

# UC Santa Cruz

## Out in the Redwoods

### Title

John Laird: Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

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## JOHN LAIRD



**Interviewer, Irene Reti:** *John Laird came to UCSC in 1968, and graduated in 1972. In 1983, Laird was elected mayor of Santa Cruz, and became the first openly gay mayor in the United States. He was also a founding member of the Santa Cruz AIDS Project (SCAP). In 2002, Laird was elected to the California State Legislature as one of two of the first openly gay men to be elected to the Assembly. Laird was interviewed on September 13, 2001 in his office at the Santa Cruz County building. The timing of this interview was significant because it took place two days after the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.*

**Reti:** Where were you born?

**Laird:** I was born in Santa Rosa, California. I was raised in Vallejo, California, where I went all the way through school. In 1968, I came to UC Santa Cruz as a first-year student.



That was the fourth year of the campus. The first, full four-year class didn't graduate until June at the end of my first year.

**Reti:** What drew you to UCSC?

**Laird:** UCSC at the time had a college system, close teacher-student contact, residential colleges, narrative evaluations, and no grades. It was basically: come and live in a social environment where you have real close contact with your teachers, and you are competing against yourself, not against other students. That was very alluring. I was rather blasé about it. I didn't apply anywhere else. At the time, there were something like six or eight applications for every vacant seat. I got in. Later I realized that, and was stunned. I had, I think, a 3.4 grade point average in high school, and it kept being the lowest of anybody's I met at UCSC. I was very active in things in high school, and was from a working-class town that not many other people came from. Somehow I [represented] balance. I don't know how. But I was always grateful for getting in.

**Reti:** When you first came to UCSC you weren't out as a gay person yet?

**Laird:** No. I should have known. But you have to put it in perspective of what the time was like. Stonewall [the Stonewall Riots] happened between my first and second year at UCSC. Growing up, I don't think I knew anybody who was consciously gay. It was in the months after I graduated from UCSC that I really came out, in 1972. I discovered that one of my best friends in high school was gay. Many of my good friends at college were gay, but nobody talked about it at the time.

**Reti:** Did people know?

**Laird:** Among each other they knew. The first time there was anything openly gay at UCSC was during my last quarter. There was actually a gay conference, or a gay meeting, at Stevenson College. It was sometime in the spring or late winter of 1972. I always remember a friend of mine saying, "Did you see who was there?" It was this friend of mine, Rik Isensee, whom I later discovered was gay when we were both out of school. I still see him periodically. He has become a therapist and actually written a couple of books on coming out. It was funny. Another friend of mine said, "Did you see who was there?" It was Rik, so I said, oh Rik must be gay! I was very excited, intrigued, even though I should have known that's what was going on with me. I dated women periodically. It was never an overwhelming success. But there were never any role



models. It was never discussed. Now I think—where was I? I had all these close relationships with men. I just never put it together.

There was one guy everybody said was gay, who rented a place from me one summer when I moved out. I remember seeing another man coming out of his room, and someone said, “Oh yes, he’s gay.” It was clear that’s what was going on. I read his obituary in the *Bay Area Reporter* seven or eight years ago. He died in San Francisco. I was always sorry I never had a chance to close the loop with him. I should have known. We all joked later that he decorated that apartment incredibly.

The sexual revolution was just beginning. The year after I graduated, I left the area and went to work for a congressman. But every weekend that I was in California, which was ninety-five percent of the time, I would come to Santa Cruz. I always would stay with these friends, some of whom were going to UC. One person in the household was gay. I began dating him. They would have parties that were totally mixed. It became clear after awhile who was gay in the community. There was a very *subrosa* community burgeoning in Santa Cruz at the time.

1975 happened to be the first year of Gay Pride. The first year was not a parade. The parades happened every year since. It was in the park, or it was some kind of celebration, and the board of supervisors was asked to proclaim Gay Pride Week. This came at this interesting time in history where one supervisor had resigned, Pat Litkey, who interestingly enough came out later. That’s a whole other story. The governor, Jerry [Edmund G.] Brown, Jr., appointed another supervisor, who hadn’t been sworn in yet. One of the conservative supervisors said he’d vote for the resolution because the new appointee had said he would support it if he were just sworn in. So it passed, with the barest of majorities. It was very controversial. That was in the days when resolutions would come on the council’s or the board’s agenda, as opposed to doing things by proclamation. It made it a very political issue. There was a group at Cabrillo College in that era.

**Reti:** A gay group at Cabrillo?<sup>11</sup>

**Laird:** Yes, that was one of the first ones. It was probably in the mid-1970s. For me, the watershed moment as a community was the defeat of the Briggs Initiative in 1978. There

<sup>11</sup>Lesbian and Gay Men’s Union [LAGMU]



was a group called CUDBI—Community United to Defeat the Briggs Initiative. That went on *forever*, that campaign. [CUDBI] was one of the first things I ever went to in the community.

Then the next year, 1979, there was this drop-in gay men’s group which started at Loudon Nelson. Ken Sentner and Patrick Meyer co-facilitated it. It was just, drop-in every Monday night. It started with ten or twelve people. That’s when I went. I was so shocked, because my faculty adviser, David Thomas, was there, from my student time at UCSC. I was just floored that that whole time he’d been gay, and I hadn’t known.

**Reti:** So he wasn’t really very out at that point?

**Laird:** No, not in those early years. None of us were. That group grew, and grew, and grew, and within two or three months it was up to ninety men a week. There’d be an exercise, a topic. People would do things together. Out of that group came many social activities. We had a gay men’s Spanish-speaking group. We would get together and speak Spanish. That is where volleyball started. Ken Smith, Ken Sentner’s partner, and I started gay volleyball. Somewhere, in a box, I have one of the first flyers. Yeah, I’ve done some great things. One of the first openly gay mayors in the country, that kind of stuff. But being a co-founder of gay volleyball, I always think has been much more meaningful to a lot of people in the community! [laughter]

There were always people at different levels from UCSC involved in everything, either people who were in that group, or in the gay organizations. There started to be gay organizations at UCSC. But they were not unlike anything else at UCSC. The community is so transitory. Students are just learning different skills, and every year it seemed to change to a different emphasis.

In the early years of the gay movement, before we even were conscious of always saying “gay and lesbian,” or “GLBT,” there were enormous struggles between men and women. It’s not like there still aren’t differences, things to be resolved, but boy, is it different from the way it was then! I think some men were particularly insensitive. Don’t get me wrong. A lot of things haven’t changed, but many men were just completely unaware of how much it was a man’s world—whether it was stepping over a woman in individual conversation, how offices were set up, or organizational structure and equal participation—who is listened to. In the early days of gay men just coming out, able to be open for the first time, men were recognizing each other, and it was almost to the



exclusion of anything having to do with women. And there was real nationalist feminist stuff going on at the same time. It just made for unbelievable struggles in trying to present a united gay and lesbian movement.

**Reti:** Do you recall those kinds of struggles going on during Gay Pride?

**Laird:** Yes. It always went on in Gay Pride in the early years. Although the other thing was that it was such a strong statement just to be open in Gay Pride. I remember the first time I marched. It must have been 1978. A friend of mine who didn't have the courage to be out at the time said to me later, "I ran into the chair of the seniors commission and he said, 'Could you see who was marching?'" It was *me*.

It was terrorizing to be out in your own community in 1978. Yet that's three years after the first people organized Gay Pride. I was a latecomer, although years later, it doesn't look like a latecomer to say, I was there in the third or fourth year. It was such a strong statement for people to be out, that for those who *were* out, somehow there was also a feeling of, well, there's real advanced thinking here. There's courage that's so uniform that that could mute some of the disputes.

There was always a struggle between the people who clearly weren't out. I remember Dan Dickmeyer calling me and making sure he understood the county process about resolutions or something, and I wasn't fully out. Although I always laugh, it's the classic story. I worked for the county administrative office, for the county executive. There came this time when I decided hey, I'm just going to purposely tell everybody in the office. I started to work my way through the office and just basically say, "I'm gay."

**Reti:** This was the late-1970s?

**Laird:** 1978, somewhere around then. It was very funny, because one of the first responses was, "Oh I thought everybody knew." I was stunned!

Santa Cruz was one of those early gay and lesbian communities, other than San Francisco or Berkeley, but we still had tremendous struggles here. In the 1980s, the film *The Times of Harvey Milk* came out. Whatever political group we had at the time, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, or the Freedom Democratic Caucus, got the premier locally at the Nickelodeon as a fundraiser. We gave free tickets to local elected officials because we wanted them to come and see it. It's very funny given our later history, but Gary Patton



came. Gary had always struggled with gay issues in the early years. He wasn't comfortable with it. He just genuinely wasn't comfortable. He knew that it was a progressive issue. He knew that it had civil rights overtones, but he was socialized in the 1950s. It was tough for him to get past some of his personal stuff. Not unlike many of us that are gay or lesbian. So there was this startling moment [in the film] when it flashes to the scene of the White Night Riot.<sup>12</sup> All of a sudden there's the anger. I'm crying in the theater. It's a very emotional movie. It still gets to me everytime I see it. All of a sudden, it flashes to that scene where the police cars are burning. The theater breaks into thunderous cheers. People are stamping and cheering. The theater goes wild. I looked at some of these people who were there, and they looked shocked. I don't know if he'll remember this, but Gary Patton turned to me and said, "Okay, I finally get it. This is a civil rights movement. I finally get it." I've always thought what a good thing it was for us to do that.

There's been such a long struggle here at every level. Because UCSC was one of nine campuses, it took forever to pass non-discrimination policies campus-wide. They got domestic partners rights only a year or two ago. We passed domestic partner benefits in the middle of the 1980s in the city of Santa Cruz. Admittedly, we were the third city in the country behind West Hollywood, and Berkeley. We were even ahead of San Francisco. We were the first transit system in the country, I think, to pass domestic partners benefits, and we were one of the first counties. We were the first county to have non-discrimination on sexual orientation in the country, in 1975. Santa Cruz was always in the forefront, but there was always a struggle. People didn't necessarily get it as an issue.

**Reti:** When you first came out right after you graduated from UCSC in 1972, where did you socialize in town? What was the scene like?

**Laird:** Mona's was a bar then, Mona's Gorilla Lounge, which later became Cha Chas, the In Touch. It's now a music club, Mo's Alley.

**Reti:** On Commercial Way.

<sup>12</sup>On May 21, 1979, because of a technicality of California law, a jury found Dan White guilty of manslaughter, rather than first degree murder in the double assassination of Harvey Milk and George Moscone. Dan White was sentenced to seven years and eight months in prison. The resulting violent protest that evening came to be known as the "White Night Riot"—the first gay riot since the Stonewall Rebellion ten years earlier.



**Laird:** Yes. When I first went there, it had to be in 1972, 1973. That was where most gay folks hung out locally. There was also the One for One Club down by the beach, and another club right across from where the Ideal Fish Company is now. It burned down twenty or twenty-five years ago. 26 Front Street, I think. Mona's was funny, because the first year or two it just had a jukebox. If you wanted to dance you had to put money in it. I remember putting money in, playing the Stones, dancing. It had after hours where you could volunteer. People would sign up to cook. A friend of mine cooked breakfast from two to six a.m. One morning I came in and helped her out. It was this after-hours place without alcohol, too.

The fire at 26 Front Street was rumored to have been arson. It probably was burned in 1976, 1977, or 1978. I remember being in there a bunch of times. It had these faux leather booths, and people would go there and drink. You probably could even eat. I remember one time this guy saying, "What were you doing there?" I thought, what were you doing there checking it out? I always wondered what happened to him.

The Dragon Moon must have started around 1975. It was on Soquel Avenue, in the building that's almost right next to where The Crepe Place is now. It closed in the mid-1980s, and there was one period of time where it was not very gay. But it was gay almost the entire time. That was a major place. People would shuttle between there and Mona's during that period. It was the bar scene. There was nowhere else. At times the Catalyst, but even that was rather rough-edged.

I think the bar scene has died because we are so integrated into everything else you don't have to go to a bar to meet gay men and women. The attitude toward alcohol has changed, and there are a lot more socializing things. There was a particular time in the 1970s and in the 1980s where there was a social scene. There was a season. People had parties in the summer at their houses. You would go to their places. It would be the bars in the dark, parties during the daylight hours. I always loved that. It still goes on, but it is missing in a lot of the ways that used to happen. But once again, when there was no openness in the community, you had to create private spaces, whether it was the bar or parties.

The reason I first realized I was gay was [when] I was at a friend's party shortly after I graduated, and I saw these two men kissing. I thought, Ooh, that seems exciting! [laughter]





There was a place out by where Mona's is. It was a nightclub which later became a jazz club, before it went to something else. I wish I could remember the name of it. Sometime in the late-1970s, it was in the height of the disco era, they had one of those lighted dance floors. They did an advertisement that said: "Come dance." It had a man and a woman stick figure together. It had stick figures of two men next to each other with a circle and a line through it, stick figures of two women next to each other with a circle and a line through it. Of course, they didn't think anything of it. That wasn't a big thing. They had a ladies night, where it was free. So we arranged this takeover. Forty gay men and lesbians met at Chris King's house. The men paired off with the women, and drove over there. Chris was my date. She got in free and I had to pay. And while I was in line to pay, she bit my neck. A very hetero thing, to throw them off. We went in. We were all screaming. We had a fixed [agreed upon] time. The DJ yelled "Party Santa Cruz!" Then he realized the men were dancing with the men, and the women with the women. We took the place over for awhile. It was great fun, a real statement. Those were the days when we felt power from strength.

There was great street theater at times. They still talk about Alena Smith in the sheriff's department. She's always had this naughty nun act. In those first four or five [Gay Pride] parades there was a sheriff's deputy for security who walked at the end. Alena walked at the end sometimes. Somebody shouted something homophobic. Well, it turned out she was not wearing anything under her nun's habit. So she lifted up the back of the nun's habit and mooned them. She got picked up for exposure. They always told the story in the sheriff's department after I came to work for the county, maybe not knowing that I knew who she was. A deputy brought her in dressed as a nun and they were sitting there at the booking table going, "Oh, what is this about?" They said to her, "And what did you do?" So she turned around and mooned them! [laughter] At the booking table. Just part of the color. There are a million of those kinds of stories through the years. I feel like I'm getting older, more respectable. But geez it was fun in those years of organizing when we were young. Disco takeovers. Nuns mooning cops. [laughter] The things that were going on.

**Reti:** What was it like to come out nationally as the first gay mayor in the United States?

**Laird:** When I ran for the city council in 1981, I really struggled with how open to be. I wanted to be out, but nobody else was making announcements about their sexuality. Having a press conference seemed totally inappropriate. There were people who confused that with me not having courage. A few people in our movement thought,



“Well, he’s just taking advantage of us and being quiet.” I struggled with it. I listed a couple of gay affiliations in my resumé. The *Santa Cruz Sentinel* left them out. Somebody there told me, “We thought we were doing you a favor.” I thought, okay, can’t deal with it that way. The leftist weekly, *The Phoenix*, speculated on the front page that I might be a single-issue candidate on gay issues. I thought, okay, that puts it out there. The *San Jose Mercury News* at one point referred to me as a gay activist, but just in passing. It was tough. I did not make a statement, and I was looking for a way to do it. People say, “Well, did people know?” Only seven or eight thousand people knew. It was really commonly known. But it was difficult. I was elected. I found out afterwards the more conservative people had a big debate about whether to deal with it in the campaign. There were three schools. “Don’t do it; it’s wrong. Do it; people need to know.” And this middle ground that prevailed in coalition with the others that said, “It’s not politically smart.”

**Reti:** To attack you on that basis?

**Laird:** Yes, that it would actually backfire. So it wasn’t raised at any time during the campaign from the opposing side.

I was about to be elected mayor in 1983. I sat down four or five days before the election with Jack Foley, a reporter from the *San Jose Mercury News*. We were having lunch at the Acapulco Restaurant. His first question was, “Are you gay?” I’d been waiting for somebody to ask. I said yes. He was quiet for about a minute. I think it washed over both of us, what had just happened. He said, “How will it feel to be the first gay mayor of Santa Cruz?” So I said to him, “The first *openly* gay mayor of Santa Cruz.” When we got done laughing, he said, “Well, who are the other people that have been gay and mayor of Santa Cruz?” I said, “You’re on your own.”

Within a matter of days, it took on a life of its own. I had not planned this. Later somebody said to me, that was very smart. It happened to be in the middle of your council term; they are going to elect you mayor regardless. I was the first unanimous mayor in five or six mayors, which was very startling for the time. I had really worked, and promised I was going to get everybody along with each other.

The *San Jose Mercury* ran the story. It was like my Andy Warhol fifteen minutes. It went on the wire services. It went on the front page of most newspapers in northern California. It was covered all over the place. Paul Harvey news—“You won’t believe



what they've done out in Santa Cruz, California." I heard from friends from college I hadn't heard from for years.

I have two brothers. There are three boys in my family, although, at fifty-one and forty-nine and forty-three, the word 'boys' doesn't seem to fit. My brother, who is two years younger, is gay. It's one of the more wonderful things in my life. We are very close. He's lived in San Francisco with his partner for twenty-five years. At the time, my parents (my mother still does) lived in the East Bay, in Pleasanton. All of a sudden, I'm the lead story, beaming in on the television news. It had never occurred to me that they were not out to all of their friends about the fact that they had two gay sons. Just did not occur to me. So my brother calls and says, "It's kind of like a funeral over there. People are bringing casseroles." It was very startling. My brother called another time and was just screaming. He said, "I was just watching [newscaster] Wendy Tokuda and she called you an avowed homosexual." He was just beside himself that I was an avowed homosexual, which was the term the mainstream media would use in the 1970s and the 1980s.

All the television cameras were there when I was elected mayor. There must have been fifteen cameras in the council chambers that night. It was jammed.

An interesting thing happened to my parents. They are both from the Midwest. My mom's from a small town in South Dakota, and my dad, who passed away last year, was from down-state Illinois. It was just not where they thought life was going to take them, to have two out of three of their sons be gay. There was never any break when we came out, never any break in any way. They had a tough time dealing with it, but they were very loving all the way through it. It was a very good family situation. The funny thing was that when I came out to my mother, her comment to me was, "Geez, we thought your brother might be gay, but we never thought *you* were." I couldn't say, "He *is* gay. He just hasn't told you yet." I had to struggle with that.

So when this happened, all of a sudden they started getting amazing letters and support from friends of theirs. My mom was an elementary school teacher. She got a letter from another teacher, who said, "I always thought those people in San Francisco were really strange, and I always snickered at Harvey Milk. I know you. I know your husband, and I know your son who lives at home. You're really wonderful people. You're really loving people. It's clear your son came from this. I've made a mistake, and I will never snicker at a gay person again." So my parents are starting to get this kind of response and they are feeling, "We are going to have to be adult about this." It was like them coming out in



a way, except they had no choice. It was done for them. It was a very growing experience. I laughed when I ran for the legislature in 1993. Somebody walked in with *Out Now* or some gay paper of the time, from San Jose. My mother had given them an interview. My mother had given an interview to a gay newspaper! Things have changed here. How far we've come.

There were people in Santa Cruz who were very active in the gay community here, who were from other parts of the country or the state, but had never come out to their families. All of a sudden, they were getting calls saying, "You have a gay mayor. How do you feel about that?" Suddenly they were talking with their families about gay issues. I got tons of letters. I think I only got two bad ones. They were almost all positive. Somebody wrote and said, "I have three gay sons. You make me proud." It was not unlike the experience of coming out. It was exhilarating.

At the end of my year as mayor, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* ended up writing a headline that it was a time of cooperation. I had had a great year as mayor. They endorsed me for re-election the next year. And the big furor over the election was just gone when it was done. There were things like negotiations with the firefighters that year. Well, city management put on the table that there be non-discrimination on sexual orientation. They said to the firefighters across the negotiation table, "Do you have a problem with this?" And they all smiled and said, "Not this year we don't."

Among the political structure, I was not viewed as somebody to be afraid of, by other elected officials. I would work with them. It really helped. Although, as I'm always fond of saying, they knew I'd mess with their bus routes if they weren't with me on domestic partner benefits. [laughter]

I happened to be working at the county at the time. Somebody at work said, "Boy, you are just a normal person." I said "Yes, I put my pants on one leg at a time." She said very innocently, "I know. We've been reading all about it." A good friend who had been active in my campaign, who was straight, said to me that she thought one of the most interesting things about that whole coverage was that they were all writing about my sexuality, but nobody was alluding to the fact that I ever might have been sexual. This was exactly the way I wanted it.

There was a civil rights bill in front of the legislature at the time, that Art Agnos, then an assembly member, was carrying, AB1, to protect against discrimination in employment



in California based on sexual orientation. In the first interview I said, “That’s the issue here. It’s not part of my contract, but I ought to be able to do a good job for the people of Santa Cruz and have my own non-discrimination clause. That’s the issue. Can I act on merit, and be judged electorally and politically that way?” So it unrolled in a good way. It was a very good experience, although it was completely unplanned.

After that, it was just great. There were some rumbles occasionally. I marched in the gay march in the 1984 Democratic convention, not knowing that—I mean, I would have done it anyway, no big deal— [but] not knowing that a photographer from the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* was up there, and I was going to be on the front page of the *Sentinel* holding a sign that said, “Mayor of Santa Cruz,” with the caption: “While walking in the gay rights march in San Francisco.” A couple of conservative councilmembers said, “Keep it to yourself.” There was actually a very anti-gay ad run the Sunday before the campaign when I ran for re-election, which, I think, backfired massively. People worked hard on election day because they were motivated.

**Reti:** Do you find yourself being put in a box as a gay candidate?

**Laird:** That’s a very interesting question. I don’t, where I have any background at all. I am running for the assembly right now.<sup>13</sup> Over fifty percent of the district is in Santa Cruz County, but it includes the Monterey Peninsula, and it’s about to include Morgan Hill and San Martin. I find in Santa Cruz County [being gay] is a non-issue. I’ve been so systematic this time. I started by going to the closest elected officials whom I feel will just say yes, and worked out from them. I flew under the radar for three or four months, and just [targeted] elected officials, political leaders, leaders in labor, the environmental movement. As I went through the first thirty or forty people in Santa Cruz County, starting at the very beginning, it didn’t come up. Not a single person raised it as an issue.

I am in my seventeenth year of elected office, so I am [known as] the person who was on the transit board, or the Cabrillo school trustee who was chair of the board when the bond passed. Or they are mad at me because I voted for some project in their neighborhood that they didn’t want. It’s about the issues. And yet, in Monterey County people are...[being gay is] still an issue. Initially, when I ran in the election eight years ago, the way it would come up would be—“You can’t win,” i.e.,—“You’re gay.” This

<sup>13</sup>In November 2002, John Laird was elected from the 27th District to the Assembly of the State of California. Laird, along with Mark Leno of San Francisco, became the first openly gay men ever elected to the California State Legislature



time the way it's coming up is very interesting. It's, "We think you're good. We're going to back you. We think you'll make a good assembly member. But we're worried you'll get to Sacramento and spend your time on civil rights, as opposed to public education, or the environment," or whatever issue is important to everyone. I'm fine with that, because that's progress. They are going to support me. When I'm working with them on preserving wetlands, or making sure that there's not seawater intrusion in their area, or that we set aside places in the Ventana wilderness so that it's not logged or mined, they are going to forget that they ever had that as a thought.

In 1993, when I ran for the assembly, it was a really bad year for incumbents all across the United States. I was not an incumbent at the time. I kept feeling like I was the only person in the country who was not benefitting as a non-incumbent. Because when I was an incumbent, reporters would cover me on a water issue, or they would cover me on the greenbelt. But it allowed the media to just take my campaign and put *gay* on it. And I didn't have as easy an ability to throw that off. I entered this campaign very attuned to that.

If I am elected to the assembly next year, it will still make history in California. There has never been an openly gay man elected to the California legislature. It's been done in Nevada. It's been done in Arizona. It's been done in Texas. It's been done in Missouri. But we can't seem to do it in California. Four women have been elected, and I'm really pleased with that, but we've never elected an openly gay man. So what I am trying to say is, I'm the most qualified person. I'm entering my seventeenth year in elected office. The issues that drive this district—public education, the environment, diversity, affordability, are issues that I have a record on. I'm out front. I'm the best person on the issues and experience for this office, *and* will make history in the process. If somebody wants to say *gay*, I'll say: I want to break that barrier. But I want to break that barrier because I want to show that I can be as good a legislator as anybody else is for their district. That's what you should learn about somebody who is gay. This isn't a stereotype. This isn't, elect me because of that. I am trying to walk that line in the right way politically.

**Reti:** That's delicate.

**Laird:** Yes. But the other thing is... It was very hard to maintain a relationship when I was in public life, and I've been together with my partner now... We're just about to have our sixth anniversary. That's very different about this race. I feel a little more stable



as a result. It's a nice way to make a statement, without having to talk in a lot of other ways about being gay.

**Reti:** I noticed that you listed your relationship on your campaign literature.

**Laird:** Yes, I didn't say anywhere in there, "I'm gay." I said, "I live on the Westside of Santa Cruz with my partner," and named him. That's clear. But that's the way it should be. That's the low-key way. The interesting thing is that, except for the fact that I would make history and break stereotypes, I don't know if my voting record on GLBT issues in the legislature would be different than the current person who is there, Fred Keeley, or would be different than our member of congress, Sam Farr. He voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.<sup>14</sup> Politically, our area and our legislators are there. I'll be in the same place. Don't think that this is some big radical takeover. I'm just going to break a few stereotypes in the process.

**Reti:** We are trying to document both the history of the University and the community. You are a very good person to bridge that divide.

**Laird:** Yes, I have lived in both worlds. It's interesting, because we did a number of community-based organizing efforts at different times, probably starting with the Briggs Initiative. The one that was also very interesting (it was hilarious at the time) was the organizing against the undercover arrests of gay men in the beach area of Capitola. I was one of the two or three people who worked on that all the way through. It was—call a community meeting, break into teams, investigate, keep trying to get things done—until we elevated it to the level where we took 250 people down to a Capitola City Council meeting and took it over, in early 1981. The arrests happened in 1980, in the fall, and I think it was something like January of 1981 that we went to the meeting.

**Reti:** Please talk about your work with the Santa Cruz AIDS Project.

**Laird:** The AIDS project came out of a similar process. I believe the political group at the time was the Freedom Democratic Caucus. There were gay and lesbian Democratic clubs up and down California. Alice B. Toklas and Harvey Milk in San Francisco. Stonewall in Los Angeles. The San Diego Democratic Club. They were even in San Luis Obispo, Fresno. Sacramento had the River City Club. There was a real movement, since the

<sup>14</sup>The Defense of Marriage Act, a California bill to allow states to ignore same-sex marriages performed in any other state, was passed in 1996.





Republicans were so rejecting, to organize within the Democratic Party. That's the way a lot of political activity was done. So we formed the Freedom Democratic Caucus, which the *Lavender Reader* came out of. That was actually our regular newsletter initially, and it morphed into the *Lavender Reader*. Michael Perlman edited it. We did a lot of things. There was a big fight after three or four years and the "Democratic" was taken out of it, so it became the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, and gradually fell apart. There were people who didn't like the affiliation with the Democratic Party.

But in any event, when the epidemic began, we decided it was time for some kind of community response. I was even interviewed by the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* as mayor, and I said I would love to participate in a community-based organization if something happened. In May of 1983, I introduced a resolution to the city council for more funding for AIDS education and prevention. It must have barely been called AIDS by then. I actually got the city council to pass that. So we called a community meeting as part of the Freedom Democratic Caucus. We had a reasonably good turn-out, fifty or sixty people, and out of that came the Santa Cruz AIDS Project. There were six of us who were the original board members, all gay men. Interestingly enough, given the path of the epidemic and the criticism early on, there were three men of color, and three who weren't. It was Jerry Solomon, Gerald Landers, Wesley Harris, Ray Martinez, Sean Wharton, and myself. Two people have since passed away of that six, Wesley and Ray.

We started from scratch. I joked about all our records being carried around in a shoebox for awhile. We tried to figure out what to do. Sean went and took the Shanti Project caregiver training [in San Francisco]. When we had our first one, two, and three clients, Sean literally was giving them [care] as per that training. We tried to send people up there, and that's how we first developed client services. Then we started a speaker's bureau. After a year, we expanded the board, and Sally Blumenthal, Ken Koenig... We expanded to twelve or fifteen people. Then we hired the first staff member and we got the first grants: a U.S. Conference of Mayors grant to help us with Latino outreach, and the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency gave us a grant for the basic infrastructure. With that grant, we hired Gerald Landers as the first executive director and rented a small office that was out by Food and Nutrition and the Seniors Council in Aptos. Terry Cavanaugh was the second staff member. He was doing volunteer coordination. It just took off from there. But it was a real idea, that there could be a community-based response, that people actually could make a difference, that you could volunteer.





**Reti:** Were there other communities organizing this kind of grassroots response?

**Laird:** Yes. San Francisco was doing it, because they had both the AIDS Foundation doing education and prevention, and the Shanti Project doing care.

**Reti:** How about communities of this size?

**Laird:** Santa Cruz was probably one of the first, because it was 1985 and 1986, very early in the scheme of things. At the time we thought it was kind of late. We helped Monterey County start the same thing the next year. We had a retreat at Jerry Solomon's house with the people from Monterey, to tell them what we had done and help them do the same thing with the Monterey County AIDS Project.

Then it just took on a life of its own. I was executive director from the beginning of 1991 to the beginning of 1994. In that time the budget doubled, the staff-level doubled; we moved. We were on the Eastside. Most of the executive directors of the AIDS Project have been really good for the time they were there. There are different life spans within the organization. Gerald was great for the start. He had energy, enthusiasm. He was really dynamic in getting other people involved. Jo Kenny was the next director. She really took it to the next level in a very good way.

Then I had to stabilize it and jump it up. We opened the house when I was there. We increased client services dramatically. It had been just one person who was a social worker, and interns or volunteers. By the time I left, we had a substantial client services department. We became the spokespersons in the community. I would always try to figure out every four or six weeks, what is going on with the epidemic, and try to make a story out of it, try to make sure it was in the feature section of the newspaper, or there was a news story where we were speaking clearly about what needed to be done. We were raising \$200,000 a year from the community. The budget, I think, when I left was in the \$750,000, \$800,000-a-year range. \$200,000 of that was from community fundraising, and we had six hundred people who volunteered in some way with the agency.

It was a monumental human response. I was just talking to somebody about it earlier today. It was one of the most challenging things I've ever done in my life. I took a massive pay cut to do it. I worked fifty-five or sixty hours a week. I think it was easy to be on the city council and work overtime on public stuff while the epidemic was beginning, because it helped my denial. As friends started to get sick, it helped me keep



from just facing into it. I brought many skills to the AIDS Project. I brought connections. I upped our government grants. I could speak to the press. I knew them all, and made sure I got them there. I was in tune with the community, with volunteers. But at the same time, I must have said goodbye to fifteen or twenty people who were reasonably good friends, in that particular time. I faced up to it. I remember thinking, even when I was director of the AIDS Project, okay, that's my last funeral. I am never going to another funeral. I can't take it. Of course, two or three weeks later I'd be at the next one. It was a very difficult time, but it's when I became an adult. It's when I truly grew up.

The AIDS Project has had its ebbs and flows in the fifteen years it's been going, but it's been such an important part of the community and of people's lives. I think one of the interesting things, getting back to the tension between men and women in the community, is that the number of women who volunteered in the epidemic, primarily lesbians, actually outweighed the number of men. Men were having it in their daily lives. It was in front of them all the time. Some people found it hard to seek it out. It was heroic, some of the work that was done in that period.

Once again, if you look at thirty years of history in our community, the AIDS Project is an important piece of it. We struggled about being considered a gay agency, or a gay and lesbian agency. One of the hardest things was being true to the fact that the epidemic was overwhelmingly hitting gay men, and a lot of the volunteer response was overwhelmingly coming from lesbians, and yet trying to be this broader agency in the community that was not going to be considered solely a gay and lesbian agency.

**Reti:** Yes, AIDS is not a gay disease *per se*. You don't want to reinforce that stereotype.

**Laird:** Well, as the epidemic [affected] people of color much more, that was a struggle. There was a point when I was our executive director when fifty percent of our board were people of color. We got to a point when we had to move where the epidemic was. It was really hard for some people who were not gay to feel like they would be perceived to be gay by being involved at the AIDS Project, even as a client. It was a struggle, but it was one in which everybody grew.

When I think of where people were on gay issues in 1972, when I was just coming out and people wouldn't talk about it at UCSC; or in 1981, when I was trying to figure out how to be out as a candidate; or in 1983, when I was out as a mayor; or the late-1980s, when the AIDS Project was struggling to get going; or in 1993, when I ran for the



Assembly—when I look back at every one of these benchmarks in our community, where gay issues were very heavily involved, I am very pleased, because we are farther along now than I ever thought we would be. It's the result of all that work. 1981 was the first Gay Pride rally where I spoke, and I've spoken from the stage at every single one since. I always tried to take a long view in those speeches. We have a tremendous reversal, and I'll say "Hey, you know, this is just a step on the path." Now I've been around long enough where that's so totally true. Yes, the Knight Initiative was bad last year, but we're just winning more domestic partner rights. More people are getting elected to office. We are moving ahead. And it's because everybody is just so out in their lives in ways that it builds that change. It makes a sense of inevitability.

Even in the events of the last two or three days, with the bombing of the World Trade Center, [on September 11, 2001] I've thought, oh my God, there had to be bunches of gay men and lesbians who were killed in that blast. Greenwich Village is right there. There had to be people who worked in the financial industry. That's a story that hasn't been written yet. I think that one of the interesting things is going to be is that if truly the toll is going to be around 4000, if there was a little bio of every single one, it would be *us*. It would be this whole mix of people.

**Reti:** What do you think some of the other key moments in Santa Cruz LGBT history have been?

**Laird:** Well, I've talked a little bit about that men's group. It was such a key moment, because there were all of these people who were around, and they truly publicly came out as part of all that, to each other, to the community. There was this strength. We figured there were 250 to 300 men who were in that group over a course of a six- or eight-month period at its height. We realized who the community was. I still feel close to anybody who was in that group. Twenty years later I feel real attached to them.

The Briggs Initiative. That was the first great, broad-based political thing. And in the Capitola organizing, there was this moment when we had 250 people in the council chambers, and the police chief was sitting in the front row just cowering, just dying, because he wouldn't listen to us. We had tried every possible way before that. We had the ACLU, we had the Lawyer's Guild. Even the Gray Panthers came. We did this classic organizing. There was this moment when you looked at the room, and all of a sudden these people were looking at each other and saying: "We have power." It just had not occurred to them. It happened during the Briggs Initiative. It happened during the men's



group. I think it even happened in the formation of the AIDS Project. It happened at a time when I was elected mayor and people felt a part of that. There were certain common organizing times when people got together in a real group or community, and realized they could change things. So whether it's the Briggs Initiative, the Capitola organizing, political campaigns, starting the AIDS Project, or even Pride through the years in its different incarnations, people realized they have power. These were defining moments in the growth of this community.

We are always perceived as being a strong, well-organized, and large community by the non-gay community. Sometimes I do not think we are dramatically larger per capita than anywhere else except for a few urban areas like Los Angeles or San Francisco, but we are integrated into the community. It's not like there's a neighborhood. It's not like there're a particular few businesses. We are integrated across the board. We are on the faculty at Cabrillo. We are on the faculty at UCSC. We are on the staffs at both places. We are throughout county government. We are in businesses downtown. Reporters for the newspaper. You go almost everywhere... My office right here in the county building. There are thirty people; finally, there's a second gay man. But there are three or four lesbians. We are very integrated, and we are very open. That makes for a very unique community where there is a perception of strength. I think the only place in the county that that might not be true is Watsonville. People are still struggling to be out there. If you look at the results of the Knight Initiative, it passed in Watsonville with sixty percent of the vote, while it was being defeated in the rest of Santa Cruz County, by almost sixty percent, which means it failed outside of Watsonville by maybe sixty-five percent or so.

There are those defining moments. The challenge has always been, and it's a challenge I faced when I was younger, is so many people move to San Francisco or another place. They feel much more comfortable in larger numbers. I've always been much more comfortable here in a non-urban environment, and being out. Now sort of the reverse migration is happening out of a lot of urban areas, where people are coming out of communities, because it is easier to be out here. I find a lot more people moving to Santa Cruz just because it's okay. They seek it out.

One of the problems I've had personally is there are a certain number of people who say, "Oh, gay, we'll call John." As if somehow I am the community. I have to refer them to other people. I have to say, "Hey, we don't speak with one voice." I am a point of entry sometimes. A lot of times when people are professionals and they come into town... I think it is easier for somebody like me, who has been here for over thirty years on and



off. I've got my social structure in place. I've got my political or job connections in place. It's not like I have to struggle with coming out as I get to know people in the community.

**Reti:** Establishing yourself as a professional.

**Laird:** Yes, not just like, "Oh, there's the gay person who is our new executive director," because that comes first somehow.

**Reti:** As mayor, how did you deal with the split between the University and the town?

**Laird:** It was tough, because I was the first UCSC graduate ever elected to the city council, who was an undergraduate for four years. Mike Rotkin had been a graduate student, and had gotten there a couple of years earlier. A substantial number of people in town at the time hated the University. They said, "We've lived here forever. They are changing our way of life. They are yahoos. We're more stable townies who stay here forever." There was this pronounced split. I campaigned on the basis that I was going to try to bring us together as one community. But the term I was mayor was begun by a ballot measure that was anti-University growth, that when I was elected mayor, I was charged with implementing. It was very difficult. We even sued the University the second time I was mayor. So it was a very fine line. They [the University] were unwilling to compromise. They were unwilling to look for common ground. It was like, "We are exempt from local land use. We are exempt from laws under the state constitution. Basically, we're going to do what we're going to do." That was the attitude.

The University has changed and matured. I think M.R.C. Greenwood is the most community-friendly chancellor there has been, with the possible exception of the first one, Dean McHenry, who brought the campus here. But the community has changed in thirty-five years. I think it's down now to where the more conservative or older part of the community can't be more than ten or fifteen percent of the community. It's really changed. Now the University is really part of the community. And if you look at the alumni numbers, I think over 8000 graduates of UCSC are still in the Monterey Bay area.

Robert Sinsheimer was the chancellor for most of the time I was on the city council. He wanted to build a research and development park that was on University land on an area that the city considered a greenbelt, and using the contracts that the city had with the University. The city was actually going to pay for a lot of the infrastructure for this research and development park that was going to be oriented to the University. Even



though it was public/private, the private part was going to have the benefit of the public subsidy and the University land. And so people were pretty outraged about it in town. We'd have debates. The chancellor would really like to portray it as the anti-University town. So I went up to debate him, and I would open up the debate by saying, "This is the time of the annual fund drive for the University. The UCSC Foundation needs your money for scholarships (or whatever). Here's the address of the UCSC Foundation." Then I'd talk about the issues, and make him crazy, because he was trying to make the point that we were anti-UCSC, that we didn't like it here. I was trying to make the point that that wasn't the issue.

**Reti:** Haven't you been an officer in the [UCSC] Alumni Association?

**Laird:** I'm the equivalent of president-elect now. They just changed the name to executive vice president. I've been on the alumni board now for five years and been real active.

I think [the relationship between the city and the University has] gotten closer, although there are still some tensions over a number of different things. They tend to be development and economic issues that are related. It will never be easy. The end result of our efforts in 1989 and 1990 was the University having a goal of seventy percent of the students being housed through campus housing, and a higher number of faculty and staff members. Something like forty-two or forty-three percent were housed on campus when we made that agreement. Last year, it was still in the forties. It was in the high-forties. And that involved conversion of a lot of dorm lounges to dorm rooms, and things that in my view were probably not real moves towards good housing. But this year, with the opening of the new colleges, and even though very controversial, a whole other story, the Holiday Inn, the Town Center, they are doing a lot of things to provide additional housing. Additional housing will help the housing crisis that exists in the region. That's one of the things I want to work on if I am elected to the legislature. They have such a weird funding formula. You have to look at all housing developments as a nine-campus-wide funding formula. You have to pay a lot of the costs up front, and the paybacks and rents are high. It's not even a good alternative in some ways. There have got to be some ways at the state level that you can problem-solve these issues so that you can relieve a little bit of the pressure on the local housing market that comes from the University.





**Reti:** Has the fact that you have been active in gay politics, and that you are a gay man, played into the split between the University and the surrounding community?

**Laird:** It hasn't really, that I'm aware of. Interestingly enough, one of the benefits to faculty members having tenure is that there are out gay faculty members who have tenure. That's an okay thing in the town-gown thing. The University is behind the times sometimes. When we sent Mardi Wormhoudt to the Long Range Development Committee meetings as the city representative in 1988 or 1989, when she first served on it I think there were twenty-six people on the committee and she was the only woman! They did some changes. They managed to get four or five women on it. The University is such an insulated institution, insulated from trends, the public, politics, in certain ways.

One of the funniest stories was, Edmund G. Brown, Jr., when he was governor kept trying to make appointments to diversify the government. One of the appointments he made to the board of regents was Sheldon Andelson, who was a high-powered Los Angeles attorney and political donor, but an openly gay man. He was the first openly gay regent. When they were trying to build the research and development park, and they thought the city was giving them such a hard time, what do they do? This is the time for the gay regent to come and talk to the gay mayor. So I had dinner with Sinsheimer, and his wife [Karen] might have been there, and Sheldon Andelson at the Compton Place when it was new, this hoighty-toighty restaurant in San Francisco. They were trying to hit on me. It's like, "Let's trot out the gay regent for the gay mayor." Then Sam Farr and I flew to Los Angeles to meet with him. Sam was a state assembly member at the time. It was like somehow we were going to make peace. They had some table at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Andelson died eight or ten years ago of AIDS, but at that time he was very powerful in Los Angeles. He was one of the most influential regents. I thought that was very funny, that somehow I would immediately say, "Anything I ever stood for, and was elected on doesn't matter because I'm speaking gay-to-gay with a regent." I thought it was twisted. I don't know if I've ever talked about that. That's the advantage of interviewing people ten or fifteen years after things happen. The edge is gone. If I had made the statement I just made within a year of that, it would have been explosive. It would have been anti-University. It would have been self-serving. It would have been all these things. So I just shut up about it during that time, and thought it was off.

One other thing, it was great when David Thomas started his gay politics class. He would have me up most of the time to speak in the 1980s. That was one of the things I always loved to do. I loved to be involved in anything that might be going on on campus



that was organized. I would generally come and speak to whatever gay group there was, once a year when I was on the council.

Closet Free Radio [on KZSC] has got to be one of the longest running, if not the longest running gay radio program. I've lost track of how long I've been doing politics on it. I just show up the second or third Monday for half an hour. They don't even call me anymore. They just know I'm going to be there. Through the years, I've spoken at tons of Pride celebrations on campus during that week. It was important for people to see a role model. I never had one. I would probably have come out five years earlier if I had even had a clue that stuff was going on, that it was safe. I think that's an important investment to make back.

**Reti:** Would you say that the University has influenced Santa Cruz to be a gay-friendly place? Or vice-versa? There are those who say this community would never be like this if it wasn't for the University.

**Laird:** I think there is some truth to that. University towns tend to be places where there's organizing, where there's been progress. You can't generalize that much. One of the places that first elected gay officials was Madison, Wisconsin. Also Minnesota. The guy who retired last year from the Minnesota State Senate after serving thirty years was an out member of the Minnesota legislature. He was the longest-serving member. He had to be one of the first or second out officials. He was a professor at the University of Minnesota law school. So if you look, there are these connections especially since the eighteen-year-old vote.

**Reti:** But there are university towns that are very conservative. Of course, UCSC is a very special kind of place.

**Laird:** Yes. I've always thought that that's part of it. I'm sure being a beach town, a coastal town not far from San Francisco, there would always be some influence anyway. But if you look at Santa Cruz compared to Monterey, Monterey's community is still semi-closeted, to this day.

**Reti:** Let's talk about the more recent civil rights ordinances, in the 1990s. There were two efforts, right?





**Laird:** Yes. There was one in the city that was very controversial, filled the Civic Auditorium in the early-1990s. Then there was one that was done by the county two or three years ago, that was not very controversial, even though we worked very hard on it.<sup>15</sup> People say, why weren't those done when you were on the city council? It's because at the time, where they were getting adopted, they were being repealed by referendum. I said I would happily support them, but people need to be ready to work all the way through on a campaign, and if we're going to do this I want three or four people that are going to stand up and talk about specific instances of discrimination that happened to them that would be prohibited by this law. We could never do that. People would always say, no, just do it. I would say, you don't seem to understand that you are putting the city council out there. Somehow we'll have to manage this campaign.

At one point, I was instrumental in forming a human relations committee or task force, at the city, that took testimony and tried to make recommendations, in the hopes that if they did their job right, it would lead to the ordinance. But there wasn't enough documentation. Then, interestingly enough, when Governor Pete Wilson vetoed the statewide protections in the early-1990s, then here comes the council, saying "We'll do it at the local level." The looks part of it got added to it. To be honest, I was very unhappy about that. I thought, here's our chance to be clear. Let them referendum and we'll see it at the polls. We've finally got where we wanted. We've built a constituency in the community. And it all got lost. We kept getting lumped together with people who had tongue rings and all this other stuff. It took what I thought was a very solid civil rights discussion and diverted it into a more frivolous debate. We were on the *Rush Limbaugh* [show]; all this kind of crap was happening. I was very unhappy about it. Actually there were people who were mad at me about having that point of view. It was like, "Oh, you get up the ladder and you kick the ladder down for the next group. You're not being sensitive. We work in coalition." And yet, I just didn't feel like that was the coalition to do this. I thought it was more likely to get referended if the looks thing was in there. It was a pragmatic view of how we were going to move it along.

We actually had a couple of incidents that motivated the county ordinance about public accommodations. One of them was at a beach on the North Coast where there was a

<sup>15</sup> In 1992, the city of Santa Cruz passed an ordinance incorporated into the municipal code to "protect and safeguard the right and opportunity of all persons to be free from all forms of arbitrary discrimination, including discrimination based on age, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex, gender, sexual orientation, height, weight or physical characteristic. In 1998, the county of Santa Cruz passed a similar ordinance.



couples rate, but if you were a gay couple it didn't count. You still had to each pay full tariff. We worked very closely with Mardi Wormhoudt, a number of us in the community, and helped draft the legislation. There was a little fight about how wide to make it. It was a little easier political discussion, because the city is one thing, but when it's the county board of supervisors, that at the time included three Republicans out of the five—Walt Symons, Ray Belgard and Jan Beautz. It was like, sorry, going out there on who this covers is not going to pass that board. That's what we have to do. So because it was clearly public accommodations, GLBT, it passed. The funny thing about that was twenty-five of us came down to watch them vote on it. I was the only man. I was blown away by that. There were others involved who just couldn't come that morning. It was embarrassing. I didn't go pointing it out in the moment, but I talked about it later on the radio and other places. I thought this was awful.

**Reti:** Why was that?

**Laird:** Oh, there are tons of reasons. I always feel like the men don't have it together the way the women do in political organizing, locally. [They] just don't.

I thought it was a tribute to how far the community has come that nobody threatened a referendum. It didn't have the backlash of five hundred people coming into the Civic Auditorium. Those [initiatives] aren't being referended as much anymore. That was the problem in the 1980s. They were overturned in Irvine, Davis—university communities.

It was very strange to be sitting in the audience. I had just left the council, a year or two before. It was very strange to sit in the audience and have them talk about me. The mayor said, "Well, John Laird was here. He was incredibly competent and I find it very hard to believe that somebody just wouldn't hire him because he was gay." They are sitting there having this discussion. I felt like saying, "What am I, dead?" [laughter]

**Reti:** What work do you think needs to be done in the LGBT community at this point? What do you see as the pressing issues?

**Laird:** There still need to be a lot of practical things done. As much as we've made progress, still only twenty percent of employers offer domestic partner benefits. That's in the country. I could be off a little bit either way, because that number changes all the time. There needs to be a lot of work in non-discrimination benefits.



At some point, there will be a more formal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships, and it's just a question of what you call the work to get there. I look at my own family. Thirty years ago, who would have thought this is a family that would be strongly pro-gay? I mean, until my youngest brother had a couple of kids, if you looked at my family around the holiday table there were eight people, and half were gay! [laughter] It's just not what you would have thought from a Midwestern-transplanted family. When you look at all the progress that's been made, it's been made because I'm out to my family or my friends. So is my brother. So are all of us. And that's just this long process that keeps going. Every year we get a little further. That's the kind of work. I'm convinced the relationships and everything follow from that. Ten years ago, there were major boycotts if there was a gay character on a television show program. Huge boycotts. Now people fight to have them on. It's hard to imagine some major shows that don't, even if it's just a character in an episode. It's becoming much more accepted. I think there is this long-term work about relationships and where it goes. But that's how you get there. Laws tend to ratify where a country or community is, rather than moving the community there. We have to do all this work at the community level across the country, family, or neighborhood level.

I've had a radio show for years. I had this guy on who was director of the Council of Churches and was fired because he came out. He was active and still is active in organizing within different denominations for recognition of relationships and ordination of gay and lesbian pastors. He said, "We just lost that vote fifty-six to forty-four in some national council. But we lost that vote ten years ago ninety-to-ten. Everybody is upset that we lost that vote. That's progress. We're going to get there." That's the fact that is hard to get across to people. Sometimes, I think people look at me and think I'm callous about certain losses. But I'm thinking, damn, got close on that one! I never would have thought it. We're going to get there. That's the long view I feel people need to have about what we're going to get done. There'll be a time. There's this dividing line, age-wise, if you look in the polls. Ten years ago it was forty; now it's near fifty, of people who have the most negativity toward gay men and women. We're just going to outlive them at some point. Even if people who are younger than me have to outlive people my age, there's going to be this time when we get there. It's remarkable in the thirty-two years since Stonewall how far things have come, even though it's frustrating at times that we are not farther.