

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(SINGING) After hours. After hours.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Oh, yes. You've tuned in to *After Hours*, Queer Radio with Attitude right here on KPFT Houston 90.1 FM. The crew of *After Hours* is ready to bring you news, interviews, dialogue, and music geared for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people and their friends.

Here at *After Hours*, we may be diverse, but we have one thing in common-- we are all out of the closet and urge everyone to come out of their closets. That means standing up for yourself, taking responsibility for your own life, and being proud of who you are. Realistically, we know not everyone can do that because of age, job, or frame of mind. That's OK. We're here for you too. So sit back, relax, and enjoy this week's edition of *After Hours*.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hello, Houston in College Station and-- oops. And Huntsville. And welcome to *After Hours*, Queer Radio with Attitude. I'm Jimmy Carper. And this is the Saturday, January 13, 2001 edition. And I say that for a reason.

**SARAH** Hello, Houston! How the hell are you?

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes, and there she is, my co-host, the effervescent Sarah DePalma. And she has been "vescing" for quite a few months now.

**SARAH** Yeah.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** I mean, you know, I see more and more of Sarah DePalma on hand net.

**SARAH** I have been a busy, busy, busy little girl.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes.

**SARAH** A lot busier than I actually would like to be, but this is what happens when we start getting close to Transgender

**DEPALMA:** Lobby Day.

**JIMMY CARPER:** You bet.

**SARAH** Lori has gotten used to the idea that she sees the back of my head as I go by.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** [LAUGHS]

**SARAH** And she will get to see me again about March.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** I see.

**SARAH** It's just the way things are. I'm really lucky that she's real sweet about this.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** No kidding.

**SARAH** She tolerates it so. And I want to say a special hello to all of the people that are listening to us on the internet

**DEPALMA:** tonight.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Oh, and they-- yes, yes, yes.

**SARAH** And we have been-- I have been sending out emails all over the country, telling people, I realize that we are now

**DEPALMA:** once again the only transgender radio program on the air in the United States.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Oh, no.

**SARAH** Yup. The one in Boston folded.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

**SARAH** And so--

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** We wanted more.

**SARAH** We wanted more, not less.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**SARAH** And I said--

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** And then tell people how they can do that on the internet, two ways.

**SARAH** You're it.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Http-- blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, without the w cubed kpft.splitrock.net. Or even easier, [www.kpft.org](http://www.kpft.org).

**SARAH** Or if you can't remember all that stuff, just use your search engine to go to KPFT Radio and follow the directions

**DEPALMA:** on the opening page.

**JIMMY CARPER:** You betcha.

**SARAH** Real, real easy.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** We are on the air in real time.

**SARAH** Yeah, literally all over the country tonight. And I especially want to say hello to a good friend of ours, Katrina  
**DEPALMA:** Rose in Albert Lea Minnesota.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Hey, Katrina, girlfriend.

**SARAH** Just talked to her on the phone the other night, and she is having a good time even though she is freezing her  
**DEPALMA:** you know what off.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Well, she can freeze that off, just not the other parts.

**SARAH** That's it. First of all, I got to compliment you on that. It's the music coming in.  
**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Thank you.

**SARAH** That was fabulous.  
**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** I really worked on that opening piece because it was important to me.

**SARAH** I got to tell you, I was one of those people that was lucky enough to be a freedom writer.  
**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes.

**SARAH** And I remember the first time that I ever went to a Black church. It was a little bitty town in Georgia. And here I  
**DEPALMA:** am, you know, I'm a white bread kid from Connecticut. And one who lied about her age to get to go do this as it was.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Oh.

**SARAH** And so we went to-- I'll never forget-- this church is out in the middle of the woods somewhere. Jimmy, they sang  
**DEPALMA:** gospel and made my ears just come unglued. These people were praising the Lord and saying Hallelujah even though they hit a lynching the week earlier. And I'm not joking. I mean that sincerely. And I couldn't believe it.

**JIMMY CARPER:** That's the music that really gets you going. I mean, that's the music that fills you with the spirit.

**SARAH** I'm telling you, I was ready to dance around the trees. And I was just-- and so I've always had a weak spot in my  
**DEPALMA:** heart for gospel music. And that was very nicely done, actually.

**JIMMY CARPER:** And I've always had a weak spot in my heart for Dr. King.

**SARAH** I was lucky enough to actually get to hear him speak in person. And that's one of my treasured memories.  
**DEPALMA:** Unfortunately, I was not at Washington. But I got to hear him speak actually in Georgia. And in fact, I remember some new kid who had just come down from Chicago named Jesse Jackson who was trying to make a name for himself. And everybody looked he just said, who the hell is he?

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yeah, well he made a name for himself, all right.

**SARAH** Yes, he did. Anyway, that's great music.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** And of course, we also want to give homage to Bayard Rustin--

**SARAH** Yes.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** --who engineered the March on Washington.

**SARAH** Martin Luther King's right-hand man who just recently passed away.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes. Yes. He was one of us.

**SARAH** Yeah. We have a guest in the studio tonight. Her name is Tamara Jones. Tamara is from Resurrection

**DEPALMA:** Metropolitan Community Church. She's going to be talking about the Justice Ministry, which is one arm of MCC. And I told Tamara just outside that I had remembered hearing churches in the '60s talk about their justice ministry. Yes so I've heard of it before, but I think MCC has a little different twist on it. So we're going to be talking about that.

And then afterwards, we are going to be talking about Lobby Day, the Transgender Lobby Day which is coming up, and I have just got a ton of news about the way things are going, how things are shaping up. Let me just put one bug in your ear for people to think about.

**JIMMY CARPER:** OK.

**SARAH** Over the years you've heard me on this show talk about the lack of help that we got from gay communities and  
**DEPALMA:** the lack of inclusion and this and that. Ain't true no mo'. We have got cooperation coming out of our ears from the gay lesbian task force, from the gay and lesbian political caucus, from the lesbian, gay rights lobby. My dear, times have changed, and they have changed for the better. And I credit some guy named W for this.

**JIMMY CARPER:** [LAUGHS]

**SARAH** Some guy named W has put the bug in people's ear. And it suddenly has dawned on him that, duh! We're all in  
**DEPALMA:** deep crap together, and we're going to drown. And I have to say I've been sitting-- I have been sitting around in joints saying, where have you been the last six years when I've been warning you people this stuff was coming?

**JIMMY CARPER:** Really?

**SARAH** Oh. Jack, you probably saw the post. The GenderPAC, which is a political division of-- or had been-- recently  
**DEPALMA:** collapsed. And at the moment, we don't really have a national transgender--

**JACK VALINSKI:** Well, they didn't collapse so much as they got co-opted.

**JIMMY CARPER:** I didn't hear-- I heard that it happened. I didn't hear how or why, and maybe you just don't want to go into it.

**SARAH** Well, I'll go into it in very simple terms. They got bought off by the HRC.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** No.

**SARAH** Yeah. I mean, that's as simple as I can explain it. They were bought off by the HRC. And if you know-- how many  
**DEPALMA:** years have I said at this studio--

**JIMMY CARPER:** Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

**SARAH** Yeah.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Riki Anne Wilchins was bought off by the HRC?

**SARAH** Oh, he wasn't alone, honey.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah, it wasn't her. It was-- who was the-- who was the other one that was with her?

**SARAH** Oh, there was a whole there was a whole coterie of them.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Well, she's too radical for NGLTF.

**SARAH** She doesn't even want to talk transgender anymore. She wants to talk gender only, gender much bigger sense.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Whatever that is.

**SARAH** Yeah, doesn't want to talk about--

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yeah.

**SARAH** --doesn't want to talk about transgender. And how many years have you heard me sit at this mic and say, it's

**DEPALMA:** going to collapse because the leadership stinks.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yeah.

**SARAH** OK. I'm not going to sit here and say, I told you so. But I did! I did. I did. I did.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** I will.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Doesn't that feel good?

**SARAH** And I told you this five years ago when no one else would listen.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yeah, I know.

**SARAH** I am telling you how I really feel.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Now, now, now-- whatever Riki Anne was to the transgender community, you must give her props because she did get trans out there to the people.

**SARAH** She-- I'll say this for her-- she got the word transgender on the map.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes.

**SARAH** And she did a lot of very good and very positive things. And I don't mean to sit here and just rip her completely.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Just a little.

**SARAH** Well, it's probably more than a little bit.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** [LAUGHS]

**SARAH** But I have to-- but the sad part of it is that right at the moment, we don't really have a national transgender

**DEPALMA:** rights organization.

**JIMMY CARPER:** No, that's true.

**SARAH** Now, interestingly, one of the co-hosts of this show, Monica Roberts, is one of the chief honchos in the new

**DEPALMA:** organization that appears like it's going to step forward called NTAC, which is National Transgender Action Coalition.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Really?

**SARAH** Uh-huh. And Monica Roberts is the driving-- one of the driving forces behind that.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Wow.

**SARAH** She and Vanessa and my kids.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Vanessa Edwards Foster.

**SARAH** Vanessa Edwards Foster. Yeah. And, once again, Houston is showing them how this gets done.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Let me make-- let me throw in a plug here. GTC is the first organization to be a lifetime member of NTAC.

**SARAH** I knew you were going to get that. I was just waiting and see how long it was going to take.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** [LAUGHS]

**SARAH** OK, well, which is something to be proud of. So anyway, enough of that stuff. I'm sure the audience doesn't really  
**DEPALMA:** care about in the internal workings of transgender politics. I just had to get that in there to say that I said this five years ago, and I feel good saying, I told you so.

**JIMMY CARPER:** How about our judges?

**SARAH** Hmm?

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** How about Houston's judges? Aren't they obdurate or something?

**SARAH** Well, when I get to-- when we just got--

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah, we'll get to that in a minute.

**SARAH** We will get to talk about Lobby Days. I'm going to talk about some of the legislation that we propose and why.

**DEPALMA:** And that that's one piece of it. Jimmy, I see you working feverishly over there. You have a piece of music to go to, and then we can go to our guests.

**JIMMY CARPER:** You betcha.

**SARAH** OK.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** This is from my favorite Broadway or off-Broadway show, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

**SARAH** What? What is the name?

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. It's got wonderful music. It is about a man who has SRS that goes wrong.

**SARAH** Oh, I remember you telling me about this. OK.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes, great music though.

**SARAH** That would be an angry itch.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes, it would.

**SARAH** Yes, it would.

**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes, it would be. And this is called Wig in a Box from that show, and you're hearing it all on *After Hours*, *Queer Radio with Attitude* on KPFT Houston and KEOS College Station.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SARAH** Well, if that doesn't wake you up and make you want to jump around the bed, you're just not listening to the right  
**DEPALMA:** song. Former writer for Meat Load, I understand, Jim Steinman.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Yes.

**SARAH** And you can tell it's got that rocky horror, rock and roll, I'm going to knock your socks off kind of sound. So  
**DEPALMA:** anyway, a good piece of music, Jimmy.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Thank you.

**SARAH** OK, sitting in the studio with me is Tamara Jones. And first of all, Tamara, welcome to *After Hours*.  
**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** Well, thank you. I'm excited to be here.  
**JONES:**

**SARAH** Now, Jessica Edwards Foster and myself are going to be at--  
**DEPALMA:**

**JIMMY CARPER:** Vanessa.

**SARAH** What did I say Jessica? I've been a beat off all day. Yeah. We'll be at Metropolitan Community Church tomorrow,  
**DEPALMA:** and we'll be handing out some material and talking to people. And we're there as a result of your invitation from the Justice Ministry. So first of all, you might want to tell the audience if they don't already know, what is the Metropolitan Community Church? And then what is the Justice Ministry?

**TAMARA** OK. Well, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church is the Houston chapter of the United Fellowship of  
**JONES:** Metropolitan Community Churches. And it's where other straight churches are open and affirming, meaning that they will accept gays and lesbians.

**SARAH** They'll tolerate us.  
**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** They tolerate us in the congregation. We kind of run the pulpit over at MCC. So, you know, we're the queer  
**JONES:** church. Although we have a lot of straight members as well. It's one of the most diverse churches. We just moved into a beautiful new building--

**SARAH** It is a beautiful facility.  
**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** --corner of West 11th and TC Jester Boulevard, seats 1200 now. And within that, we have various ministries. And  
**JONES:** I facilitate the Political Awareness and Justice Ministry. And when I came to this, I'm a new member coming back to the church. I've only been going back to church in the last year and a half after 25 years of consciously avoiding any church. So it took a lot to get me back, but Resurrection did the impossible.

And when I took over the Justice Ministry, it was with an eye to doing a number of things, to educate our community about political issues because so often a lot of us don't know what's going on out there. We find out after the fact. So to give people the information up front, to give them opportunities to get involved, to get out there and start doing some things, and to help build what really is a Christian left, to kind of give an alternative to the Christian right.

You think of the church and all you think about is Jerry Falwell and Fred Phelps and these guys, and they're crazy. And there's a real strong Christian left that is about love and justice and complete acceptance. And that's what this ministry is about.

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** Well, you get people like, they're like Mel White in Soulforce. And I think people are starting to get some idea of who that is and what they're about. But you're right. And I was just saying-- telling somebody earlier that I'm one of those people that you'd have to put a gun to my head to drag me into a church.

**TAMARA  
JONES:** See, we'd never do that.

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** [LAUGHS] You know, I go on Christmas because my life partner says I have to. But that's about my one time per year. I grew up into-- as I always say, I grew up Pentecostal, and then I got smart.

**TAMARA  
JONES:** [LAUGHS] We share that, you know? I grew up Pentecostal too.

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** Did you really?

**TAMARA  
JONES:** Oh, speak in tongues, holy dancing, man.

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** Oh, yeah. You know, the audience probably has no idea speaking in tongues is, and I'm not 100% sure I could explain it. You can correct me if I'm wrong here. The theory is it's when the Holy Spirit washes over you, you're just sort of out of control, and you speak in tongues that nobody else really understands.

**TAMARA  
JONES:** It's actually the language that they speak in heaven.

**JIMMY CARPER:** Gloss away.

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** Oh, OK. Oh OK well I don't think I've ever done that.

**TAMARA  
JONES:** [LAUGHS]

**SARAH  
DEPALMA:** I don't think I've ever done that, but OK. Now, the idea--

**JACK VALINSKI:** This is a corruption of the biblical injunction of the Pentecost where the disciples spoke in foreign tongues. It was not an unknown language, but they were speaking in tongues that other people that were in the audience could understand. They were speaking Ethiopian and Swahili and Hindu and whatever other languages from people from foreign lands were. And of course, this has been corrupted into this speaking in tongues.

**JIMMY CARPER:** The Fundamentalist Church I grew up in before I got smart basically taught that this was one of the gifts of the Spirit but it ended around 1870.

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah, one of the seven gifts.

**SARAH** If there's anything I've learned over the years, it's not to argue religion. What people believe is what they believe.

**DEPALMA:** That's the Unitarian in me, I think. But the point I was going to make is, I remember in the South in the '60s, a lot of churches had what they called justice ministries. Is that the basic idea where MCC got it, or?

**TAMARA** Well, I don't know if that's where MCC got it, but that's a powerful tradition for us to tap into. And with the civil  
**JONES:** rights movement, as you know, African-Americans, Black people, it's one of the few places that you could go to that was really off the community. You were locked out of so many other places. And so the churches really became a hotbed of political activism, both among the members and from the pulpit, you know?

**SARAH** And they still are.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** Yeah. And really radical politics for the times, right? And that's what we need more of now.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** What a lot of people forget is that the Black churches in the South, if nothing else, they were a safe haven from  
**DEPALMA:** white people.

**TAMARA** Right.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** And it was-- it's a terrible comparison, but it was like the safety of a restroom where you're only going to have  
**DEPALMA:** your own type in there generally. In a Black church, it was one place you could go where you were truly away from white people and say what you really thought.

**TAMARA** Right.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** And that was quite an education to me that people had to go into the churches to hide.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** Really?

**JONES:**

**SARAH** But what they did while they were in there is what's important. And they didn't hide, they became activists.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** That's right. That's right.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** They decided that the answer was, don't sit there until they burn out the church. Go do something about it.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** Right. And like a lot of things, things change. I mean, the Black church wants the civil rights, opened up a few doors, and some people got in to institutions and had access to resources. The churches became more conservative, which was always there. But when everybody is shut out, everybody gets radical, right? Some people get let in. And then you start seeing these splits. And that block-- that conservatism in the churches in general, certainly in the Black churches, helps explain why we see the enormous impact of AIDS.

Because for so long they refused to do anything because it meant talking about gay, lesbians. Don't even talk about bisexual or transgender in the church. So I think now, the hotbed for any kind of radical politics is with us queer mongrels over at places like MCC where people who got kicked out of every other church and who's developed a real different radical understanding of the Bible that doesn't exclude anyone and that calls for us to fight on behalf of everyone.

**SARAH** I have a story about a friend who has since passed away now, so I can use his name. His name was Dana Love.

**DEPALMA:** And Dana was a good friend of mine. And he was a deacon in a Methodist church and is queer as I was. But he would never talk about it in his church.

And I asked him once, I said, Dana, I said, don't you feel funny teaching Sunday school and doing all these things in a church where people who knew what you were that hate you? And his response was, well you have to go to church somewhere. And I never forgot that because I thought, if you have to give up yourself in order to go to a church, there's something seriously wrong.

**TAMARA** That's right.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** And that's why I've always thought places like MCC and the Unitarian church and Bering Methodist, they are  
**DEPALMA:** fabulous places because there aren't nearly enough of them.

**TAMARA** Right. That's right.

**JONES:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Well, the other thing too is the Black churches in the early '60s were the birthplace of the civil rights movement, truly the birthplace of it. From these locations sprang the voter registration programs and all the rest of this material that was ultimately codified in '64 and '65 in the Civil Rights Acts and so forth that finally passed Congress.

**SARAH** Let's talk about some of the programs. What are some of the things that the Justice Ministry has been doing?

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** OK, well one of the things that we've spent the last few months developing is really routinizing politics in the church. We invite in two community groups a month to come in and to do outreach and information tables in the fellowship hall after the sermons. Everyone goes into the gym, and there's food and coffee, and people stand around.

And it's a wonderful opportunity for people to get information about organizations that are trying to do something in the community. And we've signed up hundreds of people in the church already as volunteers for groups like Progressive Voters in Action. We've got people that went out for the Dr. Laura protest. We were very happy we had almost 20 people protesting outside a TV station.

**SARAH** You can see how she turned out.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** Well, you know, exactly. Exactly. So we've really done that. And we've been really blessed to have hosted groups as diverse as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force with their election guide, the Green Party, Stonewall Democrats, the Lesbian and Gay Rights Immigration Task Force, tomorrow, the Transgender Advocacy and Information Network. So that's been a very important part of what we've done this last few months.

As we start the new year, we've got some new ideas and some challenges before us, obviously, with the introduction of the Defense of Marriage Act in Texas. We're called to do something there. And the Hate Crimes Bill, we're called to do something there as well. But something that I'm really excited about is an initiative that we can do that will connect the GLBT community with the straight communities, particularly straight communities of color in Houston.

And we sent one of our members up to Maine last year to a training by America Speaks Out. And what they do is they train members from our community to go out to straight groups and to be able to talk to them and answer questions and begin to build some of those bridges. So I'm hoping that's something we're going to develop again this year. And I have to tell you, the idea for that really came to me when I attended a PFLAG meeting here in Houston and heard Jackie Thorne giving a talk. Who else was there, Jackie? Was Vanessa there?

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**TAMARA JONES:** And what's the name of that woman from the intersex community?

**JONES:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah.

**SARAH** Jessica?

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** No.

**TAMARA** No.

**JONES:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Not Jessica.

**TAMARA** Not Jessica. Blunt.

**JONES:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah.

**SARAH** We have a lot of blondes in our community.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Desiree [? Walt ?].

**SARAH** Oh, Desiree.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** Desiree. And then talking afterwards and hearing that the trans community in Houston has this wonderful record of going out and talking at the colleges and universities. And I thought, hey, that's it. That's it in a nutshell. Why don't we build on that? So those are some of the things that we've got going on.

**SARAH** Houston has an unusual reputation. We are the hotbed activist group in the country, in the country. Jessi--  
**DEPALMA:** Vanessa was telling me that she had a talk with the head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force who wanted to know what it that we had in the water down here because we had so many--

**TAMARA** It's a potent chemical mix.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** Yeah. And we do. We have that reputation. We are more politically active than San Francisco. And we have more  
**DEPALMA:** out, open national leaders here than any other city in the country. And truly, we do-- as I go around the country and as Vanessa is going around the country-- we've had people stop us and say, how do you do it down there?

And it's a tradition. It started with Phyllis. It started with Phyllis Frye. And then I think I sort of carried it on. And now, there's another generation that's coming up behind me, and they are teaching the people behind them. And it really is, it's a tradition of saying, I will not just lay down and take this stuff because I don't like getting kicked. I mean, simply, I mean it's that simple.

**TAMARA JONES:** And it's exciting for me to be here too because I'm getting exposed and getting to know all of these leaders at a time when I think the trans movement is really maturing.

**SARAH** Yes, it is. All over the country. All over the nation. Yeah.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** And so it's a really exciting time to be here with people who are really helping to shape the future of transgender politics and opportunities in this country. So it's really great.

**SARAH** I got invited to speak at GCTC tonight. And I was telling them about how I've seen this community change in the  
**DEPALMA:** past, say, eight years. When we went to go do the first Lobby Day, we went with five people of which Phyllis Frye and I were two of them. We've gone from that to this Lobby Day. I think we will have attendance in excess of a hundred people. They didn't get that many to turn out for the National Lobby Day. And we're going to turn that out at the state level.

And a big part of that is that the community in Texas has matured faster than it has in other places. When I say-- when I first started my mailing list, they had four email names. And now we're up to-- I'm over 200 at this stage. And a lot of those are people who are doing newsletters and have their own emailing list. So the number of people we actually reach is probably two or three times what we send out originally.

And the amazing thing about that is when we first went to the Lobby Day, people called us afterwards and say, what happened? Did any bad things happen? We had to prove to them that nothing bad would occur. Now I've got people knocking my door down saying, how do I participate? That's great, but it shows you how much we have changed. Eight years ago, we were begging the gay community to let us in the door. Now they're begging us to teach them how to go lobby.

**TAMARA** That's right.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** And I mean, we've done a complete 180 here in the eight years, in the five years, six years we've been doing the show. And it's the best thing in the world. And it's terrible to say, but I think it takes the sense of a threat in your backyard to make you get off your can.

**JIMMY CARPER:** What are your accomplishments?

**SARAH** You mean with TGAIN?

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** I made the point, I made the point at the GCTC meeting tonight when Sarah was talking. I said that the gender community owes a great deal to the gay lesbian movement because for a number of years, we were coat-tailed on their movement.

But it's gotten to the point now where the gender community has finally gotten enough people who are willing to come out of the closets and be visible and take a leadership role. And they don't have to take a back seat and say, well, you know, I don't have to apologize for being gay or lesbian or so forth like that. What I am, as far as my sexual orientation, is none of your darn business.

**SARAH** Well, Jackie, there's a couple of things here. For one thing, Houston has always been unique in that we have not--  
**DEPALMA:** well I shouldn't say always, but in the last 10 years anyway-- it has never mattered to those of us who are considered leaders whether the person was a cross-dresser, or a transsexual, or an undecided. None of us have ever given a tinker's damn if you feel that you belong in our community. You're welcome. And you don't see--

**JACK VALINSKI:** And sexual orientation didn't make any difference either.

**SARAH** Sexual orientation is there, and you don't find that in a lot of other places around the country.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Right.

**SARAH** The other thing is, we have had people here commit suicide due to long-term unemployment. All of us know somebody who has basically had a breakdown or has committed suicide or has simply walked away. And I think we have an anger, a fire in our belly here, that a lot of places, other places in the country don't have.

We feel an anger, and anger can be good. In this case, it's a motivator that you don't find if you talk to the people in San Francisco and use that as a good example. They've got life so easy out there right now. They can't get 20 people to attend the meeting for politics. But that's because the wolf isn't at their door. We've had W here now for the last what?

**JACK VALINSKI:** Six years.

**SARAH** Six years. And basically, we had conservative democrats even before that. And I think its take-- there's a  
**DEPALMA:** motivation here that we don't see in other places. I was telling you I went out, and I did a training session in New Mexico. And in New Mexico, one of the things-- there are great people-- but one of the things that's lacking out there is they don't have the passion that I feel here.

And I know-- listen. You were asking, what are some of the accomplishments of TGAIN? One of them is we've harnessed that anger into a movement that nobody else has done. We are right now the largest transgender rights organization-- state organization in the country, both in terms of actual size and in turnout.

And that, in large part, I think, again, is because we've been able to take that anger and harness it. And I think if anything else the TGAIN has proved, we have proven that we can count. We can go to a political meeting. We can make a statement. And we can be heard. And that's exactly what African-Americans had to do as well.

**JIMMY CARPER:** How about a legislation or court rulings?

**SARAH** Well, court rulings is a different thing. That's later.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Talk about the hearing where the woman came and the daughter spoke afterwards. Oh, we've got a-- OK, we've got some whispering going on over there. But anyhow, basically, what the situation was is that before the Texas legislature, there was a committee hearing on one of the bills.

And one of the women who was testifying who was, I believe, lesbian was speaking about the subject. And she commented, she said, there is someone here who is more knowledgeable and can speak more effectively to this point than I can. And she introduced her daughter.

**SARAH** Mm-hmm. Oh, you're telling them about Diane Ciccotella.

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, right.

**SARAH** Diane, well, Diane Ciccotella is an activist extraordinaire. I mean, I sit back in awe of Diane. There are people  
**DEPALMA:** that are effective, and there are people that are just unbelievable. And Diane is in that second category. I mean, I think I'm reasonably effective at what I do, but I will take a backseat to Diane any time. She wants to lead, I'll follow her. I mean, she's that good, so. You

Were asking about the accomplishments and stuff of TGAIN. I was going to save that for later. We have not yet been able to actually get a bill passed. But, you know, I think that honestly, that's almost beside the point.

**JACK VALINSKI:** See, education.

**SARAH** Well, when we first started, the first time that we went, we had legislators tell us transsexuals don't actually exist.  
**DEPALMA:** We had one-- I'm not joking. I'm not kidding at all. We had one legislator who told us that transsexuals are, you know, they just pure in television shows. And over that period of time, we've been able to change that. They know better than that now. And if there's nothing else, one of the biggest changes is now when I call legislators, I can actually get through to them. I can talk to them.

In some cases, we were not able to get our bill passed. But in cooperation with other groups, we were able to kill a bill that could have done us great harm. In some cases, that may be the best success you can get. And I think that's something we have been good at. The other part of it is, we have stuck with it. When other gay groups have told us, go away. We don't want to talk to you. You're a bunch of crybabies. You're neophytes. We've ignored them. We've stuck to it.

And now, we are an effective political alliance that never existed and never would have if we had just said, hey, let's-- well, maybe they're right. And, gee-wiz, the gay people hate us, and we're going to quit. Now, the shoe is on the other foot. Not only are we full allies, but we're working strategy together. It's not just that they're talking about our inclusion. We are fully included. And I'd say that's pretty good progress. That's a long, long way from where we begin.

**JACK VALINSKI:** Well, they're looking to us for leadership.

**SARAH** Which is interesting, isn't it?

**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Which they never did before.

**JIMMY CARPER:** That says a lot.

**SARAH** Well, and it's really interesting because Jackie will tell you when Phyllis started on, she was really confrontational

**DEPALMA:** when Phyllis started it. But she was angry. She was really angry. When I came in, I tried to take a different approach with it. But I'll tell you very honestly, the two people that we've really got to thank for this are Vanessa and Jessica.

They are the people-- I'm going to be the first one to give them the credit. And on the local level, Vanessa and Jessica are responsible for the change that we've seen here in Houston. It hasn't been me. It hasn't been-- it hasn't been Phyllis. It's been those two. On the state level, yeah, OK, I'll take the credit for it. But having said that let me tell you, I'm not the-- I have not done this alone.

This is too big a job for one person to do. The kind of credit that really needs to go to are the people who have shown up, who have licked the envelope, who have gotten up the courage to go in to walk into a legislator's office. I've said this a hundred times before, but I really mean it. I am not the hero, they are. Those are the people who walked into the-- went into the office with their knees shaking and stuck out their hand and didn't run. They're the heroes. I mean, I think I've got the easy job. I do the organizing. They go walk in the doors.

**TAMARA JONES:** Sarah, I wanted to ask you of all the people that come out for Lobby Days, how many of them are non-trans identified?

**SARAH** Honestly, in the past, I would say virtually all of them have been transgender.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA JONES:** OK.

**JONES:**

**SARAH** But I think that's going to change this time. I have really made a much bigger effort to make it clear that we wanted significant others to come.

**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** Right.  
**JONES:**

**SARAH** That we wanted children who were over the age of 18 to come, that we wanted wives, husbands-- whatever the  
**DEPALMA:** term they want to use-- that we really wanted them to come. We're making an all-out effort to invite psychologists, ministers, and it has--

**JACK VALINSKI:** Doctors.

**SARAH** Doctors. Yeah, and it's made no difference. When we're not looking--  
**DEPALMA:**

**JACK VALINSKI:** Rabbis.

**SARAH** And that's a mistake I admit to having been guilty of. That the last time I was so intent on getting a turnout, that  
**DEPALMA:** I didn't do the job of inviting non-transgendered people. And it's an error I've tried to correct this time around.

**TAMARA** Well, I actually asked the question not to be critical but to say that that's actually an area where the GLB  
**JONES:** community can do more.

**SARAH** Absolutely.  
**DEPALMA:**

**TAMARA** Both, I mean, part of what we're called to do is not only to work on behalf of transgender rights in the abstract  
**JONES:** but to be there on the front lines. And it's one of the things that I want to see this Justice Ministry doing.

Even within a GLBT-dominant church, like Resurrection MCC, there is still a lot of education that we have to do with our own members about what it means to be a transgender, what it means to actually fight for transgender inclusion in ENDA, in hate crimes legislation, and to drive home to people that you can't have any sort of gay rights, any sorts of women's rights or feminist movement, and certainly a civil rights movement that's not connected to transgender liberation.

**JACK VALINSKI:** Well, we have so many things in common. There are so many things that affect all of us across the entire spectrum of our community. They're not solely transgender issues. They're not solely gay or lesbian issues.

**TAMARA** That's right.  
**JONES:**

**SARAH** Well, that's-- and it's interesting because when we lobby, we've always gone to lobby in behalf of gay and lesbian  
**DEPALMA:** causes, not just ours. In fact, last time, we actually had one legislator who told us we could probably do a lot better lobbying if we would step away from the gay and lesbian community because we were up there lobbying for the repeal of the sodomy law among--