

Interviewee: McClurgh, Henry

Interview Date: July 22, 2010

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Interviewee: Henry McClurgh

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Abstract:

This interview with Henry McClurgh, now Editor-in-Chief of the Montrose Star, focuses on the gay press, the gay community of Houston and New Orleans, and efforts towards activism and advocacy for gay rights. McClurgh, who has been involved in media for more than forty years, is uniquely positioned to speak on the subject. After several years of experience, he decided to start his own newspaper, The Contact, in 1973. This foray into the gay press, while short lived (he sold to a rival paper after 17 issues), would be only the first of several papers he founded, including the Montrose Voice and the Montrose Star. His efforts towards political activism in the gay community are reflected by the editorial stance of his newspapers- he describes the Montrose Star as an “advocacy newspaper”.

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JG: Okay, today is July the 22, 2010 and we are talking to Henry McClurgh and he is presently Editor-in-Chief of The Montrose Star and we will let him tell us how he got from the beginning to where he is now with the newspapers.

HM: Hello boys and girls!

JG: So now it's The Star, let's begin with your first paper.

HM: My first paper was Contact. I think it was '73 or '74. If I do have copies of the year I can't find them and it has the date on it. I started out when I was a newscaster at KULF. I was bored I was working midnight to 5:00 a.m. doing the five-minute newscast every hour. I would work about 10 minutes out of every hour, 5 minutes to prepare, 5 minutes to air it and then I was bored for 50 minutes and I started thinking about, "God I'm bored." I'm going to the gay bars and I met a lot of press people at the gay bars and I met a lot of bar owners and we had another gay paper in town called the Nuntius, N-U-N-T-I-U-S and it was a strange paper published by a guy who used two different names, Phil Frank and Floyd Goff and he was supposedly the grandson of Mayor Ma Ferguson, I mean Governor Ma Ferguson of Texas, supposedly but Frank told a lot of wild stories, Frank//Floyd. But anyway the paper was pretty bad and it really didn't have much advertising. So I went around and talked to the bar owners, especially Gene Howell who was a legendary bar owner back in those day. I said, "If I start a paper would you advertise in it?" He said, "Yes." So I started the paper with all my spare time. I was working for Southern Broadcasting Company, who owned KULF, and they were wonderful employee. I got three weeks of vacation after being there a year. So during my first three-week vacation after being there a year that's when I started Contact then and said, "I'm bored to death. I'm going to put out a paper." So I called up IBM and

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they had a typesetting machine that was going for about \$3,000, today it would sell for about \$50.

JG: Wow!

HM: So I leased one. It was a small type, you had to rub down letters for your big type, for your headlines but it would do the text and it would justify it, very time consuming but it worked. We didn't have real typesetters. Big newspapers did but we didn't. But it worked and put out a semi-professional product. I got the advertising support and that's how I started to put out 17 issues of that. Then I bit off more than I could chew. I was deeply in debt. I called David Goodstein in San Mateo, California, and he knew who I was because I was competing with him nationally as I told you earlier.

JG: Now who was David Goodstein, tell us?

HM: He was a publisher. He had just bought The Advocate from the original founders of it that were based in Los Angeles; and he moved the office to San Mateo just south of San Francisco, an easy, easy, easy commute to San Francisco, which is where everybody lived, but he had offices and that's where he lived in San Mateo. He was portrayed in the movie **Harvey** -(3:54)Milk. In the movie they portrayed him as a big tall guy but David was actually more like a five-foot guy. But the guy looked like David in the movie, the whoever the actor that played him. He looked like him but he wasn't six and a half feet tall he was five feet tall! But it looked like him.

JG: It looked like him anyway.

HM: He said, "Oh yeah, sure." Within two days he was on a plane to Houston with a check in hand, blank, we hadn't negotiated a price yet. What David needed me, I realize

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more now, he needed my southern circulation because there was a mafia type organization that controlled all the newsstands throughout the south and for some reason he had a falling out with them and they kicked The Advocate out of all of the... you couldn't find The Advocate from North Carolina through Texas, Tennessee and all that. You couldn't find an Advocate on a newsstand.

JG: Wow!

HM: They liked me so I had Contact in all, we were primarily the southern day paper, although we were in San Francisco and New York City and everywhere else there were copies. He wanted that badly. So that's why he jumped on the plane and came here. I figured that out. I thought he just did it because he liked me. No, he wanted that southern circulation because we had it locked in. It was a pretty good deal because they had a distributor here in Houston down on Shepherd Drive, North Shepherd, and I would just take all the papers out to their distributor and dump them down there and they would take care of distributing to all the newsstands throughout the south. I didn't have to mail to each individual newsstand. So it was great, convenient.

JG: It is very convenient. So you didn't need a subscriber base or anything you just...

HM: Well we had a 7,000, I believe we had, a 7,000 copy I believe my memory might be wrong. It might be 4,000. 4,000 or 7,000 copy paid circulation individual copies, which David also wanted that. After he took the stuff back to San Mateo and they compared their subscribers with our subscribers they found that most people subscribed to both publications, so he didn't really pick up very many new actual individual subscribers.

JG: Wow.

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HM: But he wanted that too but what he mainly wanted was the southern distribution network, which I fell into.

JG: That's excellent. Did you have a lot of advertising in Contact?

HM: Yes I had pretty much every ad that he had. We had the Club Bath chain. We had the Midtowne Spa. They weren't in Houston yet, they were just in L.A. but they have... they call it The Compound, but we had their full page. We had a bathhouse in Ashbury, New York... I mean New Jersey with a full page and of course we had all the Houston bars and we had a bunch of New Orleans bars because I was from New Orleans before I came here and I knew those people. So the bar ads, we had the New Orleans and Houston bar ads and I had a few Dallas ads. Austin was still a backwater city at that time. There was nothing there.

JG: Tell us what year?

HM: About '73, '74.

JG: Okay that's when you sold Contact?

HM: Yeah, I put out 17 issues over a year and a half span. We came out. We tried to come out every 3 weeks. Usually we did sometimes we had four weeks, depending whether I could get the money together to pay the printer. That pretty much dictated it.

JG: Yeah, when you are ready to pay the printer.

HM: I loved the printer. We printed it forty times. Mrs. Carter (that's what I called her everybody else called her Doll Carter). She ran the paper and she just recently died and we ran her obituary in the Montrose Star. More than people realize she helped the gay press get started. She printed the Nuntius.

JG: Oh she did?

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HM: And she printed Contact and then when I started The Montrose Star, the original, she printed that. She was always good. You know I would go and I didn't have any money. I'd say, "Print it." She'd say, "Well you're going to have to pay before you pick it up." I said, "I know it will take you a day to print it. I'll try to get some money together." So I would go the next day and I wouldn't have any money. I said, "Mrs. Carter can I like, take a bundle and go run around and collect these checks from these advertisers and come back and get the rest of them?" She said, "Yeah."

JG: How nice!

HM: We would do that. But she was the printing plant that printed the gay press.

JG: Right.

HM: Nobody else would. Forward Times had their own newspaper printer over there on Alameda, which is now an abandoned building. They moved to a brand new modern building since she died. But The Forward Times is still a major black newspaper in town.

JG: Oh...

HM: They had big ads too, because they were, they had a niche, they were the black paper and all the Foleys and the other department stores they would buy The Chronicle and they would buy Forward Times. Because whether they felt they got results or not they just felt like they had to buy the black paper. So she was making money with her paper. I guess it's the guilt factor but the big advertisers in The Chronicle and The Post would also buy Forward Times and she put out a special broadsheet, it was a tabloid paper but inside was a broadsheet just so that she could print those big ads in The Chronicle and The Post. She knew what she was doing.

JG: Yeah, so she was making money?

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HM: Yes. But she was a real nice woman.

JG: What happened then... from the so once you sold Contact what did you do?

HM: I went to work for The Advocate. I went and worked for David. That was part of the deal and he said, "Well what do you want?" I said, "I want..." He said, "I'll give you a dollar for every paid circulation you have. So that was \$7,000 which was a lot of money in 1975. I said, "I'll take that, but I want a job." He said, "Okay, you can come to work for The Advocate." He said, "What do you want to do go to California or stay here?" I said, "Why don't you stay here and represent The Advocate in this part of the country?" He said, "That's great if that's what you need but I want you to come to San Mateo. We need to train you and teach you our ways and all that." So I did and I spent a week there. It was great. They wined and dined me. They thought I was the greatest thing ever because I was bringing all these Texas ads into The Advocate."

JG: Texas to The Advocate?

HM: Yes. Also they got the southern distribution back that had been missing for about a year.

JG: Right. Well what happened after The Advocate?

HM: Well I worked there about a year and then I quit or they... I don't know, I don't remember how we parted. We parted friendly and all that. Somehow I probably said something like, "Well you know I'm bored here. I was bored when I was there and now I'm bored again." They came out every two weeks like we came out every two weeks to start. It's so easy to do that. They really needed a weekly. I seen my competition, The G.E.M., is now advertising a little house ad, "Going weekly soon!" Of course they have to get some advertising before they can do that. They might. Then I came back to

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Houston and I had some money so I didn't do much of anything for a while. Then I said, "Well I'm bored, let's start another paper. Let's start The Montrose Star." I don't remember how I came up with the name The Montrose Star. I used to know and I wrote about it, how I came up with The Star originally. I don't remember. So I did that from about '74, '75 until 1980 and I sold it to a business man named Bert Hollister who owned a little knick-knack shop on Post Oak Boulevard that catered to the wealthy. So again, he made money. It was a small shop but he had very high, overpriced items but those people would buy that stuff. But he wanted to own a gay paper and I was ready to sell it. So I sold The Star to him and I went to New Orleans and lived for about six months. I got bored again. Meanwhile Bert had given up on The Star and folded it so my non-competitive agreement was no longer valid. I came back and I was sitting at The Venture Inn with Ed Went. Ed Went worked for KYLK and he worked for The Forward Times. Actually he was the token white guy that worked for Forward Times and he was gay. We were sitting at The Venture Inn one day talking and I said, "Ed, I want to start another paper, I'm bored." He said, "Okay what do you want to call it?" I said, "I don't know that's why I'm talking to you. Let's come up with some ideas." We came up with The Montrose Tribune and this and that and none of them really had the ring to it. Ed said, "Why don't you call it The Voice after The Village Voice in New York?" I said, "Yeah that's good." That's how we came up with the name.

JG: Alright.

HM: So we were named after The Village Voice, The Montrose Voice was. Now there's voices all over the south. There's Southern Voice in Atlanta which is owned by Window media, the Small Business Administration repossessed them and shut them

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down and seized their assets. They own The Washington Blade, The New York Blade, The Houston Voice and The Southern Voice of Atlanta. But The Dallas Voice still continues. So anyway, I was responsible for transferring the name Voice from New York to Houston and then it spread out and other people started using the word "voice" for a gay paper.

JG: Yeah, you just spread!

HM: The biggest one still in existence is The Dallas Voice and Robert Moore and Don Ritz started that and Don has since died and Robert is still up there and is running his paper and has a first class operation. He knows what he is doing. He's making money.

JG: They've been going for quite a few years?

HM: Yes. I put them in business. They stole my paper clips and I put them in business.

JG: Oh yeah?

HM: I was publishing the Dallas Gay News and they were working for me and they decided to start their own paper (which I don't blame them). The reason I started the Dallas Gay News was because Dallas did not have a gay paper. Twit was based up there my competition selling advertising (TWT) and they were getting all the free gravy Dallas ads and it was a market all to themselves as big as Houston and there had been all that money and I was having to compete here just in Houston against them with their extra bucks coming from Dallas. So I said, "Well, I've gotta start a paper in Dallas just so they will have some competition up there and they won't be subsidizing Houston with Dallas money. So I did. I started Dallas Gay News and hired Robert Moore and Don Ritz and they worked for a while and they did a long time and then they decided to start their own

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paper and they rented an office directly above my office there on Oaklawn, no it might have been... no it was Oaklawn yeah, an office building. They rented an office. I knew they were probably... we competed there for a couple of months. I continued to print Dallas Gay News but they took all the advertising their way pretty much like I did when I left The Gem and I started The Star. I just took all the advertisers with me. Because they were buying from me, they weren't buying the paper, same thing up there in Dallas. They were buying from Don Ritz and Robert Moore. They weren't buying the Dallas Gas News, they were buying Don Ritz and Robert Moore. So when they switched papers to The Dallas Voice the advertisers went with them. I competed for a little while and I put out a final issue saying, "Congratulations, I'm glad Dallas has a great gay newspaper. Dallas Voice I wish you well and all of that." That's one thing I've always done. I've published maybe 12 gay papers in my lifetime. I have never just stopped publishing. I've always put out a last issue and said goodbye. A lot of papers just... they just end without saying goodbye.

JG: Right, they disappear. That's great! So what year... so then you started The Voice and what year would that be?

HM: Well the original Star, the original Star went to 1980 and so The Voice started about 1981.

JG: Okay.

HM: I ran that for a long time. I brought in a partner, a guy named Bill Marbery to do the business side of it while I was in the creative part of it. He was... Bill Marbery was the in original Montrose Star, he wasn't in the Montrose Voice. I started The Voice on my own. About 1980 and I did that for five or six or seven years and sold it to my editor.

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I'll think of his name in a second. His lover was Dr. Crab Durren. Tad Nelson was the editor and Tad wanted to own the paper and I said, "I'm done. I've been doing this one long enough, it's time to sell it." So he went to his husband, the doctor, and said, "I need money to buy the New Voice then it was so popular. I need money to buy that." I imagine the conversation that Crab said, "How much do you need?" "Well Henry wants \$300,000." "Well offer him \$270,000." And they did, and I took it. I was ready to take \$270,000, then before I said yes, I was getting ready to say yes, Crab throws in, "I'll throw in my Maserati. I'll let you have that too. We'll just throw that in the deal."

JG: Are you serious? Before you could even get yes out?

HM: Yeah! So they bought it and ran it for a while. But then they realized they didn't think it was worth roughly \$300,000. I thought it was, based on it was "the paper" in town and it was full of ads. They kept it that way. Then they sold it to Window Media, which is the people out of Dallas. The problem with Window Media was they took out a lot of small business loans to finance their expanding operation. They had papers in New York. They bought The Washington Blade which was a premier gay paper and has now resurfaced and previous employees have bought the rights of the name and now The Washington Blade is publishing again, although it's not owned by them, it's not owned by Window Media.

Anyway it's the Small Business Administration closed them down all over the country, seized all their assets and they left owing our printer there in Texas City, where we print there, \$7,000. They owed everybody around the country. They never would pay their bills; of course, they didn't have any money to pay their bills. But when they

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did... the problem with them is it was their philosophy. They were... I'm going to be very blunt with you. They were a bunch of self-hating Log Cabin Republicans.

JG: Ah huh!

HM: And they wanted that philosophy portrayed in all of their papers. Well they did that and they would write editorials about it. In fact I remember Chris Crane once wrote something about George W. Bush, "He is our president and you must support him," words to that effect.

JG: Wow!

HM: "Because he is a good man and he is leading this country in all these times of crisis." Crisis of course is what he caused in the first place; so all their papers around the country started losing advertisers.

JG: I can imagine.

HM: It's just they never went down from a nice thick paper to a nice thin paper. Because they didn't know what they were doing, the gay community is primarily, having been suppressed, a minority group we understand discrimination. And Democrats are the ones that more aligned with. But they wanted to align with Republicans, which is fine but not if you are trying to sell advertising to gay, to primarily a Democratic audience.

JG: Rejected?

HM: It's a dumb business decision and they made a dumb business decision, which cost them their whole chain of operations.

JG: I didn't know about that.

HM: That was the big news about three years ago. I wrote about it in the paper. All the other papers in the country just ate it up; we all reported on it.

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JG: That's amazing!

HM: But they got what they deserved.

JG: Yes. So at this point why don't we let you go back and let you tell your basic biological information...

HM: Biological?

JG: Biographical sorry!

HM: Well biological... I'm sorry.

JG: Where you were born and where you grew up and where you moved around and some of those things that come to mind?

HM: I was born in Jackson, Mississippi at The Baptist Hospital on State Street. I was very young when I was born!

JG: That's the biographical part of it?

HM: Yeah! My father was a geologist and we moved all over the country. We did.

We lived in Denver. We lived in Casper, Wyoming. We've lived in Tyler, Texas. I went through the 3rd grade in Lafayette, 3rd grade also in Tyler, 2nd grade in Casper, Wyoming. I told the story... I wrote about it where in Casper I think I met Dick Cheney. He's are about the same age. There was only one elementary school in Casper so we all went there.

JG: Really? Yeah exactly!

HM: I used to walk home from elementary school to our house, which was a few blocks. There was always this bully out there. Every time I'd walk by he would bully me. He'd punch me and push me over. So finally... and I'm young and dumb and shy and all that. I'm not dumb, I thought I was pretty smart, but I'm shy, was shy, very shy.

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Finally one day I just finally had enough and I said, I said, “Well you must not believe in God!” I don’t know why that came out of my mouth there but it shocked him so much he never bothered me again. The guy looked just like a young Dick Cheney is what he looked like.

JG: Right.

HM: He was there going to that school at the same time! We know from today that he basically is a bully!

JG: That’s some good history to have right there!

HM: It probably wasn’t Dick Cheney but it could have been.

JG: He comes to mind!

HM: Okay then, I moved all over the country, primarily Mississippi though. We lived all over Mississippi. I went to Murrah High School. The same high school that I was showing you, that Candace McMillin from Itawamba High School in Mississippi and just transferred to finish out her senior year, Saint Murrah High School. I got involved in radio and listening to rock and roll stations in Jackson at WRBC and WJXM. So I started just forcing myself on WJXM. I would go down there at night and I got to know the Roger (23.32) who it turns out, I didn’t know it at the time, he was the owner’s son and he did the 8:00 p.m. to midnight shift, the radio show. I’d just hang around with him and I would sit at the reception desk and take requests. I’d write requests down and go pass it to him and he would play what he could and what he couldn’t... so finally one day Roger one day said, “Henry...” because he had been getting ready to go off the air and just work at the office at the station and not be a disk jockey. He said, “Henry, why don’t you come to work for us?” I said, “I thought you’d never ask!” He said, “You can

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start next Monday 8:00 p.m. to midnight working my show, my shift.” I said, “Okay I’ll be here.

I was still going to Murrah High School and I’d work 8:00 p.m. to midnight, plus the Sunday morning shift where I played gospel music, Rock and Roll at night. That was the intention. Okay that Monday afternoon I was supposed to work that Monday night. I had already been working the Gospel shows on Sunday morning so I knew the control room and all that. But I hadn’t worked the Rock and Roll shift, which is what I wanted to do. So I get out of Murrah High School at 3:15, I turn the radio on down to 1415 AM and there’s Patsy Kline on the radio followed by Hank Williams.

JG: Uh oh!

HM: I’ve got the wrote station here! Then the announcer comes on and says, “Welcome to WJXM your new country station in Jackson!” I said, “What?”

JG: Goodness so you had no idea?

HM: I had no idea. It turned out that morning at 9:00 a.m., Mrs. _____, (25.08)

Rogers’s mother walked into the radio station. This is a scene right out of WKRP, she walked in the radio station, stood around, looked around and said, “You’re fired, you’re fired, you’re fired, you’re fired, you’re fired, you’re fired.” Fired everybody on the station and said I will mail your last check to you. Get in your cars and get off the property. She fired everybody! Right then on the turn table it was going “ch ch, ch ch, ch ch.” She took the disk jockey right off the air.

JG: There was no transition at all she...

HM: Well because it turns out they were all stealing from her. Plus they were all doing drugs. I witnessed it there. So they were high as a kite and stealing from her. You know

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rock and roll and drugs they go together. So she fired them all and she brought Roger in and Roger sat down at the turn table and picked it up, it was a country music song, put it on the turn table, played it and said, "Ladies and gentleman welcome to the new country WJXM, Jackson's country station." She had fired everybody. She did not know that I had been hired to work that night because I wasn't at the station.

JG: You didn't even have your first day.

HM: She had never met me. She didn't know who I was. Roger had hired me. So I wasn't fired. I was the only employee (other than her son) who was not fired. So I go in that night and there is Bill Harrison working 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. I take over at 8:00 p.m. and I kind of walk in, tippie toe. I had keys to the station. I said, "Do I?" He looked at me and said, "Oh you must be Henry. Here we've got this stack of current country hits and we've got this big stack of oldies. Now you can play two current hits and then play an oldie, play two country hits and go back and play an oldie. Alternate and play music until midnight. I don't think we have any commercials. Just play music and have a good time."

JG: That's just a wild story.

HM: Yes, that's true!

JG: You just had no idea?

HM: I learned country music. I played country music for a long time. Then I moved around Mississippi and worked at a bunch of radio stations. Through WJXM because I became family you know, there we... I think we got into a little legal trouble. I was told I was going to be subpoenaed but I never was because they moved me off to Texas to get me out of the state. We got, the Mississippi Public Service Commission financed through

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kickbacks, the Mississippi Radio Network. It was my idea. I put it on paper. I sat there at WJXM at the secretary's desk with a typewriter. I typed up this whole proposal of starting a statewide radio network where we would transmit on 5 minute newscasts every hour, on the hour, around the state to every radio station we could convince to sign the contract and sign up with us. They wouldn't pay anything for it. We'd get the revenue's for it for whatever commercials we could sell on the 5 minute newscast. We have one minute of commercial and they would agree to air that and we would sell those commercials in Jackson. We ended up selling them primarily to four advertisers.

Remember, this is the Mississippi Public Service Commission. Underhandedly finance this thing for the re-election of Mayor, three statewide commissioners, three regional commissioners. They thought they were going to use the network to promote themselves to keep them in office perpetually. That was their background. What I wanted to do was to start a radio network and do a 5 minute news cast that sounded like an entrepreneurial thing to do and I was excited about that. But too the salesman Jack Carpenter at WXJM got connected with Douglas Rumfield?_____ (28.56) in the old Mississippi Service Commission and they say, "We'll finance you and you can get the commercials." So we ended up our advertisers were: Mississippi Valley Gas, Mississippi Power and Light, Mississippi Power Company (which there was two separate power companies in the state one for the southern half of the state and one for the northern half of the state. Separate they had the similar names but separate companies) and we had Hertz Rent a Car. We ended up somehow getting no it was Avis Rent a Car, we had Avis Rent a Car. That was a trade out I got a car, comped a brand new car.

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So that went on for a long time and then Clarion, a major newspaper, started investigating the finances of the Mississippi Radio Network. Meanwhile they said, "Henry we got you a job in Texas. You're gonna go work in Houston." "Okay." "You've got to go spend two weeks in Beaumont first." "Okay." So I went to Beaumont and spent two weeks there worked for KJET, K-Jet, wonderful radio station. They are no longer there. Then they moved me over to all their political connections. They just wanted to get me out of the state because I knew too much. I talked to Douglas Rumfield on the phone. He said, "Henry they are going to subpoena you they are going to come to Texas to get you and bring you back because we are in a heap of trouble up here." I said, "Well I'll be waiting for me." He said, "Henry you know what to say." I said, "I don't know." I would just mumble. But they never did, I never was subpoenaed.

JG: They must have got quiet.

HM: It was political money. I didn't ask where the money came from. I thought they liked it because they thought it was a great idea to make money. They liked it because they wanted to promote themselves and keep getting re-elected.

JG: Right.

HM: Then they got all this hush money from the three major utilities in Mississippi, and Avis Rent a Car which I did that, I got that one myself.

JG: That's wild! Is that what got you to Houston then?

HM: Yes.

JG: Where but where did the New Orleans... you lived in New Orleans?

HM: I lived in New Orleans when I first got out of the Navy.

JG: Oh so let's go back there.

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HM: Then I went back to Mississippi, then I came back to New Orleans and back to Mississippi. In fact when I had the Avis Rent a Car I would drive to New Orleans every weekend. I was living in there and in Jackson too.

JG: You lived in Jackson.

HM: New Orleans was very open, and being homosexual, you know it was just a paradise.

JG: Right. But when you got to Houston then the radio station sent you here?

HM: Yeah, they got me a job at KJET first in Beaumont for two weeks and then Roy and them that owned the radio station got me a job at brand new radio station that just started in Houston called KENR, Keener 1070, country music. I said, "Well I know country music." So I went to work for Keener doing afternoon drive newscast.

JG: Which year was this?

HM: This would have been, this was when I first got here in '73.

JG: Okay.

HM: '72 maybe... yeah '72.

JG: Okay.

HM: Yeah from '70 to '72 I was in New Orleans, but I was back and forth New Orleans and Jackson. In New Orleans I lived on Royal Street, one block out of the Quarter. My lover was Bob Grubkin. He was the bartender at Lafitte's, the oldest gay bar in America. I was worked at Canal Baths, that's because our landlord was John Emerald and he owned Canal Baths and I needed a job. I created my own job at Canal Baths. I told John I said, "This is New Orleans, a 24 hour city and you shut the bath house down and it's a bath house and you shut it down at midnight and reopen it at 8:00 in the

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morning. What is wrong with that picture? This is New Orleans! People go to the bars and drink and get drunk they want to go to the bath house and you close and you're the only bath house in New Orleans." He said, "Well it's just too much trouble." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll work the midnight to 8:00 a.m. and I'll show you that you'll get a lot of business." Which I did and it stayed open for 24 hours forever and ever and ever until he died. There is a Clint Eastwood movie that has a scene from Canal Baths in it.

JG: Oh it does? Do you remember which movie?

HM: I don't remember which movie but he's standing outside of this building and he's trying to hide from somebody so he's outside this door and he sees this door and he opens the door and walks in to hide. Then the camera looks back and the top says "Canal Baths"!

JG: So I take this is on Canal Street.

HM: It was originally on Canal Street and then it moved to Gravier and then it moved to Rampart.

JG: Okay so when you got to Houston in '72 tell us about what the gay scene was like?

HM: It took me a while to find a gay bar. The first one I found was The Round Table, which was just a little small little bar on Westheimer about 400 block of Westheimer next to a Stop and Go which is no longer there. So I had a little guidebook you know but it was so outdated but the Round Table was still there. So I walked in and I asked around. They said, "Well you know Gene Allen is opening up a new Farm House up on Canal Street." I said, "What's The Farm House? And who is Gene Allen?" "Oh he is all over Houston for years. He's an institution." "What's his new club what kind of club is it?"

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“It’s a dance bar!” I says, “Oh that sounds good where’s it at?” “You go down Westheimer and go past Kirby and it’s this little side street with a big church and it’s near the side of the church. It’s called The Farm House you’ll see the cars.” So I found it and went in and ended up getting to know Gene and his lover named **Danny?_____ (34.39)** very well. We became good friends.

JG: So that sort of gave you a base when you first got here.

HM: Shortly thereafter Houston was booming back then. We had four gay discos at one time, four. We had Bayou Lighting which later became the old Fantasia, we had The Farm House which occupied two different locations. We had Coles which was owned by a friend of mine Paul Lewis which is on Main Street then we had, what was the fourth one? Oh the Depository on Westheimer, which was owned by Jay Allen who is currently my landlord right here.

JG: Right here, full circle? Would you say at that point in '72 was, were the bars pretty spread out, it wasn't all in Montrose?

HM: The only bar in Montrose was The Round Table that just happened to be where it was. In fact, Montrose was not called Montrose it was a woman that was probably called an interview tried to name it Upper Montrose I mean Upper Westheimer. She tried to name the neighborhood Upper Westheimer she started calling it that in her newsletter. It made no sense because this is the lower block numbers here. Upper Westheimer would be like the 30,000 block way over there past the Galleria. But that's what she started to call it and I said, well that doesn't make any sense and I had already started Contact and I just started calling it Montrose after Montrose Boulevard because I thought it was a beautiful street and it reminded me of a street in Seville, Spain that I had been to many of

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times because I was in the navy I went there. Seville was the biggest big city close by where you could take a three hour train to and the Montrose Boulevard reminded me of the main drag in Seville, Spain. It looked European. Montrose sounded European so I called it Montrose. It turned out Montrose is a Shakespearian character, or word, or town or something like that. I didn't know that at the time. I just thought it sounded European. That's how... so yes you can say that I named the neighborhood.

JG: That's a good one to have. How soon do you think that more started coming into Montrose?

HM: Montrose was eclectic. It was kind of a hippy haven at that time and the rents were cheap, and so when rents are cheap the gay people move in and fix things up. Then it gets too expensive and then heterosexuals move in and take over and then want to get rid of all these queers out of here. But about the time that we... the gay community had discovered, "Maybe we all want to just congregate somewhere and it makes it easier and Montrose was the obvious choice cause rents were cheap, houses were falling apart. We would move in and fix things up, rent goes back up. But...

JG: You've got your paper going on now, at this time?

HM: Yes.

JG: So what kind of influence do you think that had on centering the community or making everybody?

HM: Well I did call my first paper Contact. I did 17 issues in a year and a half. But then I called it The Montrose Star, the original, and I think that calling it The Montrose Star helped people. It was a gay paper and the word Montrose was the first word in the

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title. I think that helped. That wouldn't have been enough to do it on its own but I'm sure it helped.

JG: Do you think there were more people first, bars first or businesses first in the area?

HM: I think the people and the bars moved in first together.

JG: Okay.

HM: Because of the low overhead, rent and overhead. It was... and the lack of zoning laws. So it was easy for some entrepreneur to come in and say, "I want to open a bar and let's do it in that house over there" and he could. And he did.

JG: Well yeah it was my understanding that the first businesses that came into Montrose, not gay Montrose but the neighborhood since it's been since the earlier part of the century were restaurants in old houses right?

HM: Right. That makes sense, yes.

JG: Okay good. Well let's go back a little bit to your growing up and early adulthood. At which point did you realize that you were not alone as far as being homosexual in the world?

HM: Oh I knew it right away. I told you in the oil business we moved around. We lived in Shreveport, Louisiana for a while. There was a little neighborhood kid that lived next door or two doors down I don't remember what. But I was only like six years old. I was in the first grade so I don't know I must have been six or seven, six probably. He would come over and we would just play, you know. So one day we decided, we crawled... under the house we had...are you checking to see if it's recording?

Interruption

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HM: Hello!

JG: Its recording I just want to make sure we are getting enough could you just scoot up a little bit?

HM: Okay, the interviewer here is getting very friendly with me right now. So, he came over and one day we decided to crawl under the house and take a nap. You know we were six year old kids we didn't know what we were doing. The house sat up on cinder blocks in one of those houses like this one here does.

JG: Right.

HM: A lot of houses in Montrose do. So we crawl up under there and just laid up against each other and fell asleep. My mother couldn't find me so she called the fire department and they were looking all over the place and they didn't think to look under the house. Finally I was like, "What is all the commotion?" We crawled out and, "Oh there he is!"

JG: Oh no!

HM: It was male companionship at the age of six!

JG: Right. So you were there. When did you start... can you figure out when or what made you realize that in the rest of the country or the world there were other people going through the same things that you were going through? Do you think there was a newspaper article or a book or a...?

HM: No, I didn't see any of that. No, I just felt it.

JG: Yeah okay.

HM: I was attracted to fellow males, generally my own age.

JG: Okay.

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HM: In high school, you know Murrah High School, we had another guy who lived down the street and he was in the 10th grade, 11th grade, Tim and he was very nice. He went with me to school together and my mother worked to 5:00 and so we would go over to my house and have “sex.” We hadn’t discovered sex back then.

JG: You hadn’t discovered it? Okay well when did you become aware that there was a lesbian/gay world in other words? There were perhaps communities forming?

HM: It was the first trip to New Orleans. I had just got out of the navy. I knew we had gay bars. I knew we had a gay bar in Jackson which I had not yet been to. I kind of thought I knew where it was but I was scared to go there.

JG: Right.

HM: But and I had a car, I had a Mustang. I drove the Mustang down to New Orleans and I kind of knew I could look around and I stood out on the corner of 800 Bourbon for about a half an hour watching people go in and out of the bar over there and the bar over there and I said, “Well this looks like it.” So I walked in and it was a bunch of men and women both in the bar. But the men, the boys... back then it was boys and girls it wasn’t men and women. It was boys and girls. The boys were together and the girls were together. I said, “Well that makes sense.” The club that I went to was called Pete’s. It was Pete Fountain’s original location on Bourbon Street and the tile on the floor on the ground when you walked in the door it’s got tile, it says “Pete’s.” Pete’s Fountain was the original club. Pete Fountain kept it as a gay club when he moved further down Bourbon to the tourist action. But he kept it as a bar without a name but they called it Pete’s because that’s what it said on the tile. Pete’s was a gay bar owned by Pete Fountain. But same sex people could not dance together. They had a dance floor. They

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could not dance together. You could dance but you had to go boy and girl had to dance.

Well one day they decided to rebel. Actually it was about two weeks after I made my first entrance in there. The boys started dancing together and the girls started dancing together and the club said, "You can't do that!" We said, "Watch us!" and they did and from there on there was no problem. They said, "The cops are going to come in." "Make them!"

JG: What year do you think that was?

HM: That would have been '73, '74... '72, '72.

JG: Okay. Right probably right before you moved here right?

HM: Yes.

JG: You had just gotten out of the military.

HM: I mean I'd been out a homosexual long before that but I hadn't been to a gay bar.

JG: Okay once you did come out what kind of newspapers, you are bound to have noticed newspapers and magazines because shortly thereafter you started your own.

HM: Yes I had seen the Nuntius, in fact I had seen the Nuntius in New Orleans when I was living there because somebody had gone through New Orleans to Houston and brought one by and said, "Wow there's a gay paper." So when I moved here I was originally going to Dallas but ended up here because my grandparents, aunts, and uncles all live up there. But I ended up coming down here thanks to the connections in Mississippi that got me the job. But I was already familiar with the Nuntius. I thought, I was impressed with it even though it wasn't much better than the daily Bugle we had in junior high in Mississippi. But the fact that it was gay was just impressive. So I said... then I got to looking at it and studying it and I became a newscast... I was already a

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newscaster and I had a good job. In fact the KNER, Keener 1070 was the ARB rated number one afternoon drive newscaster under the name John Parker. Number one ARB rated newscaster was Carl B. McIntire at KILT. He had the morning audience, we had the afternoon audience. They were number one in the morning, we were number one in the afternoon and we were number two in the mornings and they were number two in the afternoons. But his audience was slightly bigger than my audience so I was rated ARB rated number two radio newscaster in Houston for a brief period of time. I used that rating to advance from KNER over to KULF which was a southern broadcasting which I mentioned was a first class operation. They treated their employees like stars.

JG: That's excellent. Okay. So when you came to Houston and you already told me that you went to the bars and you figured out through the bars how to meet other people so you connected that way. What other social networks and organizations did you know about in Houston that were evident??

HM: The only other one I knew about was the MCCR church or the MCC church they called it at that time and they put an R on there not to be confused with everybody else called MCC or MMC, MCC or Montrose Mining Company. There's too many M's and C's in all the initials and everything. So they started to have to distinguish themselves. Meanwhile the Montrose Counseling Center popped up and they started calling themselves MCC and the church had to give in and call themselves MCCR and they have since changed their name. Now it's RMCC because there's still too many businesses and organizations that lead with the MCC the M being Montrose of course, except for the church was Metropolitan. I met Troy Perry one time. Yeah I met him one time in New Orleans when we had the big fire at that bar on Iberville where people got trapped inside

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and they couldn't get out because of the bars on the windows and they all burned to death.

JG: Right.

HM: Troy Perry came to New Orleans to read the service.

JG: Yeah.

HM: I'm not a particularly religious person. In fact, I'm not a religious person at all, but you asked what other organizations were there at that time it was just the MCC church was it.

JG: Right, yes okay that's what a lot of other people were saying, also Bering Church?

HM: Yeah I think Bering has always been a very gay friendly church and with outreach to the gay community.

JG: Okay let's talk about the lesbian/gay world as you got to know it when you came to Houston and this was about the early to mid '70's. What about cliques and class and race and gender. Do you think that there was an obvious class difference between people?

HM: Oh there was a class. There was the "A" group which they would turn their nose up at anybody they didn't recognize. They were not friendly. They knew each other and they would not... they were kind of snotty. I said, "I don't want to deal with those people."

JG: Okay.

HM: So I hung around the bar crowd who were friendly.

JG: And were this "A" group in the bars very much?

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HM: No they had their own little social clubs, their own little private parties and now they were just so snobbish, just like you would imagine in the movies and they were that way. Some of them are still around and not all of them, there were some exceptions. Some of the old organizations the Diana Foundation and the Ms. Camp America they were two institutions that continue today and they are good people. I'm not putting them in that category.

JG: Okay. What would you say about, would you say there was a "working class" sort of?

HM: Yeah that was the group that went out to the bars and drank.

JG: Okay.

HM: Primarily the main club that I mentioned it all the time because he is kind of my hero but Gene Howell and he was always good to the community, whatever you wanted he would do. Especially on Wednesdays when we had 10 cent drinks. I think that was a very good to the community.

JG: 10 cent drink nights!

HM: Yeah.

JG: So Montrose is definitely becoming the center by then?

HM: Yes. Gene had originally been in Montrose before he moved way out, way out Westheimer past Kirby. He had a...

JG: That was The Farm House right?

HM: Yeah that was The Farm House. In Houston, in Montrose he had The Old Plantation Club, not what later became The Old Plantation Club off of West Alabama but the original Old Plantation Club he had that. But he moved into a bigger location down

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the street but he just happened to be in Montrose. He was about 1300 block of Montrose with the Old Plantation. He also, you know Scott Gertner's SkyBar?

JG: Yeah.

HM: That was one of Gene Howell's club at one time too.

JG: Yes.

HM: As a gay bar.

JG: That was fun gay bar I've seen pictures of how they had that decorated.

HM: I've been there once on a visit to Houston before I moved here.

JG: Before you moved?

HM: Yes.

JG: Did these places get... let's talk about harassment and the police. Were these places raided a lot and would you have?

HM: Yes it was traditional to raid the bars on the eve of the Gay Pride. They always did that. It was a Sergeant Simmons, S-I-M-M-O-N-S who coordinated that whole thing and one time I was in The Mining Company playing a video game. The cops come in with the flashlights, "ID!" I said, "Well, I'm playing a video game!" See I wasn't intimidated. I was a radio newscaster in fact I was the top rated afternoon newscaster in Houston! They didn't know that so I wasn't going to let the guy bully me because I've already been bullied by Dick Cheney in Casper, Wyoming. So I said, "Well I'm playing my game." "Show me your ID." Okay so I stop playing the game and show him my ID and he kind of felt I think that you know that I wasn't intimidated... he wasn't intimidating me, which was his whole purpose. His whole purpose was to bully. It was to bully everyone in the bar, in The Mining Company.

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JG: Yes.

HM: Okay so I followed him out, after he went through the bar then I followed him out and I said, "By the way my name is John Parker. I'm a newscaster at KNER. What is the purpose of this? Is it..." "Uh... I'm not going to talk to you." I said, "I think you are required to give me your name. In fact you have to. It's a class 'A' misdemeanor if you fail to give your name if asked by a citizen." So he shouted out a name which was the union leader, it was not him. He shouted out the union leader's name. I knew that. I let him know, "I know that!" They did not raid The Mining Company after that.

JG: Very interesting.

HM: I had a sex club one time too, pardon me I've had several of them, one of my various enterprises. But they raided my sex club one time. I wasn't there. In fact, it was two blocks over that way. I was at the 6-11 or somewhere in the neighborhood, probably The Mining Company. No I was in Ribcord that's where I was. So the bartender said, "Henry they are raiding your sex club over there." I said, "They are?" I go over there and they are all gone and the place is empty and locked up. So I call and find out they are in jail. So I called... I stayed up all night long and at 8:00 a.m. in the morning I call City Hall, George Greanias was our councilman. I said, "George I've got to meet with you." He said, "Well, you can make an appointment and I'll meet with you next week sometime." I said, "No I'm going to be there right now. I want to see you. This is very important. Your Houston Police have arrested a bunch of naked men drinking beer and they are all in jail right now. I want to talk to you about that." I'm very blunt George said, "Well okay." George was running for re-election for city council. But I owned a gay newspaper. I was on it at the time.

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JG: Was this a council at-large position?

HM: Yeah I think... no I don't remember if he was a council at-large or District C.

JG: But he felt that there was block vote influence?

HM: Yeah so he met with me. I said, "George I'm gonna be very blunt. You've got a bunch of men sitting around enjoying each other, drinking beer naked and the Houston police cops come in and handcuff everybody," (by then I had already talked to some people) "Put them in the paddy wagon and purposely drove that paddy wagon back and forth to make them bounce up against the wall, brutalized them, threw them on the floor when they got out of the paddy wagon and I know all that and I'm going to make an issue out of it." Meanwhile Louie Welch and Jim McConn are running for mayor. I wrote a letter to each one of them explaining to them what happened. Both of them wrote me a letter back. "I'm going to investigate this. And we're going to find out who was responsible." Well it was Sergeant Simmons, which I knew anyway.

JG: The same officer from every year?

HM: Yeah and there were no more raids after that. That was it. The Mary's raid had already occurred also I think.

JG: The big Mary?

HM: The big Mary's raid yes. There were no more raids after that. That was it. Mary's raid had already occurred also I think.

JG: The big Mary's?

HM: The big Mary's raid yes.

JG: I've forgotten what year that was.

HM: That was about...

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JG: Early '80's, '81 or '82.

HM: I've got the proclamation on the wall you can look at about that. But after all that happened after we made an issue out of it and I'm happy to say that I made an issue out of it. I wasn't the only one. We were all doing it. But I did my part. They stopped.

JG: Yes! Well that's a very good story.

HM: That year.

JG: Okay so you already are somewhat, by having a paper, politically active would you say?

HM: Yes.

JG: Because your paper editorially takes a stance one way or another?

HM: Absolutely.

JG: In politics.

HM: That's why on the front cover it says, "An Advocacy Newspaper." That's not the name of a company that is... we advocate fair play, equal rights and respect and all that sort of stuff.

JG: Can you remember what do you think is the most important event here in Houston as far as political organizing, what comes to mind?

HM: A bunch of them up there when Louie Welch said, "We ought to shoot them all!"

JG: Shoot the queers?

HM: Shoot the queers, well Channel 13 didn't realize the mic was on. So many politicians have gone down in flames when they didn't realize their mic was on. "Hello microphone!" That was one of them and of course The Mary's raid, the big one. My

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sex club raid was actually a small raid but it was against me and I was pissed and made an issue out of it. I had the power of the press and I used that power.

JG: Excellent.

HM: But I would just say the general attitude of the police at the time. They were all white. Herman Short was the police chief. He was a bigot. He was the one responsible for letting George Wallace speak at the Sam Houston Coliseum with the overflow capacity that the fire marshal said he couldn't do but Herman Short the chief of police said, "Yes you can. Fuck you fire marshal, go away. I'm the police chief I'll decide how many people you can put in there." You can take the word "Fuck" out of the tape there.

JG: Tell me what influence do you think Houston has had on the national scene?

HM: We are totally unappreciated. There is an article in the Huffington Post about the 20 gayest cities in America and Dallas got a mention and Austin got a mention and we didn't get a mention and we've got a gay mayor! We're not even in it!

JG: Was this recent?

HM: Yeah a couple of weeks ago. We're not even in the top 20. Well we are, we know it! But we are still over looked by the country. They still think as Houston as a backwater city. But of course we're not. We're the fourth largest municipal government in America. Contrary to popular opinion we are not the fourth largest city in America. City encompasses more than imaginary dotted line because here and there it zig-zags. It's the general population that depends on the metropolitan area. That's the size. We are about eighth and Dallas is seventh. Dallas is Dallas-Fort Worth is just a hair larger than we are. They won't be for the next census.

JG: I wouldn't think so.

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HM: Well we always... I hate to say this to our readers out there. But we are not the fourth largest city. We are the fourth largest city government in America but we are not the fourth largest city, population wise. We're about the eighth largest. We are the fourth largest city official city limit population but the eighth largest in general people in the metropolitan area.

JG: What do you think the community... what do you think the biggest influence in the community on Houston; the national community on our community?

HM: Oh slowly people will realize. A lot of them do, the people that are smart. Not everybody is smart. I mean you can... you know they're not smart because Fox news has higher ratings then CNN and MSNBC. So generally the population is not that smart. But eventually they will smarten up and recognize that Houston is a big booming city and of course we are booming. Our boom is supposedly because we are the largest city in the country without zoning laws. There are deed restrictions but there are no zoning laws. That's why we became an entrepreneurial city. So you can just open up a bar across the street. Now a days you've got to have a... back in the '70's when you didn't have to have so much parking. Now a days you do, so you can't just open up a bar in a house across the street unless you tear the house down next to it and...

JG: To carry the parking area.

HM: But if you do that you can!

JG: Okay let me ask you this: do you think, what would you say the relationship and go back a little and come forward between gays and lesbians.

HM: Oh yeah when I first got here and they still are because we have different interests. Women want women and men want men, in the gay community. We are allies

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of course. Politically we are entwined. But men are different than women. Men want sex, women want a relationship. That is a generalization. But they tend in those two directions, there are exceptions. So but politically yeah we are the closest of allies. I was just in Galveston Saturday and my new best friend, a woman named Barbara who is from Florida and they are visiting Houston. They have a mobile home they drive it around the country. I met her and her lover at Thirco's downtown and she is a wonderful woman. We got to talking and it turns out we were both in the navy. We were both stationed at the same two bases in the navy, Morocco and Rota, Spain. We both had top-secret clearances. We both did the same thing. She did it about four years after I did it.

JG: Really?

HM: And so I said, wow what a small world!

JG: That is definitely...

HM: I've got her picture in the current Montrose Star being distributed right now. It has her and me and me and her hugging.

JG: That is a great thing to find.

HM: I know like wow!

JG: Well tell me one last thing. Do you see generational differences between the group that is new and young and did not go through the same political circumstances that the rest of us did?

HM: Yes I do, because it is more open now. As it should have been all along but of course people are prejudiced and more prejudiced back then. I think people are still just as prejudiced now, but they know they can't get away with it so they behave themselves better.

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JG: That makes sense.

HM: I say people are prejudiced I mean the gay people I mean the homophobes and people that think the only sex is to have sex the way they do it. Or love who they love.

You've got to be like them. No, I'm not you. I'm going to be like me!

JG: Do you think that with they have assimilated too much or become more...in society?

HM: No you can not assimilate... the gay people can not assimilate too much, no!

JG: Okay.

HM: When you stop looking at people as being gay or non-gay then we've achieved equality.

JG: Okay. Well thank you. Anything else you would like to add that you can think of that we didn't cover?

HM: No. I'll show you my poster over there!

JG: Excellent thank you!

End of Interview