

**Oral History Interview of
Grace Rogers**

Interviewed by: Elissa Stroman and Jordan Butler

August 1, 2018

Lubbock, Texas

Part of the:

LGBTQIA Oral History Project

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Interview Series Background:

In Spring 2018, the Office of LGBTQIA, in partnership with the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, began collecting archival resources and oral histories from members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA), and ally communities. The oral history interview series seeks to record the rich history of social progress relative to LGBTQIA people at Texas Tech University, in Lubbock, and throughout West Texas. Interviews highlight the lived insights and knowledge of LGBTQIA people and allies.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Grace Rogers as she discusses her activism and involvement with the LGBTQIA community. In this interview, Grace describes her family, what got her involved with the community, and her hopes for the future.

Length of Interview: 01:35:36

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Keywords

LGBT, PFLAG, Pride, Lubbock Texas, social activism, AIDS

Elissa Stroman (ES):

The recording so that anything else we say doesn't get lost, so we don't forget. So this thing should pick up just fine.

Grace Rogers (GR):

All right.

ES:

Today's date is August 1, 2018. My name is Elissa Stroman. We are here at the Southwest Collection. We are interviewing Grace Rogers for the LGBTQIA oral history project. Also here with me—Jordan, do you want to say your name for the recorder?

Jordan Butler (JB):

Hi, my name is Jordan Butler. I'm the student assistant with the office of LGBTQIA. One of my duties is to work on this oral history project.

ES:

So, we'll start out this interview with—if you state your full name for the record.

GR:

My full name is actually Mary Grace Wheeler-Rogers. I've never used Mary, so I just use Grace Wheeler-Rogers.

ES:

Okay. And your date of birth?

GR:

I was born December 19, 1937.

ES:

Where were you born?

GR:

I was born in a little town that's kind of in the oil patch. It's Iraan, Texas. You've probably never heard of it.

ES:

No. Can you spell that?

GR:

It's I-r-a-a-n, I think.

ES:

Okay, okay.

GR:

It's kind of like Iran, but not quite.

ES:

Yeah, I've seen it printed. I've never heard it pronounced before. Okay. And your parents' names.

GR:

My parents' names—my mother's name was Mary Helen Wattley-Wheeler. My father's name was Wilburn Raima Wheeler. And he went by W.R.

ES:

Okay. So just tell me about childhood, growing up, where you grew up, your family make up, and all of that.

GR:

Well, my father was a band director—teacher. But he ended up finally mainly being a band director. So we moved around a bit, not an awful lot. After he returned from World War II, where he served in World War II, we moved from Freer, Texas to Levelland. That was in 1946. He picked up the kind of fledgling band program for Levelland, all the Levelland schools, and he developed it into a really fine program. Eventually, in 1958, I believe it was, South Plains College opened in Levelland, and he became the first band director, one of the music faculty, for South Plains College. And then eventually, because of his issues with rheumatoid arthritis, he eventually became chairman of the math department and had to give up the band directing and so forth because of his physical limitations. I grew up in Levelland. I came to Texas Tech in 19—I came in—I graduated from high school in 1955. I graduated from Tech in 1958. So I went through in three years and some summers.

ES:

Before we turned on the recording you were saying that you entered Tech at age seventeen.

GR:

I was barely seventeen, yeah. When I graduated, I was barely twenty.

ES:

[Laughs] So you sped through it all. Tell me about—you were saying that you had to write an essay to enter into Tech.

GR:

Well, in those days, we didn't have standardized testing, so in order to see if you were going to be college material—and I had—I was one of the top two graduates of my class, so I thought I'd probably be all right. But we still had to go through that. So I had grown up in Levelland in segregated schools. Lubbock had segregated schools. There were segregated fountains and restaurants. The African American kids sat in the balcony of the theater and we sat below. It was just the way it was, and it just seemed like it was not a very good arrangement to me. So, I chose to write for my essay that day about the evils of segregation. And I pretty much felt that way about any kind of injustice ever since.

ES:

Do you know how—I mean, other than being accepted to college, did you hear any other feedback on the essay?

GR:

Nope, just, "It's all right to come." [Laughter] No, there wasn't—they didn't give you any feedback. I guess they just wanted to see if you could write and think and so forth.

ES:

Integration didn't happen even when you were at Tech, did it?

GR:

Yes it did.

ES:

Oh it did?

GR:

It began to happen in the late 1950s.

ES:

Okay.

GR:

Brown v. Board of Education was decided in '55. So it was kind of a landmark year.

ES:

Well, tell me about your undergraduate years at Tech. What was campus like in the late fifties?

GR:

The campus was much smaller. And I came over as an elementary education major and quickly decided I didn't want to take that much education, so I changed to English and minored in—majored in English and minored in government, and also got enough education to have Texas teaching credentials for secondary schools. I spent a lot of time—I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed—we were in Drane Hall, the freshman girls. Then I was an RA at Horn Hall, which was actually pretty new at that time. And the third year I got married. So I lived in a funny little apartment with my husband. I was—I don't know if this matters or not, but I was this highest academic freshman girl at Texas Tech the first year. I have a little trophy, one of the few I've ever earned in my life. Then I—and then I—because I was a musician, I spent a lot of time in the band. D.O. Wiley was the band director. I was the secretary of the—I was his secretary. That was my part-time job. Spent an awful lot of time in band, and that's where I met my husband, that's where—most of my friends were in the band. They'd come with me over here to the college. Band—music and band, and then I sang in the Festival Choir. I didn't sing—you weren't allowed to sing in the choirs unless you were a music major—the actual choirs. But I sang in some of the big choirs because I liked to sing, too.

ES:

What instrument did you play?

GR:

I played flute. And then eventually, while I was still in—my husband played French horn. And he was an engineering student. We eventually both joined the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra. We played in the orchestra until I had my—until 1968 when I had my fourth child. It was just too much. [Laughter] Couldn't make room for orchestra rehearsals and practice.

ES:

In orchestra, the Lubbock Symphony was pretty new at that point in time.

GR:

The Lubbock Symphony was fairly new. We were there in its early years. But we were good. We're not as good as they are now, [laughter] but we were pretty good. And we enjoyed—music has always been a big thing for me.

ES:

Do you continue to play or sing today?

GR:

I did until I had this problem with my hand. I played the flute all my life. I still have my flute. And I sing in choirs, mainly church choirs now, and play my flute at church. I've been a musician all the time. I just never wanted to make that my life's work.

ES:

So you finished your undergrad degree, and what happens next?

GR:

After my undergraduate degree, then I—my husband—I got out in three years, my husband's engineering degree took five years, so he had started a year ahead of me. He was a graduate of Levelland—Lubbock High School in '54. I had two children fairly soon. I stayed home with them, took care of them. Oh actually that's not quite true. I did actually, when I was way too young, barely twenty, I got a job and was going to work for that year that Tom was finishing his engineering degree. I was an eighth grade English teacher at a brand new school, Atkins Junior High. I was teaching eighth grade grammar. It was not my—I did not enjoy it. I'll put it like that. I was a person who loved grammar and loved English and reveled in all that kind of thing, and all of a sudden I was confronted with lots of students who didn't like it as well as I did. [laughter] And I was to motivate them to learn to love English grammar as much as I did. I was—it was—I was too young. I had not—I mean, I had friends that didn't do well in school, but it just wasn't my thing. So I didn't get the kids that didn't want to participate and to learn. So I stayed home for many years with my children. I was fortunate that I could do that. I had two more children after that, so I had four children. Then I decided when—I was feeling a little unfulfilled, so I came back and started working on an interdisciplinary master's degree about the first year that they decided there was a degree like that, because I was interested in government, I was interested in Renaissance English, and I was interested in Greek philosophy. And you had to have—particularly political philosophy. So all that was what I had. Dr. Tom Langford was kind of the one who started this interdisciplinary degree. So I got my master's degree after I had four children.

ES:

About what year was that?

GR:

You know, I have to always look that up. It's got to be—I have it at home, but I don't recall what year that was. It was—I mean, I had the last two children in 1967 and '68. So it's probably—it was probably in the seventies.

ES:

So your first two children, were they also born in the sixties?

GR:

No. One of them was born in '59, one of them was born in '60, then—so one of them was born in the sixties. Then the other two were born '67 and '68.

ES:

I neglected to ask your husband's name.

GR:

My husband's name is Thomas Allen Rogers, R-o-g-e-r-s, no *d* in there.

ES:

And your children's names?

GR:

My children's names are—my oldest son is Michael Paul Rogers, my daughter's name is Sarah Grace Rogers, Colwell now, C-o-l-w-e-l-l. My next two group of children—I had two sons: Joel David Rogers and Mark Thomas Rogers.

ES:

Okay. So really, I think—well, the reason why we're interviewing you is because of PFLAG and your involvement as an ally in the LGBT community, which—how did that—I'm guessing that's—it's because of your children and it's because of other things. So how do we get from where we are right now to there?

GR:

Well, eventually, when my children got older—and I did some other things too—I began to teach part-time. Then I spent about eight or ten—eight years in Taos working in art galleries, because we had an old home in Taos so I've always loved that part. But eventually I came back and I got really serious about teaching. I became a full-time teacher of English and government for Coronado High School, which was the school all my children had graduated from, so I was quite familiar with that school and very comfortable there. And I'd spent long terms substituting. I just needed—decided I wanted to work full-time. So I enjoyed that very much. I did that for—I retired in 2004. I would also do some adjunct teaching for South Plains College. I taught government. I didn't ever teach English for South, all government. Eventually I became just an all government teacher. It wasn't that I still didn't love English as much, it's just that somehow that—what was going on in history, what was going on in the times that I was living in, just drew me more and more into an interest in government. That's what I ended up doing, teaching government, AP government, dual-credit government.

ES:

[Pause] So—let's see. Do you have any questions? I forget to—

JB:

Could you talk a little bit more about your children and stuff?

GR:

My children. I have a—my children are all very different. It turns out that my first and third children, who are male, were gay. They didn't really come out so young as they do now. It's a lot healthier for children to be able to identify who they are younger, but that just wasn't the climate that they were brought up in. Not that we had any issues with that, but it just wasn't something that was on the radar a lot. I never thought I'd have gay children.

JB:

When was this? When were your—when were they born?

GR:

Well, Paul was born in '59.

JB:

Okay.

GR:

He really—he was really—I began to just determine that he probably was gay when he was in college. None of my children went to college in Lubbock because we told them they couldn't. Sorry, Texas Tech, because we had a long history with Texas Tech. My father-in-law is the—my mother-in-law, deceased now, was in the first graduating class of Texas Tech. My father-in-law was the first electrical engineering graduate of Texas Tech. My husband has his double E [**Electrical Engineering**] degree from Tech. I have two degrees from Tech. My father had about maybe three degrees from Tech. But they had lived in Lubbock all their lives and we told them they needed to experience something outside of Lubbock. So we said, Any place you can go, you can go. They didn't go as far—afar—as I kind of wished they had. One of them went to Abilene Christian University, and that was—I'm sorry to say that was a mistake because you don't want a gay son to go to ACU.

JB:

No.

ES:

Was that Paul?

GR:

That was Paul. That was Paul. And that was his choice to go there, because he was—he thought he wanted to pursue some medical careers, which he ended up not doing. But it was a school where he got a good education in those kinds of things. [Phone chimes] But it wasn't a—it was a mistake, a big mistake, the biggest I ever made was to not realize that would be a bad place for him. I could've—I was trying to get him to go to TCU [**Texas Christian University**], actually, because he wanted a small school. My daughter, who's kind of a very unusual person, has traveled all over the world. She is one that's the library. She got her undergraduate degree from Austin College in Sherman, which, again, had a religious base to it, but it really wasn't a religious school. It was just the kind of school that was good for her. Yet, again, I kind of wanted her—she was accepted—I really wanted her to go to St. John's in Santa Fe, which is an off-shoot of the one in Indianapolis. She got into it, and she was going to go until they told her she would have to stay there the full four years. Sarah's always in a hurry, so she didn't—she wanted to go where she could graduate faster than that, so she went out and got in two and a half years, and then went to Columbia University in New York. Finally, I got them out of state eventually.

ES:

She wanted to take after her mother, though. She was modeling after you.

GR:

Yeah. She had her master's degree in another year.

ES:

Oh wow.

GR:

In three and a half years she had her MLA.

ES:

Wow, that's crazy.

GR:

And I think her undergraduate degree is probably in classical studies or philosophy. Then I got two sons who decided they wanted to go to the University of Texas. By that time I said, "Okay." We had a gap there about six or seven years. We got a little more—we got a little more relaxed at parenting and we said, If that's what you want to do. It's an awful big place, but have at it. And it was a good experience for both of them. Both of them, they were just one year apart. Paul and Sarah were two years apart, even though they were all both thirteen months apart age-wise, but in school, it just worked out that way. Mark followed Joel to the University of Texas. They both graduated. Joel went on to get his law degree at George Washington University in Washington

D.C., and is an attorney right now in Austin working for the state of Texas. Mark is a—has an English degree from the University of Texas, and he owns a freediving business on a little island off the coast of Honduras called Utila, U-t-i-l-a.

ES:

Wow.

GR:

And he's traveled all over the world, too. Sarah has lived in a number of places. She lived in New York. It was kind of a basis. Paul ended up finally in New York as well. They were both up there. I'm talking about Manhattan. So I went to—we spent a lot of time in New York when they were there. I have a brother that also lives in New York. He lives in Long Island, New York. Let's see where we were.

ES:

We were—I'm curious. Paul went to ACU, and Sarah went to—

GR:

Austin College.

ES:

Austin College. So they went to these Christian schools. Was that just because of the smallness? Or did you raise them—

GR:

No, we were religious people. I didn't have any problems about going to religious schools. That was fine with me. It just so happened that that was an unfortunate choice for Paul. He graduated summa cum laude. So did I, by the way. But he didn't have a good college experience like I did. And that was because he was going through these issues of his own sexuality. Boy, that was not okay at ACU.

JB:

When was this?

GR:

This was—he went to college at eighteen.

ES:

Fifty-nine, so '69, '79. Late seventies, early eighties. I went to McMurry for undergrad, and we were always kind of considered—they would always say of the Christian schools, we were the most—

GR:

You were the more liberal—

ES:

We were the most liberal, because we were Methodist—

GR:

—than the Baptists at Hardin-Simmons.

ES:

—versus Baptists.

GR:

Abilene Christian is a fine school. I'm not—he was well academically tried. They are better than they used to be, but it was not a—it was not an accepting place at all for Paul.

ES:

I was going to—there's a lot of rigor to that. There's a lot of rules. At that time, there was still probably curfews, and you couldn't be seen—I mean, even in—

GR:

That wasn't it. There actually wasn't curfews and going to chapel and all that stuff. That wasn't it. It was just the fact that, “You are not okay.”

ES:

Well, and I was—

GR:

Who you are. “We suspected you're gay, and that's not okay.”

ES:

I was going to say the thing I remember from that time was ACU used to have—in the early 2000s, used to have spies that would go out to the clubs. So if you were an Abilene Christian kid caught at one of the night clubs, you would get in trouble.

GR:

They'd be expelled.

ES:

And I would imagine it was the same thing for him. So if he's going through this, he wouldn't have been able to find a community or find anybody—

GR:

There was not a community. He had to kind of create his own community.

ES:

Do you know about that? Can you tell us about what he was—any coping? Did he find people?

GR:

He spent an awful lot of time studying. Then he lived in a dorm, maybe one year, two years. He was there four years. The last two years he lived off campus with some friends, and that was better. But he was very focused on school.

JB:

What did—so after he graduated from ACU?

GR:

Paul thought he wanted to be a dentist, so he'd just done the whole medical school degree. After about nearly two years of dental school, he said, "Unh-uh, this is not for me." So he ended up working in a law firm in New York.

JB:

At that point, both of your sons—

GR:

The other son is not really open and out, and not nearly so obviously suspicious—suspected of being gay. And also his brother who was—Paul was very open when he got to New York. I mean, he was open in some regards. In other regards, he was always guarded. I could have brought you some pictures of him and you could see that, in some ways, he was drop dead gorgeous, handsome. But he's also—there's a part of that was shy. I think it was because of his—well, he was struggling. I'll just put it like that. Not with us. It was fine with us. We didn't—this person who thought everybody should be loved, [laughter] I wasn't going to stop loving my children because they turned out to be a little more unique than I thought. I was okay with it. It's just the world was not okay, and the United States was not okay.

ES:

Did the—did he have a conversation with you? Did he have a—like a coming out moment to you?

GR:

Nope. My children, neither one of them, had a coming out moment. Mom just figured it out. And it was fun.

ES:

There was never even a conversation?

GR:

No, we had lots of conversations about being gay. [laughter] We didn't that moment where it's going to be revealed to me. It's just that I gradually determined they were gay, and that was fine, as long as—I was just concerned about what might happen to them. Unfortunately, for my son, probably the first person that he ever—that I ever knew was a boyfriend for him turned out to be one of the early people who was infected with HIV, and he died. Many years later my son died. He died in 1959.

JB:

In 19—

GR:

No, not '59. That's when he was born. He died in 1999.

ES:

Nineteen ninety-nine, okay.

GR:

So the last—he was in New York City. He was—the last five years of his life, he was right in that period of time where everything was changing, but it wasn't changing enough for him to be salvaged.

ES:

I was—I wanted to get my timeline straight, so I was reading up a lot yesterday to make sure I knew when AIDS first was—the outbreak and when there was public understanding of it. This is—the early to mid-eighties is when it kind of really exploded on the scene. Did he—did y'all have conversations? Did he say something to you about friends getting sick?

GR:

Well, he told us—well, no. As a mother, I have very good intuition, I think. Whenever his friend died and he—by that time they had already broken up and Paul was gone. But, I knew this person whose name happened to be Bruce. Bruce died in all the ways that people with AIDS die. I was very suspicious that perhaps that Paul—but it lies dormant. And he may not have gotten it through Bruce, but Bruce died. I mean, he definitely had AIDS. His mother was a nurse. They just didn't—they just said he died of pneumonia. But I always had that feeling that he might, because it was just kind of starting to show up. He lived many years very healthy. His experience was not the worst, to put it like that. He had about five years where he finally—he retired from the law firm and took his disability. But he was—for the most part he was able to get out and do things. He wasn't bedfast a lot. He never was bedfast. In fact, he was here visiting us and got suddenly sick and died over here at UMC Hospital, after he had been going to the gym three days before. So, it's a difficult—it's the worst thing that ever happened to me in my life, and my husband, I think, would say the same thing. Fortunately, my other son was born later and, as far as I know, is not—is perfectly healthy.

ES:

Just the span of eight years.

GR:

And also knowing what things to do, because they didn't—it wasn't even called HIV at that time. It was this strange illness. So that was a big—that was not a good—not a good time. Paul and I went to Europe together. When I came back from Europe—we went in October and November. When we came back—it was a good trip. When we came back, it wasn't any time when he got pneumonia, then he was diagnosed. My mother had just died that year. It was not a good year. [laughter]

ES:

You said that was 1999?

GR:

No, that was '99 when he died.

ES:

Ninety-nine. Okay. But by that point—

GR:

It was '92.

ES:

Okay.

GR:

That's a little longer than—I have to rethink that a little bit. It might have been '93 when he was diagnosed. But I know he died in 1999.

ES:

By that point, I think hospitals were a little more equipped to handle—

GR:

I'd always thought that if he'd been in New York City instead of Lubbock that he might—they might have—he might have had a different outcome. But he also said he didn't—when we realized he had pneumonia, he said he didn't want to go on a respirator. In fact, he said, “Let me go.” We didn't think at the time—we didn't know he was going to die. So that was hard to honor that wish. I'd have put him on a respirator and see what happened. But I knew—he was perfectly clear when they asked him. They said, If it gets to this, which we don't think it will—so, anyway. But I don't—if you want to know much of the reason that I do the work I do, that's it. And then just having another gay son, as it turns out, just turned out to be a plus because I really do think that people who have a variety of kids with a variety of interests and sexual orientation, whatever—I'd like to have some mulatto kids, but I married a white man, an Anglo, so I couldn't really do that. I think it just makes life much more interesting, much richer. When I go speak at classes at Texas Tech, I always say it has broadened my horizons and blessed me in more ways than you can imagine. And that's even despite having one of them die because of—probably because of that. Joel—I prefer not to out Joel too awfully much. He's certainly out in his life and out at his work, but he has a prominent job so I try not to dwell on him as much. He's good. All I do is wish he had somebody—a life partner. But he's a very—he's been a very successful and a very good kind of lawyer. He works on behalf of children.

ES:

Okay. So, when—was it because of Paul that—did that kind of set something in motion for you to help do more community work?

GR:

Of course, I was busy. I was very busy teaching. I was the kind of teacher that taught and then went home and graded papers and prepared for the next day. So, I didn't do a whole lot. I did some things, but I didn't do a whole lot of other things. But I really got interested in PFLAG whenever—and it was—it was a fairly—it fairly a quiet organization at that time. I really—I hadn't heard a lot about it. Whenever some children at Lubbock High School decided that they wanted to have—and that they were at Lubbock High School, and I was at Coronado. I had a

student whose sister was there, and she was one of the people who was involved. They wanted to have a little out and pray proud club. This is all going to happen around 2002 and '03. The case is actually a 2003 case. I heard about these kids that was in the newspaper and so forth. So they were meeting over at J&B Coffee Shop, so I just started meeting with them. As a government teacher, I—this was something that interested me. I certainly cared that we start doing something better with our high school students in regard to that. And by the way, Lubbock High—LISD [**Lubbock Independent School District**], which I love dearly, is still not doing a whole lot for their gay kids, and they have many of them. They're better than they used to be but not nearly where they should be. So I started meeting with them, and I just got more involved. Then I just thought I wanted to get more involved. The case, of course, actually was decided, one of the few that was ever lost here that Judge Woodward—was it Woodward? Yeah. Was it Cummings? I think it was—Judge Cummings was the judge on that case. I got to know the kids. One of them eventually became the president of PFLAG. He's the president of PFLAG in Austin. He was a young student while he was a student. Ricky White, he was just an outstanding person. He was one of the plaintiffs—not the plaintiffs. He was one of the persons in the case suing LISD.

ES:

So the—I don't know anything about this case. So the students sued to have—

GR:

They sued asking if they could have—if they could post flyers in the building, and maybe make an announcement on the PA system about that there was this club, and they were going to—they were going to meet off campus. They weren't trying to even meet on campus. They wanted to know if they could do that, and they said no. So they went through Lambda Legal out of the—I don't know if you know what Lambda Legal is, but it's a firm, an organization, that takes cases for LGBT folk. And they took that case on. It was one of the few that's ever been lost. The students, by that time—you know, it takes a while for these cases. Maybe the case might have started a little bit earlier, but the case was decided in 2003. It takes a while. And they went down. The case was decided negatively. Of course, I was working for LISD, so I was not happy about it, so I decided I would go down. When the case was decided, when Cummings made his ruling, they could have send it to the fifth circuit. At that time, the fifth circuit was not quite as reactionary as it is now. But the students, by that time, were out of school. They'd been mostly seniors. So they just decided not to pursue it. So that case stands as a case of one of the few that's ever been lost about students trying to do the very minimal thing, which is to have an organization of support. The LISD lawyers—I read the case—was a very—I did not like at all the things that they said. They kept saying you can't have a club about sex. It was just so backward and so wrong that I actually went down in August, when I read the decision, and submitted my resignation to the school. I said, "I am here to resign from school or to tell you that I'm not going to support this decision if asked." Since I was the only one that could teach [laughter] AP government, dual-credit government, they asked me not to resign. I said, "Okay, I

won't resign, but I won't support this decision. I want you to know that I will not support this decision." They said, Well, are you going to talk about in class? I said, "I'm a big professional, as I'm always in class. I'm not going to express my opinions, one way or the other, in class, but," I said, "We do talk about gay rights." That is a topic that was in my college—we were teaching out of a college-level textbook for AP. I said, "It's a topic." I said, "If asked, I'll"—but I said, "I don't go around trying to—any more than gay kids trying to recruit other gay kids—other straight kids into being gay." I said, "I don't try to recruit people into my point of view." But I said, "If asked, I want you to know, I'm perfectly willing to resign rather than support this decision." I did not resign. I taught until 2004. And I resigned for other reasons. I retired for other reasons that didn't have anything to do with that. So I started coming to PFLAG. My husband and I were—particularly I was a little less busy.

JB:

What year was this when you went and started going?

GR:

I think it was probably around that same time, probably about 2004ish, '03 and '04. And I started going, and I've been involved ever since. Not as involved as I am now. I'm easing my way out of this, but very involved as far as attending, being a supporter, eventually becoming on the board, becoming a—working with the board. It's been a real blessing in my life. I love it. I love the kids. I love the people that I've gotten to know. It's a good organization.

ES:

How large was the organization when you—at that point in time?

GR:

Well, it's never been a huge organization, although Betty says that whenever they met for the very first time, they had fifty people there, mainly parents. But it's never been a huge organization. I'd say we run between thirty-five and fifty people, as far as members. Meetings can be—we've had as many as eighty there whenever the—I finally got somebody from LISD years later when they changed administrations, got some women in there. I got somebody to come and speak to us, and we had a big turnout for that. We have a big turnout when I finally got a police chief that would come and speak. Chief Stevens came and spoke. Kelly Trlica, who was a vice president—academic vice president—that's not right, assistant superintendent—she came and spoke. So it's better than it was. It's still—and I've had a gajillion interviews on TV and the newspaper and written letters, endless letters, to the editor on these issues over the years. It's just become a kind of a thing that's a part of me. I see absolutely no reason to—[laughs] as a religious person, a person of faith. I'm a member of the Episcopal church now. It's a very open church, too. It has no barriers against anybody of any sexualities. They can be anything from the bishop to whatever they want to be, whatever they're qualified to be. We don't have—we don't have any

discrimination—now, there's—within the body of the church. There are little pockets that still haven't come around, but very few.

ES:

Well, what—you said you've written a lot of letters to the editor when issues come up. What—in the last fifteen years, what kind of issues have arisen that PFLAG has tried to deal with?

GR:

Just every imaginable letter that somebody writes or may have a story about something happening, then somebody writes—I remember one woman, we had an early—some years ago, a fairly daring thing for Texas Tech at the time, a transgender person came to speak. We had a diversity conference. This was before we had any kind of office here. But they—some people on campus, or many people, in fact, on campus were very supportive. So we had a big thing here and it was reported in the newspaper. There's the letter to the editor that said she was so ashamed of Texas Tech for allowing such heresy to be—I just write a letter. I've written letters about every imaginable kind of LGBT issues there is, for everything from marriage to—it's just an endless parade of things. I've got all the letters archived in my—I've written on other things, too. The last one I actually wrote was about using the Bible to justify the separation of children at the border. Not a good—I was—that was not a good move. They picked a—they happened to pick a verse that was—I know Bible. I know not as much as some people, but I know a lot about the Bible. I read it a lot. They happened to pick a part, that part in Romans that everybody was saying, that's what the attorney general selected to justify. Well, you just have to keep reading in Romans, that same verse. It comes down to about not—treating your neighbor as yourself. I mean, it's all about love. It's just right there. All he had to do was read a little further down—Jeff Sessions—and you would have seen that. So I write a lot about whether or not—we have a secular—a lot of governmental issues, because that's a big thing that's in the news.

JB:

What do you think about the current state of things now with—

GR:

You don't really want to know. [Laughter]

JB:

—regards to the LGBT rights.

GR:

Oh. When it comes to the LGBT rights, I think we're in peril. I'm not kidding. I don't think marriage equality is in peril. I think that's become a kind of a settled law. There are too many people that are married. It would just be topsy-turvy. But only this week Jeff Sessions has put up

a group that's going—it's kind of a committee of people. He called it the—what is he calling that?

JB:

The Religious Liberty Task Force.

GR:

Religious Liberty. So Religious Liberty is now going to become the new catch phrase for saying, We're going to be discriminating against the LGBT community in a lot of ways because we just really don't think—and I've always told them, I said, "Whatever you think in your churches, whatever you believe in your heart, whatever you interpret out of scripture"—I'm talking about any kind of scripture. To me scripture's not just Christian scriptures. Any kind of readings that you do. But in this country, we do not take that kind of discrimination into our secular law. That belongs—discriminate in your churches if you want to, put up the barriers and say no gays allowed or no African Americans allowed, or whatever you want to put, but don't take it into secular law because there is nothing that could possibly justify that. They're going to take the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, and they're going to take the Religious Liberty part out of the First Amendment, and they're going to—it's going to be very scary to me to see what the new Supreme Court is. The cases are coming, and they're going to come many, and they're going to come—they have them all ready to go. States are going to—you know, they fought the marriage thing. They eventually lost. I'm not even sure what the makeup of the Supreme Court as it is or if they allow this court issue—whatever his name is—to be—the latest one to be approved. I'm not even sure that marriage equality would have been approved without Kennedy. Well, it wouldn't have been without Kennedy begin there, Justice Kennedy. And Justice Kennedy is no—noble. But I think that our—all kinds of discrimination is going to be attempted. I think it's going to be a battle. I'd like to say—you get one thing done and you think, Marriage equality, civil unions, whatever it is, just no discrimination. Just people—I don't understand. This is totally out of my realm of understanding, and I have to admit it. I don't understand why people are afraid of other people, why they want to be the other, why they want to make somebody else the other, regardless of the pigment of their skin or the religion that they have or if they have no religion or what their sexual orientation is and what their sexual identity is, any of those things. I used to say, "You can judge people, if you want to, on their actions"—I have moral standards—"But you don't judge people on who they are, on the essence of who they are, because they have a different color skin because they were born in a country that's primarily Muslim, or they're born in a poor country and they're coming across the border and they're"—my heart is just breaking about all these children. So any kind of injustice, to me, is just [pause] bad, real bad. [laughter] I just—I can't understand it. I just can't understand people hating, hating and discriminating and pointing fingers and all that kind of stuff. It's just so wrong.

ES:

You were born in this area. You were—you know, it's so easy—we see this predominant sentiment oftentimes in this area of this very judgmental and very negative, harsh tone—harshness towards people who are different. What—growing up, what influenced you to see this love for everybody and this acceptance, and just this amazing attitude that just—

GR:

I don't know. My father was—he wasn't teaching any African American kids. He was teaching—by the way, Hispanic kids were in our school. He just taught everybody the same. My mother was—had a little prejudice against Hispanic people. I always was disappointed. My mother, I thought, was just the best mother ever, but I was really disappointed that she still had that. When I moved to New Mexico and I was working in art galleries, nearly all my employers were Hispanic because Taos, New Mexico is a Hispanic—basically a Hispanic and Native American town. The Anglos are the—

ES:

The minority.

GR:

They're the minority, for sure. And I couldn't understand that. But you know what? She finally conquered that, and I'm so proud that she did. Her worst fear was that somebody different might move in beside us, [laughter] as if we had this great house, which we did not. [Laughter] So her worst fear—I always said my mother's worst fear came to be finally when she had the nicest house she ever had, my—a Hispanic family moved in next to us—actually a Hispanic husband. That was always saying, "That's just what's going to happen." Well, he turned out to be the best neighbor she ever had. My father ended up dying. He ended up doing a lot—being a great help to her. And so Mother—and then we—she has a son-in-law. One of my sister's kids is married to a Hispanic—a Spanish man. So all of that was gone before the time she left. I was so thankful. I was saying, "Thank you God for doing this," [laughter] because I didn't want my mother to be—very few times did I ever make my mother cry, but I did make her cry one time when she said something about one of my employers in Taos. It was a Hispanic woman. I jumped right into her and she cried. I felt bad about it, but I didn't want her die—I didn't want her to leave her—not get over that. And I think she did. So I don't know where it came from. I just think it came with the package. I think a lot of things are innate. I wasn't particularly hanging out with—we were all Democrats, of course, but everybody was a Democrat in Texas at that time. But that didn't really—I don't know what it—I don't know what it is. I just didn't see any reason for it. I just never have. And I never understood it. If you want to know the honest truth, I don't have a lot of patience with it. I try to. I don't write these letters to the editor like some people do, saying—condemning people to hell or tell them how awful it is, that Obama was the—some people have written in this paper Obama is the anti-Christ. I mean, it's been in there a bunch of times. Of

course, I think this racial backlash that we're having right now is just so disappointing, so backward, so 1950s. I don't want that to be, at the end of my life, seeing that kind of racism and prejudice come roaring back into this country. If you want to know how I feel about the current administration, I think that will tell you. I am not favorable to it. Plus it's overt, facetious tendencies that scare the hell out of me.

ES:

It scares a lot of us.

GR:

But I am worried about my—about this Religious Liberty thing. This is going to be the new hook they're going to use. As far as people are concerned—I mean, I think they do a good work. I think we—I wish—it's hard to keep an organization like that, a volunteer organization, going for twenty-five years. Some people kind of thought, Well, after marriage equality—everybody thought, Well, we can kind of just sit back and relax now—

JB:

Nope.

GR:

—just kind of enjoy the fruits of the work. But it hasn't turned out to be that way, and I wasn't naïve enough to think that it would be, but I didn't realize that we were going to take such a big backward turn in all the things that mattered most me, which is prejudice against people, any kind of prejudice, any kind of bigotry. I have Muslim friends. I've been to Turkey with my Muslim friends. I have fewer Conservative friends than I used to, I'll put it like that. [Laughs] Not because I don't—it's just because it's hard to have conversations with them. They kind of treat me like this because they know how I feel. So if they really—I don't know. It's just—it's strange. I really thought that I couldn't live in Lubbock all my life. It's been hard for me to live here. I've tried to leave, and I didn't go that far. I went to northern New Mexico, but it was sure different than Lubbock, Texas. It was already a very different, open, accepting place, and lots of gays lived there, it just happened to be, because it's an art community.

ES:

That's a good question then for you. How have you seen Lubbock change through the years, especially towards the LGBT community and—well, let's start there. How has it changed?

GR:

Slowly. [laughter]

JB:

Slowly.

GR:

Slowly. I think the best thing that I've seen happen—okay—is Jody Randall being hired. It has made a bigger difference faster than anything I've seen. Lubbock would not be the town it is—I couldn't be here at all if it weren't for Texas Tech. It brings a breath of new people of different ideas. I'm not an educational snob by any means, but it brings educated people in who tend, not in every case, to be less prejudice, and to be more open to change. I don't understand. Our newspaper, for instance, right now, is just such a disappointment to me. They've just taken a big—they have new editorial people, and they're just taking a huge step backwards, I think. They'll put things in there about LGBT, but—at least they did a few years ago. They call me all the time, “Comment on this story.” I think this is a new—I think we're in a new repressive regime. It's here, it's in Lubbock, it's in the nation, it's in other parts of the world. It's not just here. Brexit was that kind of thing back then. People in France, you know, trying to—Le Pen, those people. It's a wave of authoritarianism and nationalism that I wasn't big enough to really understand when I—but I certainly have learned from history, what happened, that brought on World War II, that kind of regime. I always wondered—I had German exchange students, and they just seem so bright. I even had one from East Germany. He had come over after they'd opened, but he had been raised—I thought, How did people like this ever become Nazis? How did they become—now I'm seeing it—I mean, not that people are becoming Nazis. But I can see authoritarianism being embraced openly by people. And that's—I'm just stunned. But now I understand Germany. I'm not quite as condemning of the German people for being led into this, because, you know, Adolf Hitler was also elected. [Laughs]

ES:

Most reports of Hitler said he was magnetic and people—

GR:

He was going to make the Third Reich great again.

ES:

Yeah, he was going to make Germany great again, yeah.

GR:

Come on. It's the same thing. Got to take over the press. All these things are happening. And it all is—you know, it's hard for me to put LGBT into a separate category because to me it's all of the same—

JB:

Tied together.

GR:

It's all tied together. The way we treat people, the kind of people that we have, the nation that we have, the leaders that we have, the people we have in this community who are still dragging their feet on these issues—and I'm going to say it, and I'm ashamed to say it because I've gone to church all of my life, somewhere. Also, by the way, my father first started out at McMurry.

ES:

Oh really? [laughter]

GR:

Yeah. I have quite a few people that went to McMurry, and some of my good friends today. They're all great people, by the way. I just think that our—some of our religious people have—are our biggest—I'm used to saying it. This is our biggest thing. They have taken a group of scriptures they have found in the Old Testament and very few in the New Testament, and made them out to be—to fan the flames for ever, ever, ever—and hate and condemnation against people, against particularly LGBT people. They've also used it—they used it when I was younger, you know, to fan the flames of segregation, racial segregation, misogyny. Can't marry a person of a different race. Well, that hasn't been—that could all—I don't think we'll go back that far, but I think we're certainly—we're certainly not moving forward right now.

ES:

So how do we swim against the current? And that's one of the questions I wanted to ask you. How has PFLAG, in this sea of not understanding—

GR:

Well, I wish I had brought my little thing. Actually, I'll—maybe you have one. But I wrote—I'm the one that wrote, on our 25th anniversary, what I call the Call to Action. I didn't—it's on my refrigerator, and I just didn't bring it. But we have a call to action. Those are the things that I—I don't want to repeat them now. I don't—I might—could find them in my phone. Actually, I think they're in my Word processor on my desktop computer. Those are the things. It starts out, "Speaking up, voting, participating, knowing, helping, supporting, loving," all those things that we have to do as decent people. I mean, why would you want to—I'm eighty—I'm nearly eighty-one years old. Why would I want—[laughs] why would I want to die and be known for all the things—all the things I did to hurt people? Nope. Nope, don't think so. [Laughter] Don't think so. So, I have several of those. I'll be happy to let you see because those are the things that you do. You have to be active. You have to speak up. You have to speak up every time you hear someone say something—in this case what I wrote for this was negative against the LGBTQIA

community. But it's the same thing with racial stuff. Don't let it go by. You don't have to be—you don't have to be mean about it. You can simply say, "I think what you said is very hurtful. I myself certainly do not believe that to be true." That's why I'm saying you just have to—you have to speak, and you have to vote, you have to participate in your democracy, and in your churches, for that matter. If you're in a church, I'm not ever going to join—I will never be a member of a church anymore that had any kind of prejudice against anything, any person. I'd say half the people that I know—maybe not half the people I know—a lot of people that are very hurt. LGBT people are very hurt by churches. They've been extremely hurt, including my own son.

JB:

Paul?

GR:

Paul. Joel also went to the same—we were going to the same church at the time, but Joel just—he was born different. Somebody said, "You have two gay sons." I said, "And they couldn't be more unlike one another in every way." That just happens to be one thing about them. They are just—they were so opposite. Paul was—everything was so—he was so sensitive about everything. Joel's tougher.

JB:

Do you think that part of that came from observing Paul?

GR:

It might have. I think it also came from his going—in his growing up years, he was at the University of Texas. That was a—

JB:

Would have been very different. Very different.

GR:

That was a salvation for him to get out of Lubbock, to get into the most [laughs] liberal university we have, almost, maybe except for Rice or some place.

ES:

And the difference in age too, being born those years—

GR:

And the time was changing, and the prejudice was being laughed at. All of a sudden it's not so cool to be—to be a homophobe. I don't know anybody who wants to be called a homophobe these days. Do you? Oh, some of those—maybe a few people. [Laughs]

JB:

There are a few people who might not want to be called homophobe, but I think it'd be justified.

GR:

It would be justified, but it's not a—

JB:

Yeah, it's not a—yeah, it's not a—

GR:

It's not a badge of honor for most people.

JB:

No, it's not a good adjective.

GR:

Put that in your resume there. "I am the most active homophobe in my fraternity." [Laughter]
Don't think that's going to get you any new jobs.

ES:

No, no. It's not a quality you want to have on there.

JB:

No.

ES:

So what's next for you? [GR laughs] What's next for you and—well, maybe we should frame it. PFLAG. What are y'all working towards? What are you planning on doing moving forward?

GR:

I've been doing this really, really, really active work for probably fifteen years, at least. My health is—I'm having some real health issues, and I'm having to—and just my energy level is not what it used to be. So I'm having to—I'm getting off—trying to get off the board this year. I've been doing the programs. I've been doing—I answer the phone, the hotline phone that we have. I do all the scheduling, as far as places to stay. Matter of fact, I'm going to do that as soon as we

get finished. I'm going to set up—get our new cards printed with all of our dates and so forth. I've done a lot of the publicity. I'm not having to do that right now. I've just done whatever I needed to do. And I've been really, really blessed in the last probably five to six years where our transgender group was started. It was actually started before that. They changed their name now it's the GSSG, which stands for Gender Spectrum Support Group. I go to their meetings as the board member. We were not—we had some older people who were facilitating that, and then we had a change, the person left. So an incident happened where I thought that maybe someone older needed to be there, someone who could kind of say, "Hey," in case something happened. Then the change—the new facilitator said he was fine with somebody coming who was not transgender or did not have a transgender family member. And so I go to their meetings. It's been—you know, you're never too old to learn new things. You're never too old to listen. I have learned more in the last five years by watching and observing and listening and loving [pause] these transgender people who are—who makes it seem like a piece of cake to be just the mother of a gay, [laughter] of a couple of gay sons, you know, because their issues are so complicated. So I have learned a lot from them about that. And I hope to keep doing that if I possibly can, just sit in their meetings. I sometimes will make announcements. Sometimes I participate. Mainly I listen. I'm also gathering information, because most of—quite frankly, most of the calls that I get these days is not from LGBT kids or families or people, it's from transgender. So I need to know what things are available. I need to know what—where I can point them—these people to get help, to get the information they need. So if I'm going to do the phone, I need to go—I need to continue to do that. And I like doing the phone. I used to be on the board of ACLU [**American Civil Liberties Union**], and we—at that time, they allowed us to have a board here. We had an active, working board, and we took a month each of taking the phone calls. I don't have training in that, but I have good judgment, and I have information and I know when to say, "I don't know but I'll get back to you." And I get back.

ES:

You know, I don't think we have on any oral histories any information about these—the phone lines that PFLAG has. Tell me what this is.

GR:

We just have—we just put phone—we just publish some phone numbers, and they happen to be mine.

ES:

So people call?

GR:

Because I don't mind. I don't work anymore, so I'm more available than most people to answer the phone. [Laughter] And I'm probably home a little more than some people, too, and with cell

phones it doesn't really matter whether you're home or not. It's something that I like to do, and I do have a lot of information stored in this aging brain of mine, still, about resources and about people. And I know how to help, and I'm kind. I know when to say, "Boy, that's not anything that we can do, too," because we've been—I've been called about things. I say, "That's a matter for the police. We can't"—I can listen and empathize with you, but I can't—I get calls about things like that. But I don't get as many calls as I used to.

ES:

So the calls, are they from a lot of youth from this area that are wanting—

GR:

Mainly. I'm getting mainly calls from transgender people wanting to know about medical resources. A young person, a very young person, her mama called and talked to me. I'm a calm and comforting person whenever I—and I'm overly empathetic. [Laughter]

ES:

Yes.

GR:

You can tell. That's one of the things I've been told. "You just take it on too—you make it too much of your thing." But also I know when to say, "That's a difficult situation, but there just not anything I can—there's nothing PFLAG can do about that. That is a matter for the police," or, "That's a matter between the two people," or something. [Laughter] I'm not there to be the marriage—the relationship counselor or to get involved in a threesome, [laughter] which I got a call the other day about that. "No, can't do that."

ES:

What medical resources—because I—when I am recording these interviews, I'm thinking fifty years from now somebody might want to listen to this, and they might not know—you know, like today, what medical resources do you tell them? Are there—is there one of the hospitals that has—

GR:

Well, UMC Hospital is where most of the—most help is found. Then they want a list of doctors who are—I got a call the other day. Somebody just said, "I'm an adult. I'm moving here. I want to know some churches that are gay friendly." "Well, there are some, but they're not nearly enough, because it's a town with all these churches that we have. But there are some. I try to give those—you know, be fair about it. We even have a Baptist church where gay people are allowed.

ES:

Really?

GR:

Or welcomed.

JB:

They are?

GR:

Second Baptist.

JB:

Yes, yes. Second B.

GR:

Second Baptist is pretty gay friendly.

ES:

Then there's the Methodist church, right?

GR:

St. John's Methodist. Not all Methodist churches are though, unfortunately.

ES:

Right. And then—

GR:

The Episcopal churches—our church, I think, is the best. [Laughter]

ES:

Which is your church?

GR:

The parish. I go to St. Christopher's Episcopal Church. We have a lot of gay people there, and they're welcomed and they're put to work.

ES:

The only other church I know of, I think—isn't, like, Covenant Presbyterian kind of—

GR:

Yeah, Covenant would be—I think would be a good place to go, where Jody's going. Of course, the Universalist Union Church, which is the Unitarian church, is certainly that way. There's a little church called the United Church of Christ, which is not the Church of Christ like—but it's a real small little church over on the east side on Martin Luther King. There are some that you can lead people to.

ES:

What other programming—you talked about some programming. What's PFLAG's—what have they done?

GR:

We've done programming and support, both, for a while. When I first took over the programming from Betty Dotts, it was a program every time. But some of the people said, "There's never any time for us to talk to one another." Now, the GSSG group has always been a support group. It's always been a conversation between the people who attend. But our—I was—when I was brought in to be program chair, it was—it seemed like it was all programs, so I got busy and had a program every time.

ES:

[laughs] Is it once a month that y'all meet?

GR:

Once a month, uh-huh. We had some socials and things, but, I mean, we normally had a program. The request was that, "We'd like to have about half programs and half the time just to talk." So that's what we've been doing for the last few years. We have support meetings, and then we have program meetings. It just kind of how it works out. Then sometimes—since Jody's come, she's had so many activities that have—and she's made an effort to really bring us into the things here on campus. And when things are scheduled and she wants us to be involved, we will change our meeting time and just send out a word that we're going to—instead of having a regular meeting we're going to do this activity. We'll participate in this activity at church—at Texas Tech. It's been a huge blessing, welcome. She's just a nice person. I like her. [Laughter]

ES:

Then there's—the only other thing that I can think of—and then Jordan can take over—is PRIDE. Do y'all have PRIDE events? I guess that's the most public outreach—

GR:

We were—we have made this inroad into the community. For the last two July the 4th parades, we've had a float in the parade.

ES:
Nice.

GR:
We don't have a PRIDE parade, of course—of course. I mean, we don't have a PRIDE parade.

JB:
We have a festival.

GR:
But we have a PRIDE Festival.

ES:
I was going to say there's an event.

GR:
We have a big—and that's coming up in August, this month. And that's grown. It's well attended, and everybody has a great time. But the parade was kind of a stretch for us. In fact, MCC—by the way that's another church, the Metropolitan Community Church, which started as a church to take—to bring all the people who had been rejected [laughter] as God's children into their midst. It started as basically a church that way, but they—straight people go there too. Anyway, MCC had had a float. They wanted a float. So they got ready to have a float, and they gave them all these restrictions. “You can't say gay. You can't do this.” Tony was actually going to that church at the time, Tony Thornton, our current president. He goes to the church I go to now. It was just—they had—they were going to—even at the last minute they were going to throw them out of the parade. So they had a parade, but it couldn't have anything to do with gay. But PFLAG is pretty—if you know anything about PFLAG, it's pretty much PRIDE stuff. We entered as an action organization, and they were happy to have us. That's been kind of a breakthrough for the community. The first time—I only heard one person who said—booed or something, but most everybody—then this last time, there was just people saying, “PRIDE, PRIDE, PRIDE,” just all kinds and colors of people, by the way.

ES:
Nice.

GR:
So it was fun. So we're—Lubbock is slowly changing, but it sure is slow. In fact, I think it's moving like—then when this newspaper changed, this—of course, newspapers are not the way that kids communicate, but they are the way that I grew up communicating, and reading papers. I still read the *AJ* [*Avalanche-Journal*] online now and the *New York Times* online. But it still influences a segment of the population, a segment of the population we are trying to convince to

change their minds before they toddle off this earth, because a lot of those people that write those letters, I know them, who they are and what they do and what their influence is. So we still have to do battle with that a little bit. Somebody wrote in the paper the other day, said, "We're tired of all you whining Democrats."

JB:

Be tired. [ES laughs]

GR:

I said, "Just keep on being tired of us because we're going to keep whining. [Laughter] We ain't going away." It's going to be an interesting election to see what—to see which way we're headed, whether we're going to make a slight U-turn or full U-turn or we're going to go right on down paths to 2020. I hope not. I certainly hope not.

JB:

At this point, I'd settle for a slight left turn.

GR:

What I meant by right turn, I mean just U-turn. I meant U-turn.

ES:

Correct.

GR:

Correct turn, yes. I didn't mean right to the right, no. I meant more of a—you know, just middle of the road kind of thing. When I taught government, I always said that our Constitution, which—and our government is set up in such a way that it sort of eliminates the extremes of both. You know, we have extremes, and always have, but it kind of eliminates that and brings us kind of to the middle, particularly when it comes to national elections. We're trying to find something in the middle, maybe a little right wing, a little left wing, or something of that sort. And I always said—I've said this. I'm glad I'm not teaching government right now. I have a great amount of faith in the common sense of the majority of the American people that we are not an extremist nation. I'm not sure that I could say that today. I want to know—I know that we are—we're hearing vocal voices. The loudest voices are being paid. They're paying too much attention to the loudest voices, the bigoted voices, the voices of hate, because they feel like they have permission, that it's okay now to do these things. Who would think we we'd have neo-Nazis marching through Thomas Jefferson? I guess. I don't know. University of Virginia. Although Jefferson had his problems, too. So I don't—I just think we are in a perilous time. I mean, truly perilous. Remember what Benjamin Franklin said, asking what kind of government they'd formed after he left the Constitutional Convention. And he says, "A democracy if you can keep

it." Democracies are not that easy to, in history, to keep, to let the people have the ruling say. Because what happens if you get a—if you just look at history, history goes this way. It kind of cycles around. If you get to where there's mobocracy—that was the—the Founding Fathers were afraid that we would have mobocracy, a kind of unruly mob kind of thing when you let too—if you didn't have this group of oligarchies, these educated, you know, learning people like them, to kind of keep things going, just turn it over to the general public. They didn't trust—they didn't trust the general public. Very few people voted. It was white men, property owners, no women, all that stuff, certainly. So if it gets too far to that way, then what you inevitably get in history is just another [authoritarian] leader who could bring some kind of order, can make America great again, or bring back the Third Reich or all that kind of stuff. Or deal with the other, you know, the other that we're worried about. I'm sorry that—if they understood anything about the demographics of this country, we're going to be the other pretty soon, those of us who are white, in particular—we're going to be the other. We're going to have a majority minority—minority majority in this country. We're probably headed there much faster than ever. It's nothing to be afraid of.

ES:

Do you have other questions you want to ask?

JB:

I think you pretty well covered everything that I would have asked about PFLAG.

ES:

I always end with, you know, like, what do you want—what else would you like to say to the recorder for people that are listening to this interview decades from now? Maybe also what do you hope to see from a younger generation? What can we learn from this age and do?

GR:

Very much—one of the first things that I—one of the—the only rally—the first big rally I went to was after Columbine. They had a Million Mom March in May on Mother's Day. I left—I flew by myself with my little sign saying, "One Texan for gun control," to Washington DC and attended that. That's when George Bush was about to be nominated to be president—I mean to be nominated by the Republican Party. Then it just—I've just seen it go up and down. I remember whenever President Obama was elected, we had a big party. The Democratic Party had a big party downtown in the Baker Building. I thought to myself, I am so glad ... In fact, I said to myself and I said to my husband who happened to be out of town, I said, "I am so thankful that I have lived long enough to see this." I was so optimistic. I didn't—[clears throat] I was naïve that there wasn't going to be this tremendous backlash. Since I didn't have that prejudice against having a black man or a mixed-race biracial president, I couldn't imagine that there was going to be this tremendous backlash, but I'm living in the backlash now. His

presidency was extremely difficult. He was not the leader he could have been if he had had any kind of cooperation at all. So that—I began to—yeah, I was hoping that I was going to get to see the first woman president, but I don't know if that's going to happen or not. I may not make it that long. I'm still optimistic. I am still a believer that we can survive as a democratic republic, and that we can be—we can uphold the very best in us. The Constitution is written with some horrible prejudices in it that we had to correct, we had to amend. I'm not naïve about that, but I don't wish to see us go backwards. If we become more authoritarian, if we start not valuing the freedom of the press, the value of every human being, just basically caring for one another as a nation, then we'll—but I just believe that we're not going to go down that road. I don't think we'll get to the part that Italy and Germany were. If we do, I would be happy to just [snaps] toddle on off this earth and not be around to see it. I really don't want to see that. That would be—that would be tragic to me to be the last—live out the last years of my life having a person who's—as soon as I could have a voice of my own, you know, I started. I love these kids from Florida who are speaking out and doing things. I'm optimistic about that, but I think it—I think we're having—have some big barriers, and we have to start—I don't know. I've just never seen anything like this. Every government teacher, every commentator that I have any respect for, every learned professor that I have any respect for—there are plenty of professors that probably—who probably think we're going down a good road. But even Republicans. Why do they want tariffs? I mean, I'm a free trader. [Laughter] I'm actually very conservative when it comes to money and all that kind of stuff. I am quite conservative. But when it comes to human beings, I am as liberal as you want to be. [laughter] I am all for being loving and kind and caring for one another. I'm also—I'm not—I think we have too long of sentences of our criminals, but I'm also not for closing all the jails, too. I'm not for privatizing them. If you're going to put people in prison, then you should run the prisons. [ES laughs] If you're going to jail children, shame on you. There's no good—there's nothing good about that. There is no way that can be justified in any kind of civilized society. I consider it to be human rights violation, what we've done to these children, to separate them, probably, permanently from their families.

ES:
Permanently emotionally scarring them.

JB:
Yes. Yeah.

GR:
So it's trying times, but I'm going to be optimistic. [ES laughs] What else can we do? I mean, can't give up. That's what they want us to do. They want us to give up and just capitulate. I'll be damned if I'm capitulating. [Laughter]

ES:

So we just have to keep fighting then.

GR:

We just have to make my little sign, [laughter] go out to one more rally, one more letter, one more—

ES:

Chip away, maybe.

GR:

Yeah.

ES:

Reach one more person with a letter or a phone call.

GR:

Whatever. I just don't get to do as much as I used to because I'm just plain old. Age slows a person down. So don't tell me that people don't slow down, because I didn't think I'd slow down until I got to be about eighty. It has been a slowing process, and it's been a learning process for me now. I understand why old people can get depressed. We had a program about that at PFLAG one time, about temporary psychiatric facilities for older people who get seriously depressed. And I thought, Why would anybody—you know, I was—that was probably fifteen years ago. I was like, Why would any old people get so depressed? [laughs] Now I understand.

ES:

You get it.

GR:

Of course, it doesn't help, so I try not to watch TV on that, for sure. Don't watch the news all day. I just watch what I can tolerate. But there's many good things going on. There's just many good things going on, and scary things going on. I think we just need to have a little more balance in what we're—what we do. Life is about balance.

ES:

Okay. Anything else we need to have on this recording?

GR:

No. I just hope—I hope one day—it would be nice not to have to have an organization like PFLAG, not to have an organization like the NAACP, not to have these organizations where

we're going in—I mean, t's always fine. People are going to find their support, and they're going to find people that are like them. You're going to pick your friends amongst—I mean, I like people—I pick my own friends, you know, amongst people that are more familiar to me, these ideas, but we also need to open our hearts and minds. I try to open—I swear to you I do try to open my mind and listen when I can to some of the other points of view, the ones that I find so appalling. I try to listen to them. Occasionally, I can kind of put myself in their place, but I just can't do it when you start hurting other people in the process, when you start doing things that are—I believe we have a secular government. I don't believe that we're set up to be a theocracy. But we were set up to have some morals and standards that we need to adhere to, and we're not doing that right now. We have work to do.

JB:

We have work to do.

GR:

Work to do. Thank goodness we're doing some of it. [ES laughs]

JB:

Yes, we're trying.

ES:

Well, thank you so much for talking to us.

GR:

Thank you.

ES:

I'm going to turn this off.

End of Recording