. It wasn't a big deal. Two of my friends, actually the one woman had been my boss at the print shop in East Lansing and she and her girlfriend had moved out to San Francisco so I knew somebody there. We stayed with them. We slept on their living room floor for two weeks until we found an apartment, until we found jobs. That was—that made it a little bit easier. We did know somebody.

Penn: You weren't just blindly moving out there. So, what was it like, San Francisco?

Edwards: Oh, San Francisco. If you think going to a softball tournament or the women's music festival was great, San Francisco was like walking around with your mouth hanging open the whole time. Like oh my god because you could be anything, anybody you wanted to be there. That was the best part of San Francisco, it didn't matter where you were. Of course, the Castro was the mecca of the gay movement really, lots and lots of gay men, plenty of women, there were lots of bars, different bars that you could go to, different styles of bars. It was freedom to the nth degree. Nobody cared there. Nobody cared what you looked like, how you dressed, what kind of hair you had. You could walk down the street holding hands with your girlfriend. It was really unbelievable.

I was in the restaurant business there which was like—everybody in the restaurant business there is gay. Pretty much. I mean not now, and okay that was a generalization, but it seemed like it certainly. And certainly, the places I was working at, everyone was gay.

Penn: Which job from the restaurant industry sticks with you the most from being in San Francisco?

Edwards: Well there are actually two. They are not the ones I had when I first went there. When I first went there, I got a job working restaurant management at like a Hudson's. It was called Bullock's. It was a restaurant within a department store. You had to kind of dress nice. It was more of a conservative, maybe kind of a more Michigan type restaurant job. I remember when I interviewed and they offered me the job I said do I have to wear a dress? Because I wasn't going to take the job if I had to wear a dress. They said no and so I was cool with that.

Then I got a job working at a pizzeria in the Castro. That was crazy. I managed the pizza place. It was very busy, it was very popular. It's actually still there—it's called Marcello's. It was right on the corner in the

Castro. What I remember most about that job was Halloween because we did delivery, we did pizza delivery. Halloween, if you've never been to Halloween in San Francisco, it is the holiday. It gave everyone the opportunity to be absolutely crazy. In the whole Castro, you couldn't even get across the street, it was so packed. There would be—I remember this one guy was dressed up as a witch and riding a skateboard across the intersection. It was just like that, it was just this big party, and this festive atmosphere. That was a fun job.

25:11

Then I worked at a restaurant later on in the concert district called Ivy's. It was a higher end restaurant and all of the staff—I was one of only two women who worked there, because in San Francisco most of the wait staff was gay men. I don't know why it was sexist actually, but for some reason, it was always whenever you went to a restaurant the waiters were gay men. It was really cool that I got in there and it was really fun. They guys were really fun, they were always dissing and laughing.

Penn: So you said Castro, or the Castro's? What is that?

Edwards: Well the Castro, Castro Street. The Castro was the district that was pretty much the gay area in the city. I mean not that there weren't gay people all over the city. There are different sections of the city, like there is Noe Street, and the Mission, the Embarcadero. The Castro was just where the majority of gay events, things, happened. Lots of restaurants, shops, all different kinds of things. If you watch *The Times of Harvey Milk*, he was the mayor of the Castro. That was a great, that is a great film. That was before my time.

Penn: We started talking about it, but what do you remember the most about the bar scene in San Francisco? What sticks out to you the most?

Edwards: Well there was this women's bar called Maud's, that just came to me. It was okay but Trocadero Transfer was unbelievable. It was south of the Mission and it was this huge warehouse. I mean it was huge. They had at least, there were a couple of different bars where you could get drinks out on the main floor, which is where the dance floor was. Then there was sort of an upstairs where you could look down on the dance floor and there were bars up there. And to just watch the dancing. I mean there was fan dancing where guys would dance with fans – just this beautiful thing. They used to have parties there because that was the time. What was that show? *Dallas*? Is that the one? I think it was *Dallas* with the women that fought each other on the show.

Penn: Oh, I think so.

Edwards: I can't remember their names. So, they would have *Dallas* parties cause they had this screen so all of these guys would go and watch *Dallas* because you know gay men, they love all that. They loved Joan Collins—that was her name—and how she dressed and that she was this bitchy diva. You know that was you know. My friends, my group of friends, my gay men friends, they loved that. They would dress, I had this one friend. Oh, Johnny Frisch, he was a great guy. He loved to dress up like Marilyn Monroe. So, you know that is what I remember. That was a great bar. And the great dance music. You would just

dance and dance and dance. Now I'm on my third girlfriend and she was a really good dancer. So, we went out a lot and that was fun.

Penn: Alright, what sort of support system did you have in San Francisco?

Edwards: Well I had a group of friends, primarily from my third girlfriend. She had been living there for I don't know how long, maybe four or five years before I got there. She was originally from North Carolina and several, I think there were maybe four or five of them who had all moved out to San Francisco and then made some more friends. We were each other's families. We spent Thanksgivings together and Christmases together. We had these great dinner parties and that, there was just this group that we hung out with.

29:29

Then I had some women friends, that were separate from this group too, that I had made. This is kind of a funny story if you want to hear it. The Russian River was a place where people would go. They had bars and you could stay in little cabins and they also had a campground there. The first weekend in May was always "Women's Weekend at the River" so it was just lesbians. It was like heaven to go there. So, our friends would go and we would camp with these two friends of mine from East Lansing and then my girlfriend and I, we would camp out. We would make these gourmet meals and we would camp by the river. We would swim in the river, and it was kind of funny because during the day we would be swimming, and we would be swimming naked and these families would be canoeing on the river. They would come by and their heads would just roll because here would be all these naked women on this beach. Anyway, that was crazy times.

We would go into the town. We took over the whole town of Guerneville and still to this day people talk about "Women's Weekend at the River." Then there were these restaurants and bars, so after we had hung out during the day, we went to this bar where you could get barbeque or something and they had this patio. I was sitting there and I was watching these two women together and I just felt compelled to go and talk to them. My girlfriend was like what are you doing. I said I am going to go introduce myself and talk to them. It was a crazy thing to do, and then later on they came and showed up at the restaurant where I worked at and we are still friends to this day. I am friends with those women, and I am not friends with the girlfriend that I had at the time. So, that's a different group of friends that I had that I sort of created for myself. There was just something about them that I felt I had to go talk to them.

Penn: Apparently, it worked cause you guys are all still friends.

Edwards: It's kind of interesting for me, and I don't know if this is true for most people, but I have sort of different groups of friends that sort of fill different areas, like I don't have just one best friend who you know, like I might have a group of friends that are more art—that are interested in art, or more interested in philosophical and spiritual issues than you know, like some of my oldest friends might not fit into some of those niches. They aren't really interested in spiritual things but this friend that I met was, and is. I mean it's kind of interesting.

Penn: Right?

Edwards: So that was my support system.

Penn: At this time you were in San Francisco there were a lot of misconceptions about AIDS. Did you encounter a lot of that misinformation within your friends group or within the people you knew?

Edwards: I wouldn't say that I encountered, well more with my family I would say. My friends, I was there in the eighties and the eighties were the era of AIDS absolutely. My men friends, my close men friends had AIDS, several of them did, several of them were HIV positive, one of them is still alive today. He doesn't know why he was spared when everybody else around us was dying and that was interesting because it was also the time of the AIDS Quilt. To see that, to have that going on and to see that quilt. It came to Moscone Center, which is this big conference center. It was laid out there and that was a really super emotional experience to see that. I didn't go to see it in Washington, D.C., but it was really unbelievable because your friends were dying all around you and you could do nothing about it.

Penn: What was the AIDS Quilt?

Edwards: The AIDS Quilt was started by a guy, I can't think of his name right now. They had an office in the Castro, and friends and family members would make a panel in memory of someone who had died of AIDS. Initially it grew out of the gay community in San Francisco and then it expanded to be nationwide and include women, and not that many women of course, but other people who had died of AIDS that weren't just gay men. Initially, it might be someone making a quilt panel who had whatever that person liked or was interested in, so it was a memorial quilt. I don't know where it resides currently, or if it is broken up into pieces. I know that it has been on display in other cities over the years. I don't know if it is still going on today, but it was really something.

34:54

I had a couple of friends who died of AIDS. One friend had Kaposi sarcoma, which was like the red, like way worse than measles, all over his body. He was devastated that he had it and he didn't want to go out in public, so he shut himself in his apartment, he drew the blinds, and he watched *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* every day until he died. My girlfriend at the time and I, we would go over to his house and one time we went to give him a bath. He was embarrassed that we would be giving him a bath and we did it anyway. We tried to get him out of the apartment, and one time he went with us and we took him to the ocean and we sat on the beach. His family had, when he came out to his family they basically said you don't exist to us so he had no family to support him so we were his family. Some of my other friends died after I moved away.

As far as misconceptions, yes it was in the news, yes it was rampant, but not within my group. My group was gay, we knew what it was and we knew how it was affecting everyone's lives. At the time, Rock Hudson, I remember sitting, I went home in the summer one year, and I remember, I think it was summertime. I remember sitting with my family and we watched that and my grandma, he couldn't, she didn't believe it. He couldn't you know, I remember there being some conversation about what it was.

There's another story too. When I went to the Gay Olympics, to the Gay Games, I sat in the stands, and was talking to this one guy. He told me he was HIV positive and I just went and I put my arm around him and gave him a hug. He just started crying because people were afraid to touch him. He's like you're not afraid that you're gonna get it? I said no. It never crossed my mind to even think that that was even a possibility, and I guess I didn't care anyway.

Penn: Did you witness a lot of that though? People being confused about what AIDS was and how they would contract it? I mean you said you didn't care, you knew you weren't going to get it simply from hugging a person, but...

Edwards: I think, you know I don't remember that. Not in my circle. I saw it on the news. Of course, I saw it on the news. But I was sort of in this San Francisco bubble where what was happening out there was not really, I don't know.

Penn: Did you see the news reports and the blatantly don't touch people with AIDS cause then you'll get AIDS, did you see that affecting your friends that had AIDS? I mean, obviously, the guy at the Gay Games was an example. But, like...

Edwards: Right. Not so much and maybe I was just oblivious. I just, I don't know. I can't remember it anyway. Let's put it that way. Maybe?

Penn: What did you learn, I mean just from living in the AIDS epidemic, besides it's a really terrible disease and we really need to do something?

Edwards: That's a really tough question. Like I said, I think I wasn't really in that mindset. In retrospect, compassion is key, and it doesn't matter what situation someone's in, or what illness they might have, or what they might look like. Everybody needs compassion and the human touch. You know to be able to hug somebody, people need hugs. No matter what they are going through, they need hugs.

39:31

Penn: You already mentioned the Gay Games and one meeting that one fellow. What else do you remember?

Edwards: That was another one of those, you know, this group, this huge group of like-minded people, and I just remember the stands were packed. There were people from, I don't know, like twenty-seven countries or something that had come from all over the world to compete in all these different sports. They weren't you know the best athletes necessarily, but they were there to compete and to compete in this environment of acceptance. The stands were packed. There were colors, it was just really super colorful. I know that I cried because I'm sentimental anyway, and I remember the marathon runners, when they were coming in the stands at the closing ceremonies, as they would run into the stadium, I was just emotional. I was just really emotional. It was kind of this overwhelming atmosphere and here you know sort of mind-boggling like wow it's not just San Francisco that's full of gay people. They are everywhere – we are everywhere! Look at how many we are in this one space! It was sort of like being in the Kiva in East Lansing. It was crazy in a great way.

Penn: We can't talk about San Francisco without talking about the Gay Pride Parade.

Edwards: Oh, the Gay Pride Parade. It was fabulous. Again, another of those wow experiences. We are talking you know 500,000 people lining Market Street to see all these floats and people; all different kinds of people. I suppose there were transgender people at the time but that was also in the news then. But there were lots and lots of crazy outfits. There was one area where there were booths set up when you would hang out after the parade and walk around. You could go to a booth about something political, or buy food, or just hang out with your friends.

I had a motorcycle and so I rode in Dykes on Bikes. It was our job to lead off the parade. It was so awesome. The first year it was really hard because we are riding up Market Street and there are rail tracks and I was trying to steer because it was our job to get everybody excited. We had to honk the horn, we had to wave, and I am trying to drive on the tracks and honk the horn and wave. My friend—I had a friend go with me and we dressed up. One year we dressed like Surf and Safari so I wore a wetsuit and she had a safari outfit. She would make mimosas so she would be carrying mimosas. We would be drinking mimosas while driving in the parade and honking and waving. But the exciting part was there was this area that all the bikes would gather and you'd you know—I would get up in the morning and I'd polish the bike and make sure it was all spotless and shiny, right? You'd go and sit in this area and you'd wait for the parade to start. Pretty soon someone would start their engine, and then you'd hear more engines. You could just feel this swell of emotion and excitement. It was awesome.

I think that one of the touching, I always cried again, when P-FLAG would be in the parade, which was Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays. That to me was really touching that these parents would put themselves out there and be in this parade. It was really cool.

Penn: So how many years did you participate in the parade?

Edwards: I want to say three for sure, maybe four.

Penn: Every time for the Dykes on Bikes?

Edwards: Of course!

Penn: Of course.

Edwards: Of course! I want to say four because I did it two years and then this other friend wanted to ride and then the one friend who had did it the first two years was really pissed at me because I let this other friend ride. One year I wore a rainbow piñata on my head. It was like a mohawk; it was kind of hard to balance but it was fun.

Penn: You made it work.

Edwards: You put rainbow flags on the handle bars. It was great.

44:46

Penn: Did you ever go just to watch the parade or always in the parade?

Edwards: Well since we started out the parade, then we would park the bikes and we got to basically see the whole parade because we led off the parade. There were hundreds of women on bikes. Hundreds. It was awesome.

Penn: How did living in San Francisco compare to living in Lansing as far as the LGBTQ acceptance and pride?

Edwards: Well, night and day. Here we were in this dark dive bar, sort of like hiding away. There were certainly and you certainly and even Michigan today is still conservative in the way that I don't think a lot of people feel comfortable walking down the street holding hands with their girlfriend or boyfriend. So, it was night and day. I don't know. You know, some things were similar, like lesbian softball teams. Here in Michigan, it was one of the few places where you could actually be with a group of lesbians in an acceptable environment. There was a whole league. You knew that at every softball game you went you, there was going to be lesbians there. Now today, you know, I still don't understand, all these college teams, all of these girls have long ponytails with bows in their hair and I'm thinking what? Where are the lesbians at?

Penn: Maybe they just had to get more incognito.

Edwards: I guess, but there's a perfect example of a difference. You didn't have to be incognito. You could just be you whatever that was. So very different.

Penn: So when did you move back to Michigan?

Edwards: Well first I moved to San Diego. I lived there for three years and that's what drove me back because—everybody says I'm crazy—I didn't like the weather there. It was really boring. There were no thunderstorms. There was no snow. At least in San Francisco you could go to Tahoe if you wanted snow. It was different. San Diego is much more conservative, so there was a small gay community there. I don't even remember what it was called. I don't think I really participated in it much. I don't remember there being a pride parade, there probably was, but I don't remember it. I just wasn't involved in the community there. So, I came back here in, eighty--no in '92 back to Michigan.

Penn: What brought you back?

Edwards: Partly the conservative nature of the city and I was missing my family.

Penn: And the snow.

Edwards: And the snow. Yes! Where is the snow? It's December 3rd! Where is the snow?!

Penn: That's what I have been saying.

Edwards: So yeah, that brought me back. Now I'm on my fourth girlfriend. She was from California. I met her in San Diego and she moved back here with me. And, yeah, she hated it here. Absolutely hated it

here. The entire time we were here and she was here for nineteen years, seventeen years, something so she's back in California now.

Penn: As long as she is happy. Right?

Edwards: Yeah, whatever.

Penn: When you came back from California what was the community like? How difficult was it for you to adjust from San Francisco where everything is like out in the open to Michigan where everything is sort of...

Edwards: Not.

Penn: Under the rug.

Edwards: I had sort of a different approach than my partner did. She was sort of disgusted by the whole thing. She was like blah, blah, blah. They did have a pride event in Royal Oak, it was in Royal Oak at the time. The first one we went to was held in a garage—the parking garage there. And then outside somewhere, I can't remember. And there were like 3,000 people. So, yeah, it was really different. 500,000 to 3,000, but I guess I was at the point where for me, I didn't need that so much anymore. You know, I was comfortable where I was. I had found myself, I knew who I was. I felt it was our responsibility to educate people. Not that I would say, Hi Allie, I'm a lesbian, but I do so in a more subtle way. I would just talk about my partner. When people at work were talking about their husbands and their boyfriends, I would talk about my partner in the same way. And then they would say, whatever, or whatever—it didn't matter to me.

Penn: Right.

Edwards: I didn't care. My mom—when I was really young—my mom said to me, why do feel you have to wear a lavender L on your forehead? And I was like, what are you talking about? Like to her I was really out there. But I was discovering myself then, and now I don't care.

50:12

Penn: Right. So, you moved back to Michigan and you adopted your daughter?

Edwards: Yes, not right away. We moved back in '92 and we adopted her in 2003. It was an interesting thing because my partner and I had talked about having children. How would we do that? At one point, we had asked her brother to donate sperm—thank God that didn't happen. He was aghast, he never even answered the question because it was beyond his comprehension. But thank God it didn't happen that way. Because we would have been tied in a much deeper way.

So, adopting, we had gone to this party, I had this group of friends, we had this group of friends here, we had gone to a party and we met this woman, it was at her house. She had adopted this daughter from China, and my partner had been talking to her about that, so after more people had left, what do you think about that idea? I said, yeah, sound great. How she described it was, if you dropped a pebble in a

pool and there were ripples and it just grew into this thing. Because I'm really into research, I immediately after that party started researching how do we go about it.

It took us eighteen months from the start of the paperwork to the time we went to China. But, of course, Michigan doesn't, or didn't at the time accept same sex adoption, and China certainly didn't. So, we had to have social workers come to the house and talk to us here about all different kinds of things. I swear, people, straight people, should have to go through what we had to go through to adopt. For anybody to have a child, they should have to go through that same process. They ask about religion, about money, about how are you going to raise the child, about what kind of education are you going to give them, what kind of values. All of this stuff, all of these questions, anyway, to make a long story short, legally, only one of us could adopt. So legally, I was the adoptive parent.

When we went to China, and in fact I had a friend who said, I think I told you before, the question on the form was, would you ever get married if the right man came along? Because I was having this moral conflict about not saying that I'm not straight, and I'm never going to be straight. But my friend said, do whatever you have to do to get your daughter. So, on that question, would you ever marry a man if the right man came along? I can answer that, because I know the right man will never come along so yes.

When we travelled to China she had to be my traveling companion and it was very funny because as soon as we got to China there was another lesbian couple there. I mean, it was very obvious, I have very good gaydar, and they wouldn't have anything to do with us in the adoptive town where we went, in the province that we went. My partner didn't want to do anything because they were afraid that the Chinese government wouldn't blah, blah, blah, whatever. So, when we finally left the province and we had legally adopted according to the Chinese government, then we became close. And I'm actually friends with one of those women now, and our daughters are friends. Yes, it was very funny, it was very funny, but anyway. Adopting my daughter—it was the best thing I ever done for sure.

54:26

Penn: What was it like in China?

Edwards: Well, you know, you land there and you can tell you are in a communist country. There are guards like government guards in the airports. The floors were spotless, you can eat off the floors in the airport. I mean, it was unbelievable, but we had a guide, a facilitator who walked us through every part of everything.

We were just in awe, I mean to think that we were going to become parents that was the initial thing. Everyone was really anxious. When are we going to meet our children, when are we going to meet our children, and then to have this baby, well she was a year old, that you had to do everything for. She didn't know us. She didn't recognize the smells of us. We couldn't speak the language, and we had to try to become a family and then get her to trust us while we were there was really something.

Penn: It just sounds...

Edwards: It was exciting and overwhelming and wonderful and scary, and all of that all at once, but I just fell right into it.

Penn: Did you pick up any Chinese phrases just to...?

Edwards: I had tried to learn a couple, before we went, but it was more of a bonding thing. I had done a lot of reading. Like I said, I do research; I had read and read and read, and been on list-servs with other adoptive parents to get as much information and make it as smooth as possible. I had bought this pack, a carrying pack, not a backpack but one that was sort of a sling and so I carried her everywhere the entire trip. I carried her. My ex did not because she wasn't the parent, so I had to. But that I think was a good thing because we bonded. It wasn't—not the first night, but it's a gradual thing and it's great. Love her to pieces.

Penn: How do you feel about the LGBTQ movement and community in the past compared to what it is now? I'm sure your answer would have changed after the November 8th election.

Edwards: Before you know in the eighties, I was you know finding myself and just trying to immerse myself in all of it. When we moved here in the early nineties I was involved in Affirmations in Ferndale a little bit. Very disappointed there are no wonderful gay bars to go dancing in here so that is probably my biggest angst here because I like to dance and I'd love to go out and dance, but I don't want to go to a straight bar. Not interested in that.

As far as the movement is concerned I have pretty much not been in it because I am a parent. I mean I have gone to Pride Fest and I have taken my daughter to Pride Fest. Actually, what is really interesting is that she is really interested in it now. She wanted to go this year. She is in this club at school called Spectrum that is where one week somebody gave a presentation on historical figures in the LGBT community. They are going to see the exhibition at the Cranbrook Art Gallery by Edward Gorey because he was bi-sexual. They are talking about transgender bathrooms and so you know, what have I seen in my lifetime in the movement?

Coming from having to be well not having to be closeted but so many people being closeted to now gay marriage I mean how fabulous was that. I had a lot of friends that got married. Gay rights has been the movement. It has been a gradual. It's like women's rights; we are not 100%. We are only now getting equal pay and it's going to take a long time still. Our country wasn't ready for a woman president and all of that, but we have made a lot of strides and I hope we can keep—it's going to be tough now.

59:19

Penn: Do you worry about it after the election results?

Edwards: Not specifically, I worry about everything. I am worrying about everything. I can't watch the news. It's appalling to me.

I have to say though you know about the safety pin, you know wearing a safety pin as like a safe harbor for people. For my birthday, a few weeks ago, my daughter made me a safety pin with yarn in a rainbow. I should have worn it today. I should have worn it today but I forgot to put it on. So, that's pretty cool.

Penn: That's so nice.

Edwards: It's nice to have a kid who's interested and who is liberal-minded and can make a change. She will be voting in the next election.

Penn: I think though that you're also responsible for encouraging that liberalness because you're not putting her in this little glass box of this is what you can do and this is what you can't do.

Edwards: Well it's a balance. You want to try and have your kid grow up to be what they want to be within sort of staying within in some sort of framework. I was nervous about her shaving her head. I thought that would be a little much, not only for her but—yeah. I am a little worried because of where she goes to school and what the reaction of people will be. I shouldn't be and that's so not me. I will do things to get a reaction from people. Sort of this is my new struggle, like how do I manage this.

Penn: You're parenting.

Edwards: Yes, exactly. So, you know, I don't know, will she be the one that is in the next LGBTQ movement? Maybe.

Penn: I definitely think there is another one coming.

Edwards: Yes. I'm all for it. Will I be—I will be there supporting her. Will I be there riding in Dykes on Bikes again? Probably not. Sadly. Maybe though I don't know, we will see.

Penn: Yes, we will.

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