

SARAH I have really kind of upset some of them in the past by pointing out to them that, look, yes, all of this activism is important. And we've talked about it on this show for years about the importance of activism, but there is such a thing as the importance of having a balanced life as well. You can't substitute activism for your life. It's not a substitute for finding a partner. It isn't a substitute for other activities.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

SARAH Whether it's hobbies or whatever the case may be, you've got to have someplace to get away from it or else it eats you alive. I'll tell you that from firsthand knowledge.

JIMMY CARPER: Because you can burn out, and then what do you have?

SARAH Yeah, and--

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: If your whole life is just activism.

SARAH Some of the people-- some people in the community have been real upset with me, and I got an email from **DEPALMA:** somebody who said, well, what are you doing, withdrawing from the community? No, it's a little late for me to be withdrawing from the community. I have cut back on a lot of things because I've looked at my life and said I'm getting close to 50. There are some other things that I would like to do with my life. I've already proved I can do political stuff. I'm willing to have somebody else carry water on this. There are some other things I'd like to do. But it's too-- walk away from the community? Not me. Not in this lifetime. I don't think that's too likely to happen.

BOBBY: I can't see that happening.

SARAH But I've really begun to look harder at the importance of having a balance to this.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Sarah, I can't--

THORNE:

SARAH And I wonder whether Monica had that.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: I was just thinking that, again, you mention things like suicides and stuff like that. I mean, I tried twice as a teenager. I mean-- and most people who look at me nowadays go, that's a pretty tough kid and all that nonsense. And I'm like, yeah, I have those times when I go home and cry. And I-- and this is the-- and Monica, having known Monica, she-- at the station, I've seen her get in the face of people.

JIMMY CARPER: I have seen her be as tough as they come, get in the face of people who have ticked her off, and be able to stand up against anything. But like we were saying, even the toughest people have those moments when everything just seems like it's going to fall apart.

SARAH Well, and I don't know. The audience probably may not know much about the transition process. Monica is a transsexual, and I am a transsexual. The process is called transition because you're trying to relearn everything that you need to know about being able to live your new life. In both of our cases, we're going from male to female, and I am at the stage now where I'm getting close to getting-- surgery is getting closer for me.

Monica, I know when you lose a job, it's not-- for a transsexual, when they lose a job, it's not just that the fact that they're out of work. It's the fact that they're watching their transition slip away. They're watching-- there's the sense that they're trapped, and it's, as one guest said, told us once, being a transsexual is like being trapped in a clown suit from which there is no escape. And it is a great-- one of the best explanations.

And there's the sense that when you lose your job if you are a transsexual, that you are forever trapped in this clown suit. And so it's not just a simple matter of saying, well, OK you can always go find another job. This is an expensive process. It's not covered by insurance when you're talking substantial amounts of money. And so to lose a job is to also lose your transition. And for many transsexuals, that also means they have lost hope.

BOBBY: Hope.

SARAH Once you lose that, it's a very short step to slitting your wrist.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

SARAH And as we've seen that over the years and it plays out in other ways. Many people in the community will

DEPALMA: remember Dee McKellar. Dee McKellar was probably one of the closest friends I ever had, but Dee had been without-- had been out of work for a long time. She knew she had a heart condition.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH But my life partner Laurie spent many times, spent many hours, talking to Dee about what it took to apply for a

DEPALMA: gold card and what it meant for-- but that was too much for Dee's pride.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH It was too much for her pride to take. And one night Dee had a heart attack, a massive heart attack, and just

DEPALMA: dropped dead in the floor.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

SARAH We know of another person that at one time was the president of TATS who literally just dropped dead, a young woman, but had not been going for medical care because she didn't want to take the time off to lose her job.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH And so I worry when I hear stories, when I see this happen to people like Monica because as strong as she is, that's a warning to everybody who isn't as strong as Monica that just what kind of a process this really is and how hard this is. And so, Monica, if you don't want to-- if you-- I'll call you. Just leave me a number. Leave a number with Jimmy at the station, something. I mean, give us some-- let us know that you're OK.

BOBBY: To go so far in the process of becoming who you-- you know to the core of your being this is who you are. And in order to be that, for some it requires medical stuff, surgeries, and transition.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH Well, it's easy--

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: The transition and all of that.

SARAH To lose hope.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: And to suddenly have that--

JACKIE Ripped away from you.

THORNE:

BOBBY: Taken away from you and say, OK, you can't do this because you can't afford to do this. And I mean, you're suddenly stuck in a limbo of--

SARAH I approach transition probably differently than most other people because I approached it with the idea that this was not a race, and that I was not in a big hurry. And so I have waited 10 years to make the decision to whether I wanted to get the surgery or whether I didn't. Because I had seen people who went into the surgery and regretted it. I saw people who had bad surgeries and who had been botched. I knew a young woman who died on the operating table.

And so you give it some serious thought about whether you-- and I'm talking about myself now, about whether I wanted to commit myself to that regimen. Did I-- was I willing to take that risk with my life to do that? But that's an unusual situation for it to take so long. For most transsexuals, surgery is the reason they're transsexuals. And they want it yesterday. And so to have the finances removed and to have-- to be stuck in the middle of nowhere, for many people is much too much to take.

BOBBY: Right.

SARAH Even Phyllis Frye, is strong as she is, Phyllis attempted suicide twice. She's got the scars on her wrist to show for

DEPALMA: it.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH So I mean, I don't care how strong you are. Depression is so powerful.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Yes, it is.

SARAH And the scary thing is that it all sounds logical in your head at the time. No, I'm not going to call for help because

DEPALMA: no one really cares anyway. That's the tape that's getting the play, that gets played. No, I'm not going to let anybody I know because what the hell? What do they care?

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH It makes sense.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. I'm going to go eat worms syndrome.

THORNE:

SARAH Except in this case, you're talking about I took a bottle of sleeping pills and a bottle of brandy.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

SARAH I mean, I was going to make damn sure. And the weird logic about it is when I woke up, my first thought was

DEPALMA: damn. I can't even kill myself. I mean, I'm very serious about that.

BOBBY: I know that feeling.

SARAH I mean your mind is really warped, and so I worry about her. I worry about others who are not as strong as she.

DEPALMA: And sometimes I get on this show and I talk about all of this political stuff and political activism, and maybe we don't spend the amount of time talking about the human issues that we should.

BOBBY: Perhaps.

SARAH But I think in this case, it's important. And it also leads me into something else and that is just a little talk about

DEPALMA: the meaning of community. There are a lot of people in this-- and we talk about the word community as if it really exists.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH If you take a look at the world of transgenders in the Houston and Galveston area, what we've really got is a

DEPALMA: network of like-minded individuals. Some of them become close friends, but mostly their contacts center around transsexual issues. And then for many of them, the day after surgery is the day they disappear from the community, and we never hear from them again. So that's one problem, and it's a problem in that the elders, I mean, really the elders, the people who have been through it, the people who could be there giving the advice for the people behind us go away.

BOBBY: Right.

SARAH So that's a problem. You've got some people like Kristin and Melanie Black and a few others in the community,

DEPALMA: Vanessa, who work their tails off. And they work their tails off because the vast majority of the people don't participate. But that doesn't mean that they're not willing to help, and I think that's an important thing to point out. Because you are not political does not imply that you don't care.

BOBBY: Right. I think that gets-- I think there's a lot of people out there. I mean, it corresponds to a lot of things. They're always saying on shows like this and on TV, on public TV, and stuff like that, that it's a small group of people who actually contribute. But there's an awful lot of people out there who care about it.

SARAH Well, look at the gay community. I mean, when you have political rallies, a handful of people show up.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Right.

SARAH But that doesn't mean the people that didn't attend didn't care.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Care.

SARAH They're just--

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Exactly.

JACKIE Well, it's the old thing about 20% of the people--

THORNE:

SARAH Do 80% of the work.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Do 80% of the work. Exactly. And yeah-- and of course, again, a lot of people rationalize and particularly in the

THORNE: transvestite community the cross-dressers and so forth. Because with Peter Euler and so forth like that, they are scared [? they won, ?] that if they step out into the public spotlight that they will lose their job, their family.

SARAH Well, it's happened.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

SARAH It's a realistic fear.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE And it is a realistic thing.

THORNE:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH It's not as common as it used to be, but it happens.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah, there are some of us who are extremely fortunate that we can step out and lead, but by the same token,

THORNE: as leaders we need the support of the followers.

SARAH Well, I've had a lot of people over the years, Jackie, who asked me why I bother with all this political stuff. And my response has always been I do it because I can. I know how, and so I've done it. But as I'm getting closer now to 50, to age 50, the realization to me is that that's not old, but it's not young anymore either. That retirement is not that far away, and I need to start thinking about how I want to structure my life now for the next 10 to 15 years.

And part of that has been a realization that I have spent-- I-- give away some age here, I lied about my age originally so I could be a Freedom Rider. So I mean, my activism goes back to the mid to late '60s. And here we are now in the early part of the new Millennium, and I'll be-- and I admit, I'm ready to move on to some other stuff now. And there's a good solid core of people behind me who know how to do stuff, so I don't need to be doing it out there all the time anymore anyway. But it's-- but there's a sense for me that it's time to restructure things, and so I'll back out of some things. I could never just completely walk away because I care too much.

JACKIE Well, your life, like mine, is taking a new direction. I've already informed a number of the organizations and so forth that I belong to that, in fact, that's one of the reasons why the last month or so, I've kind of been out of touch because I've been down in Galveston working on rehabbing the house that I own down there and with the ultimate goal of spending probably four days a week down there during tax season and maybe anywhere from five to six days a week outside tax season essentially moving to the Galveston area.

JIMMY CARPER: Goodness, you and Deb Murphy both.

JACKIE Well, but say come September, I start drawing Social Security. And you're talking about--

THORNE:

SARAH You're kidding me. I never would have guessed that. Not in a million years.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Talking about retirement.

THORNE:

SARAH I would never have guessed that in a million years, Jackie.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah, but in the same thing, it's a matter that you restructure the direction that your life is going in. And as far-- you're talking about you're one of the Freedom Riders when you probably shouldn't have been on the bus at all.

SARAH I know. I lied like hell about my age.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah, well, I mean, I was a card-carrying, dues-paying member of the NAACP in Maryland in 1963 before all of the Civil Rights garbage was going on.

SARAH Yeah, I told them I was 17 going on 18 when, in fact, I was 14 going on 15.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE I had-- well, I had--

THORNE:

SARAH But I had my own radio show at the time, and nobody questioned it.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: There you go.

JACKIE And in my case, I had-- I was in the military. I had a Black commanding officer, and I had another-- there was another Black officer in our unit who was the commandant of the language school and so forth who was a very, very good friend of mine. And having been born and raised in Central America, I mean, where basically our idea was that I didn't give a damn whether they were Black or white or pink with purple polka dots. These were my friends.

SARAH Yeah. Hang on a second.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah, let's take a little break here, and I want to play a little music, and we'll come back and regroup. You're listening to After Hours, queer radio with attitude on KPFT Houston and KEOS College Station. Here's a little something that I want to stick in your ear.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JOAN DEVLIN: Hi, this is Joan Devlin. You're listening to KPFT's Lesbian and Gay Voices.

SPEAKER 1: We want to create the political climate for--

SPEAKER 2: Same sex marriages.

SPEAKER 3: Let's just talk about some of this stuff.

JOAN DEVLIN: The neutron lesbian strikes again.

SPEAKER 4: We're going to be doing some radical radio right now.

SPEAKER 5: Legal changes decriminalizing gay sex.

SPEAKER 6: We celebrate the diversity.

JACK VALINSKI: Welcome to another edition of Lesbian and Gay Voices. This is Jack Valinski.

SPEAKER 7: It wasn't until I had lived with a woman for a year that it even occurred to me to ask do you think we're lesbians?

SPEAKER 8: Civil rights for gays, the ending of don't ask, don't tell.

SPEAKER 9: Listen to Lesbian and Gay Voices.

SPEAKER 10: My prediction, Al Gore, 276 electoral votes. George W. Bush. 262.

SPEAKER 11: That's Lesbian and Gay Voices Mondays at 8:00 PM.

SPEAKER 12: I hear gay people.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, a wonderful rendition of a song. *Angels, Punks, and Raging Queens*. That was by Dion McBride.

SARAH That is really nice stuff.

DEPALMA:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JIMMY CARPER: Beautiful song, yes. I wish JD was here to tell us the origin of that, but I believe it came from a musical.

SARAH That's-- it was nice music. I really liked that.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: And before that, a very nice version of *You Really Got a Hold on Me*, of *Really Got a Hold on Me* by Gaye Adegbalola who is--

SARAH Great last name.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Who is one-third of the Uppity Blues Women, and Gaye came out recently and has a couple of albums out.

SARAH Oh, the Uppity Blues Women have got several out.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, they do.

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: But I mean, she has her own solo album, a couple of them. So good music there. You're listening to After Hours, queer radio with attitude. I'm Jimmy Carper, and we've got transgender activists here, Sarah DePalma, Jackie Thorne, and Bobby the official, unofficial co-host.

BOBBY: Show co-host.

SARAH I'd like to change--

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: The official, unofficial co-host.

SARAH I'd like to change the topic a little bit.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: OK. It's--

SARAH A couple of things in the newspaper.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, OK.

SARAH Couple stuff in the newspaper. I know we just got through talking about political activism and all that kind of

DEPALMA: stuff. Is-- I'm trying to think how to put this.

BOBBY: Can I say one thing just before you get started?

SARAH Yeah, go for it.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: I just want to say you were talking before the break about how long you've been doing this and how it was time for you to do some other stuff that needed to get done in your life. And it's like-- and I think that's amazing that you've spent so much of your life doing this and being able to do this and going there. And it's like sometimes these things-- some of these things sort of happen to us.

SARAH Well, that's what I was talking about. I never intended to be a lifelong activist. It just kind of happened.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: I mean--

SARAH I was with Abby Hoffman and 50,000 other people when we tried to levitate the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

DEPALMA: Which was one of the stranger things I think I've ever done, but for the audience who is too young to know what that story is about, Abby Hoffman who is an activist extraordinaire, showman, part PT Barnum, part political, activist part royal trouble-making pain in the ass, by his own description, decided that if we could levitate the Pentagon and make it go away that you couldn't conduct the war in Vietnam, and all the boys would have to come home.

BOBBY: There you go.

SARAH So he's put out this call in the alternative press papers and said come to Washington. We're going to try and

DEPALMA: levitate the Pentagon. Sounded like a kick butt idea to me, and I thought, let's go. That's fine. So when we got there, there were 50,000 of us, and we actually had enough people to hold hands and ring the Pentagon twice which made the people in the Pentagon extremely nervous. Well--

JACKIE Even without guns.

THORNE:

SARAH Yeah, oh, yeah. And Abby being what Abby was had brought a Shawnee Indian medicine man with him. Well,

DEPALMA: they had a little campfire there, and this Shawnee, this Indian medicine man, was throwing sparks and things like little sparklers. Next thing we know, National Guardsmen in full riot gear, I mean, full riot gear, come over the top of the Hill and start tear gassing and clubbing everybody in sight. And afterwards, we read the reason they did this is they said because we were using incendiary devices. Now, the Pentagon, who manages to send all these people to Vietnam, they're really worried about sparklers from a Shawnee Indian medicine man?

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH Please.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Please.

SARAH And so when you have enough of those things happen to you, for the longest time I had a t-shirt. I got this right

DEPALMA: after the Kent State incident. I had a t-shirt with a target on the back that said student.

[LAUGHTER]

BOBBY: That just--

SARAH And if you've gone through the Watergate era like I did and you learn real fast that your government is capable of lying through its teeth with a smile and both fingers crossed, the activism just sort of fell into place. I never intended for it to be a lifelong thing. It just kind of happened. And I've always believed that if you couldn't-- if you didn't fight for your rights, you weren't guaranteed them.

But I feel pretty confident now that there is a generation behind me in the transgender community that's capable of doing all this stuff. And that it's-- how can I-- don't want this to sound arrogant because I don't mean it that way, but it's kind of safe for me to back out now, that I don't have to be the teacher and the mentor and the do all anymore. And I feel good about that.

And I realize there are some people in the community that don't understand it. And I've even had some people accuse me of abandoning the community to which I say, get a life.

JACKIE Sarah, let me--

THORNE:

BOBBY: At some point you've got to do your thing. I mean, I'm just coming to a point in my life where an issue that that's been a part of my life is now becoming an issue where I'm becoming somewhat of an activist on. Where people are saying, OK talk about this because you've been through this thing. And it's just sometimes these things happen to you. And if you've been at it a long time, you should-- even though you want to be a part of things and all of that, sometimes you've got to do something else for a while.

SARAH Brian Bradley, which is a name that will be familiar to a lot of our audience and maybe there'll be a lot of people
DEPALMA: who won't know who Brian Bradley was.

JIMMY CARPER: He was once a co-host on this show.

SARAH Well, Brian Bradley was an activist extraordinaire. I mean this man was totally, absolutely fearless. And Brian Bradley, we were preparing for the Republican National Convention when it was here, and he was part of ACT UP and Queer Nation, and we were getting ready to have our little incident with them. And I asked Brian Bradley once, I said, don't you get tired of it as an activist? He said, sure I get tired of it. He said, but what else would I do with my time? Which is--

JACKIE Sarah, let me take a shot at this. I think it applies at least as far as I-- to me, and I think in some respects it probably applies to you as well in that-- and of course in my situation, my activism has been more towards the fundraising and so forth.

SARAH You've done a lot of quiet activism, but you've touched a lot of lives, Jackie.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE But--

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: Jackie, you were out there long ago.

SARAH Long-- yeah.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: When giving aid to transgenders when no-- there wasn't anybody else to do it.

SARAH When I looked in Twit, yours was the only phone number in the book to go to for help.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

SARAH And it's the honest to God truth. So don't be so modest.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE But in my case, I mean, it was a situation. I wasn't doing it for any personal glorification or anything like that. It's

THORNE: just a situation that this is something that I felt needed to be done, and in a lot of cases, things that I have done I'm probably the only one that knows about them. And that's-- to me, that's really all I need. I mean, I know I've done it, and that's satisfying to me.

SARAH That's kind of the way I feel about it. I've done a lot of stuff behind the scenes that most people don't know about.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Nobody knows about, exactly.

THORNE:

SARAH And probably don't need to know about.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Exactly.

THORNE:

SARAH It was-- I like to think of it as being quietly effective. But there does come a point when you just know that it's

DEPALMA: time. It's time to walk-- step back. And yet I also know that deep in my heart I could never really walk away, and I'll give you an example of that.

JACKIE Well, no.

THORNE:

SARAH ENDA is about to come up in Congress again.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Again.

SARAH And to no one's surprise, transgenders are not in it.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah, exactly.

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: I will never be behind that.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH The hate crimes bill looks like it's going to come up in the Senate, and to no real surprise, transgenders are not in it.

JIMMY CARPER: Right.

SARAH And both of those are issues that were led by my old nemesis, the Human Rights Campaign. And I-- it's funny.

DEPALMA: Now, I say I'm going to step away from the community, but I guarantee you the next time the HRC shows up, this redhead is going to be out there going after their butts again. And I'm going to stay after him because I can't let it go. It's a matter of principle.

JACKIE Well, the thing is the thing that I cannot-- it just totally blows me away is these people do not seem to realize that if you don't include transgenders, the law is absolutely useless. Because the employer is going to fire somebody, and say, oh, I didn't fire him because he was gay or lesbian or she was lesbian. I fired him because he--

SARAH Because they're transgender.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Was feminine or she was butch.

THORNE:

SARAH Yep. Well, I've had people say to me it sounds like I'm obsessing about the Human Rights Campaign, and why don't I just let it go? I can't do that because it's a matter of conscience, and it's a matter of principle.

JACKIE A matter of principle.

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: Because that organization--

SARAH I'm right, frankly.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Because they're talking out of both sides of their mouths.

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: I mean, on one hand, they send out all these press releases about how wonderful things they have done for the transgender community.

JACKIE They haven't done diddly squat.

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: And they talk about inclusion, and then they don't do it.

SARAH I'll say this for the Gay Task Force. They have not only will talk the talk, but they have walked the walk.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: You bet.

SARAH Whereas, the HRC has talked the talk and done squat. I mean, I'm sorry. And so as far as being able to just walk away from the community, I don't think I could ever do that.

JACKIE No.

THORNE:

SARAH Not just completely, but I certainly have backed off a lot of it.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

SARAH It's like you and I, Jackie, were just talking that I've already decided I'm not going to do another lobby day. I've done three of them, and for anybody that wants to know how to do a transgender lobby day, I've got all the material. I've got all the contacts. I can tell-- I can walk them through the process step by step, tell them what to do, how to do it, when to do it, what order or what a sequence. But I'm not going to go and do it myself anymore. It's time for someone else to do it.

JACKIE You and I will be two of the peons that will be there, but we will not be the leader.

THORNE:

SARAH I'm not going to be the leader this time.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Exactly.

THORNE:

SARAH That's it.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE There's somebody else--

THORNE:

SARAH I'll walk them through it.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE That's going to have to suck it up and--

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah, and there will.

JACKIE Take responsibility.

THORNE:

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Someone will.

SARAH I'm hoping. I'm keeping the TGAIN list going right now for exactly that reason is that I'm hoping somebody will take it on themselves and say, all right. I'll step up. And if-- and I'll hold their hand for them, whatever it takes. But enough is enough for me. I've done it three times, and each time, it's getting to the point where it's too big for one person to do anyway. So they really need to have a committee of people or at least two or three people who do it, and I can walk them through the whole process. And maybe it's a function of age, Jackie. Maybe it's just a realization that we're not 18. I don't know.

[LAUGHTER]

JIMMY CARPER: Trust me, after two days in the sun working on that house ripping up floors, I know I'm not 18 anymore.

[LAUGHTER]

BOBBY: I only get to see you on rare occasions outside of this building.

SARAH That's true, yeah.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: But I guarantee you with the time that you spend in here, at whatever, at your age, ma'am, you still have more energy than some of my friends who are a lot closer to half my age.

SARAH Well, thank you. I've told the story on the-- once on the air but since this is a different audience, I'm going to tell

DEPALMA: the story again.

JIMMY CARPER: Sure.

SARAH About how I-- why I'm an activist. I was in third grade and we had just gotten through studying about the First

DEPALMA: Amendment and free speech. Well, this was also right during the height of the McCarthy era. And this was a small town that believed that Joe McCarthy was a hero. We actually had a woman who came in with a magic-- black magic marker twice a week and would go through the books in the library and black out so-called subversive words. And-- third grade, but I stopped and said we just studied about the First Amendment, and I know you can't do that for which I was sent to the principal and kicked out of school for several days.

BOBBY: Whoa.

SARAH And so the lesson I learned real fast was adults lie, number one. And number two, your rights don't mean squat if

DEPALMA: you don't stand up for them. This was also about the same time as the Cuban Missile Crisis, and so the third thing I learned from that was you ain't got forever to do it. That if you're good-- that nothing was ever guaranteed. So if you were going to make things happen, you'd better get on your horse and do it.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JACKIE I was in an interesting situation in the Cuban Missile Crisis. At the time, I was at Fort Holabird, Maryland, which is-
THORNE: - at that time was the Intelligence School for the US Army. And I recall, I was in the Intel officers course there, and I recall, we had a class that was supposed to run all day, eight hours, 4:00 in the morning, 4:00 in the afternoon with this one instructor on this particular subject. And we went through the four hours in the morning, and then we broke for lunch for an hour, and we came back at 1:00 in the afternoon. And they said that you all can take off because the remainder of the class is canceled. We found out that the instructor was on his way to Florida, Eglin Air Force Base, which was the center--

SARAH That's Ground Zero.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Yeah.

THORNE:

SARAH Ground Zero.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE One of those things, people just disappeared.

THORNE:

SARAH Yeah, but I mean, I learned important lessons from that early on. And if-- and anybody who went through the

DEPALMA: Vietnam War Era like I did and saw that our government declared more Vietnamese dead than there were people in Vietnam, little things like that. And I had friends--

JIMMY CARPER: Little details.

SARAH I had a friend who came back home with his face missing, and I mean, I don't know that you can see events like

DEPALMA: that and not have it affect your conscience. I mean, just as a human being, I don't know how you can sit still for it. I told Jimmy the story once about going and being in Tupelo, Mississippi. This is in 1967, and they were so proud because they had just opened up a brand new bus station there.

And this bus station was just gorgeous, and they were real proud of it because they had a drinking fountain with what they call refrigerated water. You know it was cool. But for the Blacks, for Black American citizens, the bus stop was an outhouse in the back with a dipper-- with a well and a dipper attached. And I was just flat out shocked at this. And when we talked to some of the Black people there, they were like, yeah, well, so what can you do about it? And I couldn't understand it. What do you mean there's nothing you can do about it?

BOBBY: Open your mouth and raise cane.

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Well, and you know--

THORNE:

SARAH But do it productively.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH I mean, there were a lot of groups in the 60s that tried to raise cane, but they did it by blowing up buildings, and

DEPALMA: that was obviously not the answer.

BOBBY: This is the thing. I-- often when I end up on the air on this show, I seem to refer back to the same speech, the speech that says where will you be when they come?

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: And it's like that's why people have to be-- have to speak out about these things and have to keep going and have to keep being activists about stuff. Because otherwise, those folks who want-- who consider themselves the folks in control will slip in, and they will come for us. And people don't think it could happen.

SARAH Actually, they're doing it through redistricting. We were just talking about that.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: They're doing--

SARAH They're coming for us in the redistricting process right now.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: They're not knocking on the door in military uniforms going-- dragging us off to camps or they're just-- they do it in these subtle ways.

BOBBY: Sure.

JIMMY CARPER: And all of a sudden all the rights we have go bye-bye.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JACKIE They nibble away at them.

THORNE:

BOBBY: Yes.

JACKIE They nibble away at them. It's like being nibbled to death by ducks, and ultimately, it's gone.

THORNE:

SARAH In Tampa, Florida, there is a section of Tampa called Ybor City. Y-B-O-R, Ybor City, which is the predominantly gay and lesbian area. They are experimenting with cameras there that would scan the faces of people and match them up to a supercomputer of a record of criminals.

BOBBY: I saw that.

JIMMY CARPER: What?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH And what they're doing is they're scanning this--

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Big brother has arrived.

THORNE:

SARAH They're scanning the faces of people from cameras that are mounted throughout this neighborhood, and then

DEPALMA: they run it through a supercomputer looking for a match, a facial match, now we're talking.

BOBBY: Yeah.

SARAH And if they find what they think is the facial match, somebody goes out. They're going to arrest you and find out

DEPALMA: whether you're the person. Now the thing that bothers me about that, aside from the obvious civil liberties problems, is that they're doing it in Ybor City which just so happens to be predominantly gay. And I wonder--

JACKIE Surprise, surprise.

THORNE:

SARAH If they did that in Kingwood, what would the response be there?

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Not even Kingwood, but-- because we are-- us queers are the last acceptable group to be discriminated against.

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE No, transgenders are.

THORNE:

JIMMY CARPER: Well, you're part of us.

SARAH Right now we're it, and eventually--

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: You're part of us.

SARAH Eventually they'll find somebody else.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: If they did that in the Black neighborhood, Jessie Jackson would be down there so fast screaming.

JACKIE In a heartbeat.

THORNE:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

BOBBY: Rhyming his way through a speech and raising--

SARAH And you notice they did it in Tampa which does not have a big gay community. They were not stupid enough to

DEPALMA: do it in San Francisco or in Houston or New York.

BOBBY: Right.

SARAH They're going to put it into a gay community that is largely closeted. Tampa has a good sized community, but it's

DEPALMA: very closeted and tends to be somewhat older. And it just infuriates me, and the activist part of me reads stuff like this, and I just go berserk. And then I have to remind myself I can't defend the whole world, but I can sure fire off a letter and say, hey, listen. This stinks.

BOBBY: Or how Orwellian are we going to get?

SARAH Oh, big brother is here.

DEPALMA:

BOBBY: Big brother is here. They're doing this to the-- people are doing this to their own people. I mean--

SARAH They were doing it during the Super Bowl, apparently. And so I don't know how many people attended the Super

DEPALMA: Bowl, but everybody who came into the Super Bowl, whether-- who obviously didn't know this was being scanned for potential matches with-- for other criminals.

BOBBY: Wow.

JACKIE Yeah, as a criminal. Exactly. Fugitives.

THORNE:

BOBBY: Which should have qualified for a heap and heck of a lot of scalpers at least, but--

SARAH I don't know if the ACLU is going to launch a lawsuit, but I hope to hell they do.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: I hope so. I mean, that's insane.

JACKIE You were talking about earlier about the bus station in Tupelo there.

THORNE:

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE And a very similar situation existed in, of course--

THORNE:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SARAH Right here in Houston.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE Well, no.

THORNE:

SARAH Right here in Houston.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE I'm saying-- talking about the Panama Canal where I was born and raised. Of course, basically, the Canal Zone

THORNE: was a Southern enclave, a bit of American Paradise in a tropical setting. And if-- they had their own police force, their own fire department, their own laws. They even had a federal court down there.

In fact, when my parents died their will being probated in the federal court set federal precedent. But the thing that just irked the hell out of me was the fact that because of the carryover from the construction of the canal in that the White people that work for the canal, the engineers and the blue collar-- I mean the white collar people as we call them today. But the White people that worked on the building of the canal were paid in gold, and the Black people, the strong back, weak mind types, the West Indians and the Chinese and the rest of them, were paid in silver. And so, therefore, you had gold and silver toilets, gold and silver water fountains, gold and silver schools, gold and silver towns. Actually--

SARAH Racism on an economic basis.

DEPALMA:

JACKIE And they were usually side by side. I mean for instance, in the middle of the Canal Zone area there, Gamboa was a White community. El Paraiso was a Black community. Gatton was a White community. Margarita was a Black community. I mean, it was like that all over the Canal Zone that they segregated everything.

SARAH Well, this is one thing. I know Gigi has been heavily involved in BiNet. And BiNet has done terrific work

DEPALMA: specifically for the bisexuals, but I'll say this. BiNet has been very supportive of us nationally. They refused to endorse ENDA because ENDA doesn't include us.

BOBBY: Right.

SARAH And I think there's a natural affiliation there between transgenders and bisexuals. And quite honestly, a lot of

DEPALMA: transgenders are bisexual.

JACKIE Well, that's the thing. I honestly believe that the percentages that are given out as roughly 10% of the population is homosexual or lesbian, about 15% is bisexual, and 75% heterosexual. Give me a break.

[LAUGHTER]

There are a whole lot more bisexuals out there than will ever admit it.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right. For whatever reason, that they don't want to admit it, or I guess-- even as a gay man, I have strong feelings for certain women that I know. I don't know that it ever would be sexual, but it certainly is love.

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: So--

JACKIE I honestly believe that everyone has the capability to love an individual whether that person is a male or a female

THORNE: regardless.