

NARRATOR: The following program contains language or images of the frank or sensitive nature for which may be considered objectionable by some. Listener discretion is advised.

[BED SQUEAKING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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*.

Hello, Houston in College Station in the world and welcome to *After Hours*, queer radio with attitude. This is Jimmy Carper. I'm the producer for the evening. And this is the-- since we're officially on Sunday now, Sunday the 14th of July. And a couple of things before we get to our regular scheduled segment--

[LAUGHTER]

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Regular?

JIMMY CARPER: Vanessa Edwards Foster is here.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Hello.

JIMMY CARPER: Just raring to go, you've got an interview, and we've got someone holding on line just ready to go.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Exactly.

JIMMY CARPER: OK. So I got to hurry--

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Other side of the state.

JIMMY CARPER: I got to run through all of this stuff. Is that it?

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Hmm.

JIMMY CARPER: OK.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Oh, nice. We're in athletics.

JIMMY CARPER: First of all, I want to say hello to all my MBBs out there, especially-- let's see, Wilson, Paul. And yes, Paul, I haven't mailed that back to you yet, but I will. Chat, Carol, I got your letter this week. And thank you very much.

And Junior. Junior, thank you. That was a great letter from Junior. That is terrific. Folks, these guys write to us all the time. They're really neat guys. And a lot of them would like pen pals if you're interested. And if you are interested, give us a call at 7135265738, and we can hook you up. Junior is coming up for parole, so he's going to get out and come see us soon. And he better do it too.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Yes, definitely.

JIMMY CARPER: I want to see just what a hunk he is.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Someone got dibs.

[LAUGHTER]

JIMMY CARPER: I want to say happy birthday to Sarah de Palma.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Happy birthday.

JIMMY CARPER: God. It's her birthday today on the 14th. And although this is not her birthday, I want to-- I guess wish Beth Richards a happy new body.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Yes.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: A happy new birthday.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes. Exactly.

VANESSA Born into her new gender.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes. Yes.

VANESSA And I have not heard from her yet, and I have definitely got a tongue lashing for her.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Ooh.

VANESSA I need to know how you are doing, Beth.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: She is doing fine, actually. She left me a message on my machine. I haven't returned her call. And she sounds exactly like the same old Beth. So everything is fine with her.

VANESSA I thought everything would have changed.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

[LAUGHTER]

Well, apparently it did. She forgot my phone number.

JIMMY CARPER: Ooh. Ooh. Ooh. OK, let's-- the music that you heard at the top of the hour, the first one that I dedicated to Sandy of the *Grateful Dead* show *Dead Air*. Jeff Krasner doing "Maybe Love Will Make Sense to Me" and followed that up by with Suede with her smash hit "Built for Comfort, Not For Speed." Now, a couple of things before we really get into it. And usually I'm more-- I got it more together than those.

VANESSA We got lots of papers.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: I know. I know. I know. I know. Let's see.

VANESSA Hit *The Mad Dash*.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: First of all, put this on your calendar, boys and girls. August the 18th, there is a show at 6:30 at Keys West, which is located 817 West Dallas. This is the yearly production-- Dan Gil Productions of *Live 2002*. It's a two and 1/2 hour show of live entertainment by Houston artists.

So I mean there's no other show like it in Houston. All live entertainment. No lip-syncing. And it's of course, the proceeds are for the Gulf Coast archive and Museum. This show makes enough to pay the rent for the museum for an entire year.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Wow.

JIMMY CARPER: That's important this show is. So August the 18th, Keys West, be there for Dan Gil and Bob Balton's production of *Live 2002*. Now tonight, Sunday, July the 14th at the outpost, Emperor Shawn Carter will be hosting his birthday show. That's at 6:00. There's going to be food and cocktails at 6:00, and showtime will be at 7:00.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: His birthday is next week.

JIMMY CARPER: Well, it's his birthday month.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Well, it's his birthday month. His birthday is actually the same as mine.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, really?

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Yeah, we share.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, cool.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: And Jim McColgan. So I guess so well.

JIMMY CARPER: Wow.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Lots of birthdays.

[LAUGHS]

This is a busy day.

JIMMY CARPER: This show will benefit the Montrose Clinic Women's Program. So this is not as traumatic as the one last year when he turned 30.

VANESSA Ooh.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

VANESSA Almost.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah. He's used to it now.

VANESSA Oh. He's a puppy.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

[LAUGHS]

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

VANESSA He's still a puppy.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: And don't forget, this is a neat thing if you can make it. It is every Thursday at noon. There's a recovery from food addiction meeting at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. And that's at 1805 West Alabama. This is folks that are a fellowship of food addicts dedicated to the physical, spiritual, and emotional recovery, achieved by abstaining from flour, sugar, and wheat. This is put together by Ed Barnes. And I don't know if you know Ed Barnes.

VANESSA Yes.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: I mean he is really a huge guy, and he's already lost 80 pounds. So I mean he's really serious about this. And maybe you can be too. That's noon every Thursday at St. Stephen's Episcopal.

VANESSA St. Stephen Episcopal?
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes. And the art contest for the Houston council of clubs. This is the Louis 30, 30th anniversary of Louis, which is Lettuce Entertain You. And they're looking for original art. Now, you must have it submitted by July the 17th. So that's really coming up. And if you need more information about that, contact Lloyd Powell at realloyd@prodigy.net. That's R-E-A-L-L-O-Y-D @prodigy.net. And last but not least--

VANESSA Lots of announcements.
EDWARDS
FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, I know it.

VANESSA For busy people.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I will read these first.

VANESSA Oh.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

[LAUGHS]

JIMMY CARPER: The men's gathering has their next meeting.

VANESSA Whole gallery.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Chris.

VANESSA Chris.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah. Get in there.

CHRIS: Keep talking.

JIMMY CARPER: The men's gathering is having their next meeting at the Community Gospel Church located at 4305 Lillian. That's Saturday, July the 20th at 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM. The topic is first impressions. How do you present yourself? And the address there-- 4305 Lillian. Yes. OK. Chris.

CHRIS: Yes. There was two other fundraisers that are coming up. And I thought I brought the information with me, but I don't have to track it down for later on. Well, there is CATS, the Community Awareness for Transgender Support shelter benefit.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

CHRIS: It's going to be held at the Rainbow Room.

JIMMY CARPER: Ooh.

CHRIS: Now that's not Club Rainbow. You're going to a--

JIMMY CARPER: Was that the one way out in BFE?

CHRIS: Yeah. BFE next to Bush.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, OK.

CHRIS: It's the bar up the-- near the airport. And I'll get the address for you later on.

JIMMY CARPER: OK.

CHRIS: I believe that's the Saturday.

VANESSA EDWARDS So that's what BFE stands for.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Like, the 20th?

VANESSA EDWARDS Bush-FE.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

CHRIS: Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. There was a few.

VANESSA EDWARDS I didn't say it.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

CHRIS: But the concert benefit is going to be at the Rainbow Room, and I'm going to get the address here in a little bit and make sure I have the information.

JIMMY CARPER: OK.

CHRIS: And then on Sunday--

JIMMY CARPER: Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!

VANESSA EDWARDS Oh, there you go.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

CHRIS: EJ is doing a benefit for the Houston Lesbian Gay Community Center.

JIMMY CARPER: Really?

CHRIS: And it's going to be--

JIMMY CARPER: Usually, their benefits are for the little boys who take their clothes off.

CHRIS: Well, maybe they'll be there.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Oh.

CHRIS: But I'll have to get the information on that as well.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

CHRIS: But that is going to be happening-- I believe it's also their 10th anniversary.

JIMMY CARPER: Ooh.

CHRIS: So it's going to be a double feature.

JIMMY CARPER: OK. Something really quick. I wanted to put in here, and it's an email that you sent to me. And I was reminded of it because in the letter from Junior, he wanted to know how we all-- if we all had a good time on the 4th of July. And you sent this.

And I'm going to quote you, "how did President-select George W. Bush spend his Pride Day 2002? Doped up with his butt lifted in the air while a man shoved a garden hose up his rear end. Well, that's right. The man who wouldn't sign a Gay Pride proclamation for two years in a row spent the morning with an icon up his backside. Irony. Got to love it."

CHRIS: I had to clean it up there when I send that on hand. And it was like--

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: How do you clean that up?

[LAUGHTER]

Not my job.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, my, my, my, my--

CHRIS: For those who don't remember, that was the day the president went for his colo-- oh, not colostomy.

JIMMY CARPER: No.

CHRIS: I don't know. Well, when they did a little search and destroy mission up his wazoo and--

JIMMY CARPER: Get a fissure. I don't know something. Hemorrhoids, whatever.

CHRIS: Yeah. When Cheney became president for a couple of hours.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Exploratory mission.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah. There we go.

CHRIS: I think they were searching for his mind and came up negative.

JIMMY CARPER: They find it.

CHRIS: All right. So let me go find--

JIMMY CARPER: Look in the little head.

CHRIS: Ooh.

VANESSA Oh. Oh.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

CHRIS: I don't think Laura would agree. I'll come back later on when I've got the information for you on those benefits.

JIMMY CARPER: No. It's way past time to get these folks on air.

VANESSA Ah, yes. How do I do?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Air.

VANESSA Air. Three. Hello. Is anybody there?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Hello.

VANESSA Hi. Hello. Oh-oh. Did we lose him?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: I don't know how.

VANESSA CARPER:It's red.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

VANESSA It's lost?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: It should be there.

VANESSA Hello. Talona. Talona.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Hello.

VANESSA Can anybody hear us?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

[LAUGHS]

JIMMY CARPER: What have I done wrong?

VANESSA This is interesting.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE I can hear you.

COOP:

VANESSA Oh, you can hear me.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Sorry.

VANESSA Sorry. We pushed the wrong button.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah. No, we didn't push the right one.

VANESSA Oh, we didn't push the right.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

VANESSA OK.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Thank you, Chris.

[LAUGHS]

CHRIS: I've only been doing this--

VANESSA She's answering, and we're just going on and on.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: I've only been doing this 15 years. Why should I know how to do it?

VANESSA Hey. Well, I haven't been doing it at all. I'm just going to sitting here looking at the buttons flash. And oh, isn't
EDWARDS that pretty?

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Welcome to *After Hours*. You've already gotten a little bit of a taste of what we do here.

VANESSA Oh.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Thank you.

COOP:

VANESSA Oh, we're a little wild here. It's a Saturday-- well, actually it's not a Saturday night anymore. I guess we can't
EDWARDS really say that. But anyway, very, very late Saturday.

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: It's Saturday night until you've gone to bed.

VANESSA Well.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

[LAUGHTER]

I'm not going to go there. Already going to bed and already back up again. That's not OK

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah. My, my, my--

VANESSA Early to bed, early to rise and all that other good stuff. But I know any window there. Anyway, I want to introduce
EDWARDS our guest for today. We have Talona Marie Coop from Dallas, Texas. And many of you may not be familiar with
FOSTER: her or familiar with the name, but she is here for a reason. And that is-- in fact, I'll let you explain this. Talona,
what is your claim to fame here?

TALONA MARIE Well, basically, I did a little bit of lobbying, and it paid off. Dallas has passed a non-discrimination ordinance that
COOP: includes both sexual orientation and real or perceived gender identity. And the credit goes to Laura Miller and
the council members from Dallas.

There's some great people here in Dallas right now that have done a lot of work in different organizations. But
from the beginning, there were a few that wanted to include transgender but didn't have the wording down
correct and didn't-- we're just wanting to include the word transgender as part of sexual orientation under part of
the ordinance.

And I just kept lobbying, and pushing, and contacting people to ask them to be more inclusive to include gender identity, real or perceived gender identity. And actually, I wanted them to include it separately in the ordinance. They didn't choose to do it that way, but they did include it as part of the definition of sexual orientation. And it was a fair compromise. And I think it's-- the ordinance is if a huge victory for the transgender community, both locally and for the state.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Just a little background here. This is the first citywide ordinance here in the state of Texas that covers gender identity. We had a couple of other cities that had passed nondiscrimination ordinances but only extended those to sexual orientation. Dallas is the first one to actually go that extra step and spell out gender identity, along with sexual orientation being covered in their nondiscrimination ordinance, correct?

TALONA MARIE COOP: That's correct. And I think that the Dallas community, it's just recently our transgender community has just recently started to really organize. And we've always had really good support group type organizations here, organizations like Purple Light Transgender Services and organizations for different facets of the transgender community, like multiplex cross-dressers club and other groups like that.

So we've been organized good in that area. But we haven't been as well-organized as some of the other communities like Houston, Austin, and other cities as far as transgender issues.

And so this year been a lot of great change for the transgender community here. We're finally organizing and starting to work on advocacy, and education, and making a presence known in both the heterosexual and the gay and lesbian community.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: You definitely pulled off a major coup with the addition into Dallas' nondiscrimination ordinance, and it really wowed everyone here in the state of Texas. You captured a lot of folks' imagination.

TALONA MARIE COOP: But I tell people is, you know what, if each one of us just does a little bit of lobbying, a little bit of phone calls, a little bit of emails, a little bit of letters, each one of us just takes the time to get involved just a little bit, and stand up for our rights a little bit, and educate people a little bit, it can really make a huge difference. Just ordinary people, everyday people in the community.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Exactly. And it just takes that first start. Before we get into this fully, I just wanted to get a little bit of background from you beforehand. Can you give us some-- I guess the history of Talona up until the move to Dallas. Or have you always been from Dallas originally?

TALONA MARIE COOP: Well, I lived in Tampa, Florida for eight years. And I moved here a little less than two years ago.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: You've been transitioned for quite some time now.

TALONA MARIE COOP: I transitioned back in 1997, with a reservations company, major hotel industry company in Tampa. And I moved out here because at the time, I got promoted and came out here during that transfer period.

VANESSA Were married at the time?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE No, I wasn't. No, I wasn't. But I am now. I've got a really supportive husband. And that really helps out a lot when

COOP: you've got a partner that really supports what you do. And he's a really great guy.

VANESSA Exactly. Now, coming out to Dallas, you had transferred out here on your job. Once you got to Dallas, what were

EDWARDS your first impressions of it?

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Well--

COOP:

VANESSA And when was this? Was this just a couple of years ago?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Yeah. One thing is I took my time before deciding what I really thought about Dallas until I'd lived here for a while

COOP: and really gotten to know the people and traveled a little bit and before I made any decisions about what I thought. But in a lot of ways, to be honest, I felt, and this was just my personal opinion, that Dallas was actually a little bit kinder than Tampa, Florida was to me as a transgender person. But part of that, I think had to do with the fact that-- is in earlier stages of transition in Florida.

And when you're more obvious as a transgender or people can pinpoint it more, some people are willing to give you more of a hard time about it, obviously. But when I transitioned in 1997, it was a difficult time period because there was a big restroom issue with the employer that I was at.

VANESSA I remember that. In fact, there was something that reprinted in the tats newsletter. I believe it was a Denny's?

EDWARDS Was it not? There was an incident where a number of transgenders and female impersonators were kicked out of

FOSTER: this one restaurant in two separate incidents. And yet, I guess made at least regional news, if not, national news.

I guess this is a general attitude down there. And in Florida, is there a lot of negativity towards the transgenders?

TALONA MARIE What's funny is I always tell people I moved from one Bush state to another because Jeb Bush was governor of

COOP: Florida. And then of course, I moved over here, which is George Bush country. So I was moving from Bush state to Bush state.

VANESSA Can't get away.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Well actually, we weren't too thrilled about him being president, but it did get him out of Texas.

TALONA MARIE Yeah.

COOP:

VANESSA So good.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Yeah. There's benefits for that. And thank you for sharing the thoughts of the colonoscopy with us.

COOP:

[LAUGHTER]

It's just kind of like-- I don't want to think about that one.

VANESSA OH, yes. Exactly. We're going where no man has ever gone before and not really wanting to either.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

TALONA MARIE But when I did first transition there, they wanted me to continue to use the male restroom until I had given them

COOP: proof that I had genital surgery.

VANESSA Now, I know they've got--

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE And of course-- I'm sorry. Go ahead.

COOP:

VANESSA I'm sorry. I know they've got the issues with the birth certificates there in Florida where-- in fact, it's one of the

EDWARDS few states in the union that even post surgically did not allow birth certificate changes for transsexuals.

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Wow.

COOP:

VANESSA And I don't know if that factored into it. But I do realize that Florida has a lot of the same general mentality that I

EDWARDS guess Houston-- were not Houston. Texas does.

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Well, I tell you what's odd in my transition was that I went ahead and got a legal name change in 1998, 1999.

COOP: Before I came to Texas, I had my name change. I didn't try for the gender change. At the time, I was a little bit uneducated about trying to go for that, especially since I hadn't had any genital surgery. But I went ahead and got the name change.

VANESSA Can you explain how you came about the name change?

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE I just did.

COOP:

VANESSA I mean not the name change. I'm sorry. The gender change. I just blanked that part.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Well, I tell you. I'm going to be honest with you.

COOP:

VANESSA Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE But I'm not going to divulge too much but for reasons that I have. But to tell you-- to give you-- to have an

COOP: overview of it, I went to court this year and with the right documentation that was needed. Got the gender change. And I had my name changed too to my husband's last name.

VANESSA Excellent. That was just excellent.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE So I've got just his last name, and I've got female on my driver's license. For confidentiality reasons, I can't go

COOP: into all the details of it, but I haven't had genital surgery. So it can be done. And I think that there's a big hush-hush thing in the transgender community about gender changes and about all of these things. But the fact is these states need to change. These courts need to change.

There was one case recently, where I believe it was somebody from Illinois, had non-surgical, had gotten an F on their license and then went down to Georgia.

VANESSA Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE I'm sure you're probably familiar with that. But went down to Georgia, and then they denied it from state to state.

COOP: And such that person, she had to have a male on her driver's license, which is just terrible.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

VANESSA One of the difficulties--

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE It comes back to society's ideals that sex and gender have everything to do with what's in your pants, and

COOP: they're not looking at the whole picture. They're not looking at what gender identity and what gender really is. So many factors are involved in making up one's gender. And we have to change society's ideas about gender. And it comes through education, and it comes through making them aware of these issues.

VANESSA EDWARDS To the realization that this is about relationships. It's about loving the individual, not the gender or not the image just to please the rest of society.

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE COOP: And it's like I said recently. I was on a different radio show a couple of months ago. I tell people if you have two consenting adults, it really doesn't matter what their gender is. If we're going to abide by the fact that consenting adults should all have equal rights in our country, then everybody should have the right to marry the person of their choice. And that's what it's really about. And everybody should be able to live the gender role that they want to.

VANESSA EDWARDS How did you go about meeting your husband there in Dallas? Jimmy was bugging me a little bit earlier about the relationships and lack thereof.

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Yes. Yes.

VANESSA EDWARDS Yes, on my part. And of course, I've got a lot of friends who care about me and are gently nudging me in that direction. But did you meet your husband through work? Or was this just a through social circumstances? Or was it just a serendipitous type thing?

TALONA MARIE COOP: I met him through a mutual friend of ours, had introduced us, and we really hit it off. And I've always been attracted to heterosexual men. And for him, this was the first transsexual woman that he had dated and been with. And that was a new experience for him. And there was a lot of education, a curiosity on his part. But he was the first person that I've met that just wasn't-- what's the word?

VANESSA EDWARDS Just waiting.

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE COOP: He just loved me for me. He would support me no matter what, I mean a decision I made as far as different transgender decisions, as far as procedures or whatever. He just loved me for me. And he fell in love with me, and I fell in love with him. And after waiting 31 years to find somebody, it was a real blessing to say the least.

VANESSA EDWARDS Well, hey you got there. So listen, I'm proud of you.

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Thank you.

COOP:

VANESSA EDWARDS Actually your marriage was just earlier this year, was it not?

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE COOP: Yes, it was. And we decided-- we had marriage and a church that we go to at gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-mostly church. But I had my legal gender changed. I had my name changed to his too. But we haven't attempted to go get a heterosexual marriage license.

VANESSA Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Although strangely enough, I have had my birth certificate changed to female.

COOP:

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, excellent.

TALONA MARIE Which is one thing that's very hard, especially I haven't had genital surgery. I'm not ashamed to tell people. It

COOP: doesn't bother me. For financial reasons, I haven't gotten there yet. And eventually, I'm sure I will.

VANESSA Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE Because that's goal that I want to do. But that was an accomplishment in itself that I managed to get the change

COOP: on the birth certificate to female.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes.

TALONA MARIE Most people have to go through the surgery in order to do that.

COOP:

VANESSA Exactly.

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

TALONA MARIE And once again, I can't go into the details of it, but I can just tell you there are so many loops that transgenders

COOP: have to go through that regular people don't have to go through in order to live their lives the way they want to. And my husband and I could easily slip through the system and get a heterosexual marriage license and that being one of these cases, like Christie Lee Littleton or whatever. Or not because we'd be ending our relationship but just simply because of public curiosity people, people wanting to dig into it.

So we chose for right now just to let me to have my-- would change my name to his, and we got married in the church. And that would be enough for us right now rather than go get the marriage license and go through all that. But the reason I'm bringing it up, and a lot of people wouldn't bring it up, they just keep hush-hush about it, all these things. They're so hush-hush in the transgender community. The reason is because if people don't talk about this, it's never going to change. Big things aren't going to change.

VANESSA Oh, exactly. I mean--

EDWARDS

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: Exactly.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: There's a lot of repercussions. And for that, many people do want to keep it private. But then again, love is something that's not really done for reasons of just going out and being public about it and making, I guess, issues about it. When people fall in love, it's similar to how you described. We just do it. We do it quietly.

But as you were saying, you don't hide from the reality. You basically let people know. But it's not the focus, or it's not an issue unless someone brings it up, and then it's just more a matter of fact explanation. Just, I guess, a little bit of background on Dallas.

Now of course, you moved into a city that's not exactly known for being a hotbed of activity as far as activism goes. It's a great city for fundraising. It's a wonderful HRC town because of the fact that you get a lot of donors up there and folks are very great at writing the large checks, which is exactly the polar opposite of Houston.

JIMMY CARPER: No kidding.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Houston, you can't raise the funds, but you can pull people out in the streets at the drop of a hat. Whereas in Dallas, in fact, this isn't just the transgender community, but the gay and lesbian community is also said the same thing. They don't understand it, and they don't know how to activate people up there.

TALONA MARIE COOP: Well I tell you, Dallas has the Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance, and they've been around for over 20 years. And here we are. I'm glad that I'm affiliated with a lot of great people that are helping me start Dallas Transgender Alliance here. And we have our first meeting July 17th.

But here we are. We're a new organization. And they have-- some of these organizations have 20 years ahead of us, and we're just starting. And it's exciting, and it's new. But if they can do it, we can too.

Some of these organizations have done some good things on behalf of transgenders, but they haven't included, I mean their mission statements and in their policies gender identity. And they haven't include transgenders. They've just included gays and lesbians. I think they're missing out on a great deal of the population by doing that. And I think it's unfortunate.

So this is an opportunity right here in the Dallas area with this new advocacy organization to really make some change. And I think it's really going to open up some people's eyes. And these other organizations are getting big sponsors, like American Airlines, corporate sponsors, \$5,000 or more on a spot. If they can do it, we can too. Absolutely.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Well, Dallas' alliance, as I mentioned, is great at the fundraising. But as far as mobilizing folks, in fact, it was made painfully aware to me at the lobby days that we had in 99, both the transgender lobby day, in which we had, I think, about 22 people from Houston alone, about another 20 or so from Austin. And we had folks from around the state, but we did not have anyone from Dallas at all. It's zero.

TALONA MARIE COOP: Exactly. and that's exactly what I came into when I moved here. I was like, wait a minute, they've got other stuff going on in Houston.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Well, the quality begins at home is the same thing. With the gay and lesbian community, there were six people from Dallas. Grand total-- one transgender and five from the gay and lesbian community. And yet, Galveston alone sent about a dozen people up there. And you look at places that are much smaller that are much more active. And then you look at Dallas and you wonder, what happened? Where did everyone go? Did they just fall off the face of the train in here?

TALONA MARIE COOP: Yeah. I tell you what. We haven't even had our-- we have our first official meeting July 17. And to tell you how much interest is here already, I have an online group membership of online and online DTA newsletter for Dallas transgender lines that I've started about a month or two ago. And we've already got over-- we got about 55 members already.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Excellent.

TALONA MARIE COOP: I mean, and that's just starting out in a month or two. Imagine what we can do with a couple of years time.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

TALONA MARIE COOP: And really getting into the nonprofit status and whatnot.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Goo. I applaud you because Dallas has been a tough nut to crack for us. In fact, Robbie Washburn was about the only person from up there in the area. She was living in Louisville at the time. But she tried, for the longest time, to infuse a little bit of the activist bug up there in the community. And a lot of it was just met with general apathy, really, or in some cases, maybe even disdain. How did you--

TALONA MARIE COOP: There a lot of transgenders that-- and it's not just in the Dallas area. But there's a lot of transgenders, and it's certainly their right to do that. They want to slip into society comfortably into the new gender roles and blend. And it's nice to blend.

But at the same time, that's not a choice that I made. I made a choice to be open and out about who I am. And I think by doing that myself and by getting other people around me, they are willing to do that too. It takes away that fear and more people are going to get involved.

And so I really think there's going to be a lot of good changes happening. And we saw that when we were together-- you and I were together at the equality ExxonMobil rally. I brought some people from the transgender community.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Many folks out there.

TALONA MARIE COOP: And we made a good impression because we had a nice sized group. We really did. And people were like, wow. The transgender community is really starting to get involved here.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Exactly. and that's exactly what needs to be seen. And I was very, very much afraid that it was just going to be and myself out there. And to see that the rest of the folks that you managed to get out to the rally itself, it lets, number one, the rest of the community realize that we are part of this community.

And yes, we're not just part of the community in name. We're actually there in person, helping in the effort shoulder to shoulder, to try and push this over the hump, to try and accomplish something. And additionally, that's also how we prove to the rest of the community and society at large that yes, we are serious about this, and we're not just paying lip service. This is something--

TALONA MARIE COOP: Yeah. That's very eloquently said. That's exactly the point. And I was just an example that it's kind of like Rosa Parks decided not to sit in the back of the bus anymore. And we're not going to sit on-- transgender community is not going to be sitting in the back of the bus anymore.

We want the same rights, and we are civil rights. We want our agenda to be on the same level as everyone else in the community. And things are changing, and things are happening. And they're going to continue to as long as we keep pushing in that direction. So that's--

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: I've got a saying that I keep repeating in all of our lobby days. It's basically civil rights is not open for debate. Civil rights or everyone's rights. And that's what it boils down to. And unless someone actually stands up and takes that initial first step and basically says, look, this is wrong, we need to address this, then it just continues going on and no one really pays much attention. But they have to have that first notice. And they have to have followed through with it.

Sometimes, it does take a good number of years. I mean this has been going on, well, since 1969, since Stonewall. And we've had activists that have been heavily involved in this for years here in Houston-- Phyllis Frye and Sarah DePalma. In fact, she was the reason that I got involved in this. Otherwise, I would have been one of those closet cases. Trust me.

TALONA MARIE COOP: I might even have been really great role model for me, that I have the courage to come out and do these things because I'm the kind of person-- like I told you when I was down at that rally, I said I've been doing some radio shows, and interviews, and stuff, I'm scared to death to get in front of people. It scares me to death.

But you know what? I'm doing it because if feel great about doing it, I know it's the right thing to do. And society has this-- is still miseducated and has this idea that somehow, all these different groups are fighting for special rights. And it's not about special rights. It's about pulling ourselves up from third class citizenship up to equal rights what it's about.

VANESSA EDWARDS FOSTER: Exactly. And trust me, the public speaking thing will come in time. I was in the same boat, extremely shy and very much did not want attention, did not want to get out there in front of people. And I had a hell of a time just trying to get beyond this. And really, it drove me nuts. But it was just a matter of jumping in the deep end. And once you jump in, all of a sudden, you start learning how to swim. You start learning exactly what you did right the first time and what you did wrong, and you learn from those mistakes.

TALONA MARIE COOP: And just to give you an example, I didn't get a chance to talk to you when you were in Dallas about this. But after that equality ExxonMobil rally, I made my rounds, and I said thank you to a couple of the council members from Dallas that were there-- John Loza and a lot of [INAUDIBLE].

And I also got a chance to talk to Elizabeth Birch. Of course, everybody knows she the executive director of Human Rights Campaign. And I'll tell you what, she was really impressed with the transgender turnout there and with what we had to say. And she totally floored me because she basically told me-- and I don't remember the exact words, so don't quote me on this.

But she basically said to me, you know what? I'm tired of pushing away transgender rights because next year when we're pushing legislation again on a federal level, I'm going to push for gender identity. I'm going to push for transgenders whether they like it or not-- to the politicians. So to hear Elizabeth Birch tell me that face to face, whether those things are actually followed through upon--