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SPEAKERS

Jimmy Carper

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Jimmy Carper 00:01

Hello, Happy gay and lesbian Pride Day. This is the time of year that we remember the Stonewall riots in New York City circa 1969. I'm Jim Carper. When Ray Hill and I got together to interview people, we decided to concentrate on those who would remember that era 1969. Everyone was given the same questions. And what follows are their responses.

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00:27

Lee Harrington is my name. And I began to deal with my sexual orientation in 1977, really. And it was a disconcerting experience. So much so that when I came to Houston in 1979, I had to wear a mask at the first gay pride parade. I might also add that also had turned left on Westheimer, our South by the tower theater. The first week I was here, and I had Michigan license plates still on my car. And so the police stopped me. And they said, What have I done wrong? And they said, Well, you've turned into a one way street and the other officer realized that they made a mistake. It was only one way on the other side of Westheimer. And the people in front door mirrors were standing there watching all this take place. And so since they had to save face, they looked and found that I still had Michigan police asked me how long I'd been here. So finally just said, Well, you know, we just said, Where are you going? And I was not quite as bold as I am now. And I wasn't quite sure what to say. And so I pointed between Mary's and boobie rock, and I looked that day straight enough that they thought I was going to be the rock. And I've regretted it ever since.

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01:32

My name is Eleanor Handley. And I came to accept being lesbian, approximately three years ago. And the best way to describe it, it was like coming home. I felt like I finally got the whole picture together what life was all about? In 1969, I was living in a little town in upstate New York called Holly. What I was doing was being a wife and mother, I had four children, ages four to nine. And that's what I was doing. What was what was it like? Good and bad. I enjoyed it a lot. And part of it was pretty difficult. My



02:19

name is Pat Gandy and I first came to accept the fact that I was a lesbian. Actually, five years ago, when I came out, I had strong suspicions of it all my life. But I didn't do anything about it. In 1969, I was living in Deer Park, Texas, teaching in Pasadena. And I'm trying to sympathize with all the four adolescents who are getting drafted for the Vietnam War. And as as always, all my life, I've always been sympathetic with the press people's I suppose that was a projection of my own hidden non acceptance of myself for what I actually knew I was, I was lesbian and projected by helping other folks and I sympathize with these adolescents. And it was it was it was a very upsetting time for me because I could see the power and the and the awfulness of the federal government as it did it and society stomped on any young person who dared to disagree. And I feel that it's somewhat similar to the fact the way the situation we are in many tabs by society that we they want to squash and step on us the same way. Okay, my



03:42

name is Laurie lingo. I accepted being gay in 1974, when I was 37 years old, calculate fast. It was very liberating. When I finally came to terms with it. I'd known I think for some years I was gay, but really come to terms accepting it was about a year after my divorce, and it was, as I say, very liberating. 1969 I was married. I was living in Fort Worth, Texas. I was teaching history at Texas Christian University. And that was it. Lee,



J Jimmy Carper 04:16

Eleanor, Pat and Larry. Now tell you when they first heard about the Stonewall Rebellion, and what they thought of it, you will find out what gay and lesbian pride means to them, and how they will celebrate their pride this year. Well,



04:32

I was not aware of it at the time. Of course. I when I first heard about it probably was when I began to deal with leaving East Lansing, Michigan where I had gone after graduate from University of Alabama. And probably I really can't remember exactly which troubles me because it's such a profound moment, but I wouldn't have remembered it. Like I remember the day that Kennedy was shot because I knew where I was. And when I wasn't aware of all this stuff at that time to him Number one, it was exactly the spot. But in 1977, I would say I began to hear about it. But in 78 when I arrived in Houston, and saw the likes of you and others, at the Astro Hall, meeting one, I started to think, Well, I think it's, I think it's a glorious moment for all liberated people. A special moment for gays and lesbians. It's the thing I look forward to most each year, I always want to pray to be bigger and better I want the mainstream businesses to enter floats and I weigh myself to death all year long. But I finally got to go down to Foley's and talk them into it and work with Academy and tuck them into it and, and I always am so busy with other projects, I never get to go and help Gay Pride Week. Do that. Also, by this year, of course, by being at the parade and, and thinking back when I'll wear the mask, and the first one, and how far I've come. And I think also how far we still have to go.



06:00

I heard about the Stonewall Rebellion about two years ago, shortly after I came up. From what I've heard about it, when I've, you know, heard about it from other people they had good reason to ride in the streets and right hand are lesbian and gay pride means means my own personal pride, since I am a lesbian, and proud to be one. I feel like there's a lot of work to be done for us to have to have the real recognition that we should have as citizens of this world. I will be celebrating Pride Week, how we started celebrating by going to the the dinner, Last Saturday, the awards dinner, I will be marching in the parade. And this will be the second year of march in the parade. And it'll be the third year I knew there was a parade. Well,



06:59

I probably heard about it when it happened. But I don't remember. Because I usually read the paper very avidly. I wasn't out there. But I spent most of the first part of my life as an alcoholic, trying to suppress the fact that I was a lesbian. So there are a lot of I have a lot of blank spaces in terms of memories of things. But after I sobered up, and and when I was in the process of coming out, I read about it and being an old sort of semi mover and shaker and radical myself, I thought that they were probably long overdue and doing it and I should put should have done it sooner. But as wonderful as being gay pride means to me accepting who I am. And, and being being cool with that. And participating in the life of the community and doing what I can to further the cause of gay and lesbian rights. And I plan to celebrate it by by doing as I do normally. And then participating in the events of Gay Pride Week, such as going up went to the banquet last Saturday night. I will attend several events and just fade in the parade on Sunday. Well,



08:32

of course I heard about when it happened because I read The New York Times. My feeling was, again, secretly knowing I was gay. I was very sympathetic. I was involved in the anti war demonstration myself at the time, I thought it was a great thing. Well, let me answer the let me say celebrate it by being in the parade Sunday, the store our store, Lobo will have a booth at Star 91. So I guess in that sense, that's part of how we celebrate it. We decorate the store. We celebrate gay pride. We actually a year round at Lobo. But we do get a little more involved during Gay Pride Week. What Gay Pride means to me. Again, I think it's something that everybody should experience here around. I think it's very important that we take pride in being gay and lesbians first of all, because it's good for us individually. Everybody, I think should have a very positive attitude towards themselves. And it comes I think with pride, I think they should be proud if they are gay and if they're lesbian.



Jimmy Carper 09:34

Now Lee, Eleanor Pat and Larry will tell you how gay and lesbian people have changed over the years in their perception. You will hear what they think of young gay and lesbian people today. And what advice the four of them offer



09:48

I think I think that there has been a lot of change. I am a perfectionist and I don't please easily but there's no point question that there are more people who are out now I think one of the things that colors my thinking on that is is a dilemma in Houston. Because I do think since 1985, and the January 19 referendum that we have gone downhill, I think more people are scared. But I do see a lot of young people in the bars coming out at an early age. And that's exciting. I really love them, I go to the bars, and I'm a late person. And I'll work at my desk on scripts or on a production schedule until midnight or so and, and I'll jump up and my friends kidding me about using that as an excuse, but I'll go to the bar, sometimes maybe for only 30 minutes. And I'll see young couples in the bars, especially on the under 21 night, and there'll be embraced when I'll be jealous and envious. Finally, I'll watch. Because I didn't do that at an early age in my life. And so I'll wait for until they break. And I'll usually walk up to them and tell them how jealous I am. And tell them that they need to have two goals and one of them need to come out at work within two years and at home within three years that that's where our power is.



11:01

If I go back to what I thought gay and lesbian people were like, they definitely have changed. Because it was only what I thought it wasn't what I knew, because I didn't know any gay and lesbian people. I don't really know a lot of young people, but the ones I do know. They seem to have a lot of pride. And they seem to know who they are. I think the advice I would give them is to be true to themselves. And to keep working for the rights that we all need and deserve our well



11:42

yes, I'd say so. Back when I first suspected my tendencies. I was 615 15 years old, just out of high school in a small rural high school in Texas not far from Houston. And I went away to college. By then I was all 16 years old. And I strongly suspected I was one of those homosexuals. So I went to the library and read about homosexuality and found out that it was a sickness that that was visited upon folks. And I determined that I didn't want any of that. So it you know, it took lots of bottles of alcohol for the next 30 years to keep that from, you know, to try and change myself. And it didn't work of course. And but I remember, uh, definitely, I went to a girl school. So it's, you know, there were there were a lot of lesbians there. It's affectionately known. Among some of us today is the dark factory of Texas. However, I purposely avoided all those people, because I know who they were. I don't know how I knew. But I knew all I knew the ones that I that were rather obvious. Or I felt like we're fit the stereotype actually. And some of the rest of them I didn't know because I've run into her here in Houston since then, and I had no idea about her. But everything was very close. It didn't very, nobody, you know, nobody talked about it. If I hadn't been so shy and retiring and, and less bookish. Of course, some people find that hard to believe about me, but but I was and I you know, everything was hidden and it's wonderful to data you know, you can you can you know read newspapers, it things in the newspapers, even the even the stripe press this says some positive things in between the rest of the time that it's not, and we have access to a gay press into information that's that's uplifting and helpful. That's the fact that's how average they came

out is. You know, other people helped me but I was I got some of my my, did a lot of reading. So. So that's that's pretty much it's changed. It's changed for the better, but not nearly fast enough.



14:20

Special question just for you. How important is sobriety to your wholeness and your pride? Sobriety



14:28

is the most important part of being proud a person that's proud and happy with themselves and with their with their gayness or their lives. bidness as you may say, I can't say too strongly or too often, that the advice I'd have to all people young and old is to they're not going to ever come to grips with their sexuality with their problems in life, if they don't get sober. And I think that's especially important in our community, because we have been so oppressed and so downtrodden. And so maligned by so many people, families, by society by everybody, that we've often turned to drink I did. And I'm no different than than a lot of folks. It's no respecter of economic conditions. It's no respecter of intelligence. It's no respecter of anything. But it's a very important thing if we, if we don't deal with the alcoholism, we can't deal with ourselves, and we can't be proud of ourselves. And to me, that is crucial. Crucial, I'll never drink again.



15:47

And again, my experience of gay life has since 1974. As far as changes, yeah, radical changes, I guess, since I came out. AIDS has completely changed our community, I think the main thing I noticed is, and they'll fight my lover, and I've discussed this often, in the early years, we seem to do very few women, gay women are lesbians. And we find now that some of our best friends are women. I think that's been a radical change. I think for both men and women, gay men and women, is discovering suddenly that there's this whole other community that we actually do have something in common. And I think part of that is because family, more and more gay men are realizing that there's a hell a lot more to being gay than sex. And once they get that through their heads, than they realize that we have a lot of common goals, and just common ideals that we share with gay women. I think that's been the biggest change. I've seen this and it's been radical. Well, I guess my only count my contact mainly with with younger members of the community is primarily through the store or to the caucus or other activities. I find them much more liberated than I ever was at that age or even after that age. If I have any concern is I think a lot of younger gay men don't always understand the impact of AIDS, I think there's a tendency to to slough off safer sex among younger man that that concerns me. But otherwise, I find that much more together much more dedicated, much more comfortable with themselves. And certainly, younger men and women were years ago.



Jimmy Carper 17:39

The last question for Lee, Eleanor, Pat. And Larry concerns how they think their lives will be in the future. Yeah,



17:46

I have no idea I, I've learned to go with the flow, not quite as rigid as I used to be. I try not to expect things to happen quite as fast. But I do feel like that it's going to be more radical than I've ever been



18:02

right now. My life is pretty wonderful. Because I'm in a relationship with a person that I expect to be in a relationship for the rest of my life. And I'm very happy, very fulfilled. In the future, I expect my life to just continue on as it is, and you know, perhaps even get better. Oh,



18:26

I have a wonderful life. Now.



18:28

I don't. As far as the future. I think I take the attitude, I don't know, maybe more people take the attitude. I think we are at least I think more in terms of day to day at this point. Given the health crisis and everything else, I don't really plan even in terms of the business, I don't really plan that far ahead. And as far as life, we really do take it a day at a time. And that's we like to think it's getting better every day. We watch all the reports that are coming out of Italy right now in terms of the AIDS conference. There seems to be a lot of, I think, hopeful signs on the AIDS front.



Jimmy Carper 19:08

Now for a different perspective. We talked to John Barco, a 22 year old gay activist, we asked him all the same questions, we asked everyone else. My



19:20

name is John Burgo. And I first came out when to myself when I was 16, junior in high school in 1986. And I've been dealing with it ever since I was like 10 or 11. You know, because things that happen in Boy Scouts and everything and denying it, you know, and myself even at the same time that I was lustng for all the men that were around me. And it was I was really lucky when I came out. The reason I came out was that an exchange student and German exchange student was living with my family and Sharing a bedroom with me. And I was madly in love with them. And I had a terrible crush on him. And that's the point where I could no longer ignore the fact that I was gay, where I was just like, totally, I was really upset when he wasn't there, I was incredibly jealous of his girlfriend. And that's just that, you know, the reason you feel this way is because you're gay. And so the very first person I told was a teacher in high school, and she

was my best friend. And things were great. I mean, things were great. She was very accepting. And very, she really made a lot of support in Indian system, and also in dealing with my feelings about him, which was the big stress in my life. And I just started telling people on and probably by the end of that year, I told maybe a dozen people in my high school and people that I knew, and except for when I told my mother, I got nothing but fairly positive responses. And so it made me feel very confident about coming out a lot to a lot of different people. I was being born in September of 1969. So my life was pretty simple. Just a little Queer baby, doing the things that little Queer babies do. Like most other babies, I first heard about it when I was in high school. When I was a junior, after I told that teacher, I was still dealing with water problems. And there was this youth counselor that came to the school once a week. And so my teacher helped me arrange a time to go see her. And I went and talked to her. And then she went back to the county agency that she worked for and found everything she could in their files, about gay people. And she copied made huge copies for me, and brought them back to me. And one of them was an article in the American Library Association Journal that talked about Stonewall. And I was just really excited, because almost as soon as I came out, I was like, I was an activist, you know, I would get really pissed off when I heard people, you know, like in Congress like Jesse Helms saying, stupid awful things. And, and when I just heard about, about it, and the police raising the bar, and, and, and all the patrons fighting back and everything, I just felt so excited and energized, I think it's a time for us to remember everything that we've accomplished in the last 22 years. And to be really angry about the things that haven't gotten done, not not angry at ourselves, but angry at all the stupid people and the stupid society that stands in our way. And to remember all the things that we still have to do in dealing with AIDS and helping gay and lesbian youth. And, you know, getting some real political power for ourselves to represent ourselves and in government, and end the violence, you know, and all these problems that we still have to face. But to celebrate the fact that we have come so far, and that we really have a community of people who are working to end these problems. And what I'm gonna be doing this year is going to advance and like I've done every, every year, as soon as I came out like that, that first year, when I was 16, a lesbian teacher that I knew in school, who I come out to took me to see planning glasses, it was my first Gay Pride Week event, and services that I've done something and so like, I want to see play this week, and going to going to the parade, of course, and marching with the people from U of H. And, and just trying to be with as many as my friends as possible. But I don't think that game has been people have changed too much since the time that I came out to the present, because that was only six years ago, five years ago. But I think in talking with people, and reading about the last, you know, 22 years, and even before then, I think people have changed why people are coming out more. And people are realizing more and more that, you know, when they get a negative reaction from people about their being gay, it's not their problem, it's the problem with the person who's giving them the negative reaction. And I think that's a big change in the last. I mean, it's a big change for myself, you know, from when I was 16. And I was terrified about my mother, you know, having a fit. If I if she found out I was gay to saying she has to deal with it. It's her problem, not mine. And I also think that, that people are starting to realize that the problems that we face as gay and lesbian people, no matter what group we come from, or what gender we are, or what color our skin is, or what language we speak, or what we'd like to do in bed, are a lot of the same problems. And we really have to work together to overcome them. I think that young people in the community today have I think they see a lot of those things that that other people saw as dividing factors, like men and women, or black and white, that divided people in the community, I think for not all young people, but for a lot of young people. They're getting over that, you know, the young men are learning to to change their behavior towards women, so that they don't, they're not patronizing and they're not behaving and even unconsciously sexist ways. And, and younger women in the community are learning that there are young men who want to change and giving them the chance to change. And I think there's

a feeling more that you know, rather than being gay or lesbian, or black and white wall, Queer, and we're all together, and there's a strong feeling of community. The advice I would give is that I think a lot of young gay people also tend to overlook the accomplishments of the generations before us. And that they, they look at the past 20 years and they see older people as not having not having accomplished very much and I think they really have to look at everything that's happened. And look at everything they've done. And learn learn from learn from what the community has accomplished and also the mistakes that the community has made. But to learn, you know, you can't just like start over and we will not just we're not we're not coming from nowhere. We have a whole past behind us that we have to respect I mean, better and better all the time. I think in Houston I see a lot of changes that people are coming out more people are getting more involved in the community that that they're there people are saying you know that they can do their own thing and do what they want and not feel ashamed of themselves?



27:43

You human nature Whoever heard of 100