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Interviewee: Van Cleave, Kay

Interview Date: July 6, 2010

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Early LGBT Houston

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Place: Van Cleave Home, Houston Heights

Interviewer: John Goins

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

Born in 1937 and moving to Houston in 1953, Kay Van Cleave offers a glimpse into early gay life there and the beginnings of its organization. As a member of the group that founded the Diana's in the 1950s, she was present at the earliest of the events. In her early years, she associated with an elite, moneyed, group that did not involve itself politically. Her interview reveals the atmosphere in the fifties and sixties with regard to coming out in those years, the lifestyle of gay individuals, and the issues of race and class. In time, however, Kay became more "out" publicly and participated in groups that she considered to be important. This included among others, membership in PFLAG and forming the first Alcoholics Anonymous chapter, Lambda, for gay women and men in Houston.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Kay Van Cleave

Interviewed by: **John Goins**

Date: **July 6, 2010**

Transcribed by: **Michelle Kokes**

Location: **Houston, Texas**

KVC: Okay I was born in 1937 in Fort Worth, Texas and my aunt (my father's sister) had a lot of money. They... she had married a doctor. She was one of the few people in the 1920's I think that got a college education. Their father was a doctor and in those days you got paid in chickens. So they moved around. When I was doing genealogy it was so funny because they would go over to Venus, Texas and go over here, all the kids were born in a different town because you were being paid in chickens and stuff. But she was very ambitious. So when she went to college they all moved to Denton which I thought was real funny, 7 or 8 kids they all just picked up and went. She had two dresses. She washed one and wore one but she managed to get a college degree. She married a doctor which is exactly what she wanted to do. So she was a big shot. And every time anybody had children, got sick or whatever they went to Aunt Sewanee's house. She was named for the University for the South in Sewanee. Okay so then we lived in what they used to call oil camps. Daddy worked for Gulf Oil Company and they had these little camps and they put pipes and stuff in them. Usually in the back side of the huge lot they would have several houses that at one point belonged to the supervisors of these camps. But then later on if somebody wanted to... I don't know if they... they couldn't have bought them they must have rented them but anyway they could do that. And we lived in Shreveport (which I hated – it was so dull!) until I was 15 and we moved to Houston because daddy got transferred.

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IV: What year would that be?

C: About '53. And I went to Milby High School and I was this little kid from this Shreveport was podunk, real podunk and we lived on the lake. We lived in somebody's fishing camp until we moved into town in those houses. So I was pretty sheltered. My first day at Milby High School somebody took a knife when the loud speaker came on and threw it in the loud speaker. Then when I went to lunch somebody had a condom. They put on a banana and hooked it on somebody so they wore it all on the...I mean I went home and I said, "I don't think I want to go do this." My mother was very kind she said, "Well you have to." She said, "There's no way around this." We lived here, my father never made a good financial investment. He could have bought in West U or he could have bought into Garden Villas he bought in Garden Villas. But we had a real nice house there. It was in a 180 by 210 lot. He liked to drink a lot but I think my mother just kind of kept a lid on that and so... and he loved her he was crazy about her even though he barked around. But he had a garden and that garden I think helped him take the edge off of it. The kids (his siblings and he) were required to go with old doc their father on emergency calls and most of the other ones were just cold fishes who ran around on their wives and did everything and daddy was very sensitive and I think going and seeing mangled up people, the doctor was so fat that he couldn't drive the car. So the kids would drive him in the car and they had actually taken the door off on his side so that he could get in and out of it. But here these kids were watching all this mangled up stuff. Then his father, his mother was really and intellectual and all of the daughter in laws really liked her a lot. But she wasn't... she was no housekeeper she did not like women's work and he kept her barefoot and pregnant for about 10 or 12 years. So she just sat around and read a lot. Passive aggressive reading. And she didn't really control the kids so when doc would come home he would beat them up. So they all hated

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him and I think my father was really conflicted by that plus everybody in that family had an eating disorder and an alcohol disorder. They were a mess but they were interesting. They were a lot of fun. They could do really strange things. My genealogy is very interesting. Well anyway we lived and we came to Houston and I didn't make friends very easily because I was real shy and I had like two or three friends the year and a half I was at Milby. And then it was already predetermined (everything was predetermined for me) that I would go to North Texas because one of mother's sisters was a professor there and I could live with her free. I hated that. But I did like a school that had a degree in Jazz music. In the meantime I found out I could dance real well. I couldn't do a lot of stuff but I could dance real well. So I only went with dance instructors anything that had to do with dancing. But I would say ballroom dancing. Now they call it I think sports dancing that really athletic kind of stuff. And I dated a guy for a long time. I don't know why these guys dated me because of course I didn't have sex with them or anything. I guess because I could dance well and I was pretty cute. So anyway we did exhibitions at dances. I learned a lot from this one guy because he had dated an older woman who worked like in a dance studio and I loved that. I was in really good shape throughout my life dancing has always been important up until about the last 10 years. Okay so when I was at North Texas I had no idea I was gay. I just knew I didn't want to screw with guys. And I lived sort of a strange life because I was always on edge about everything thinking there was something a little amiss. But I just decided I was probably very peculiar and I didn't like... I got a lot of attention from men and I didn't like that at all. I mean even later on. I just kind of wanted to be left alone. But the last, towards the last... oh and in high school in Shreveport I didn't know this but I had fallen in love with my best friend. And I helped her get homecoming

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queen and I did all these things that were real goofy you know and I was silly about a lot of it later. But that was the first time that probably that it cropped up and then I didn't have it again.

IV: At that time did you - how did you think about that or did you think about it more in retrospect, is what it meant, or when it was going on?

KVC: At the time I just felt like I was her best friend. In fact I was the maid of honor at her wedding. I didn't like that either. I looked good in the picture though. But then the last, I don't know if it was last year, there was a woman that, I always liked very small women so this women (girl) was always real needy and she was real cute and she's probably a big user. But she liked to lump up you know get in the bed with you and stuff like this. Well some fireworks kind of went off and I thought, "Well what is this?" and then she wanted to come home to Houston with me. She lived with her grandmother and I wouldn't let her. I thought, "Something haywire is going on here and I need to deal with this and I don't need to deal with it around her." So I got out of college and considering the fact that the second half of it I probably didn't apply myself much I made pretty good grades. I get out and I have no skills. About the only thing that was available was to teach school (hated that).

IV: Now which year was this you graduated?

KVC: '59. I graduated from high school in '55 and that was in '59. So the only job I could get really was teaching school. So I ended up in as they say in the south (or in England) a mare's nest of problems. I was sent to Marshall Junior High School. I had a degree in Spanish and at that time I could read and write it like I do English. I couldn't speak it so they sent me to this school over here with all these Mexican Americans and I finally had enough sense to say, "Look" to the students who were like 4 years younger than I was, "I don't have a clue what I'm doing so here's what I'm going to do. I'll teach you to read and write it and then you all help me

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learn the other side of it." So we all had a deal and everybody made good grades. I had to do that. But there was a girl in that school that really came on to everybody. She had great big tits. She was very flirty and she flirted with all of us, all the younger women and she flirted with a lot of the men. She just was a real problem. And so well all kind of got caught up in that. You know when I see these things about the teachers and their students and all that kind of stuff. I know that there are times that if you are pretty vulnerable and somebody comes along you don't have to act on it but it creates a problem. So then I knew that there was something that was not right. Not only... and she got caught at it because she was Pentecostal by the way and she would go in for the Christian services before school and play the piano and swing her boobs. I mean we just stand there and watched that. I said, "My God!" but the one guy she accused of bothering her turned out to be a pastor at the school. And they investigated it and they found out that she was the accusation she made on everybody were wrong and that she was an instigator. So the principal told me, "Let me tell you something. You all..." Because it was me and P.E. teacher and another woman, two P.E. teachers and me. And I really didn't know them very well but he said, "You know you all almost got caught up in a mess and you all need to be very careful about this kind of stuff because there are kids that will see you coming and really make your life miserable." So anyway I transferred to Bellaire High School which was the frying pan into the fire. I was not academically prepared to be over there, particularly in Spanish. So I stayed over there about a year and lived at home and I think at that time I started hearing about that there was some gay life in Houston. I had no clue where it was, didn't know how to find anybody everything was so underground. But I went to... well I decided that what I was going to do was go to a get another job. And I went to work (again totally unprepared) as a secretary at McCann Erickson advertising agency.

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IV: Okay so you stopped teaching?

KVC: Yes.

IV: And that this point not only you figured out there's gay life somewhere in Houston but you know it exists out there somewhere.

KVC: Somewhere, something's out there.

IV: You are also thinking there might be in Houston?

KVC: Yeah it was kind of... it never made the papers because the only thing that ever made the papers was when somebody got busted. So I went to work at McCann Erickson and the first person I ran into was Kern Tipps used to broadcast the Southwest Conference games and his secretary decided I was it. She's cute, real cute. That's the one I went to visit in Wimberley in November. Well we took up with each other. We moved in together and she was gone all the time.

IV: Wow.

KVC: Wow she did not really know who and what she was and but she had been around a lot. She was real, real cute so from that she found out all the guys, the gay guys wanted to take her out. She wore beautiful clothes. She was Irish so she had really, really thick hair and it always looked perfect no matter what. And she was very charming so these guys always wanted to take her to office parties. So that was part of why she was gone the rest of the time she was chasing women. Well I didn't like that a whole lot at all. But she found out about Charles Hebert and Charles Hebert at the times was the grand dame at the time of the A group gay life. So she says to me, "We're moving." I said, "Where are we moving to?" She said, "Across the street from Charles Herbert." So she told me what it was and she said, "I want to go to those parties." I said, "Okay." So Charles lived on Mason Street that runs into Westheimer and if you ever and

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Brandon's stuff you've seen his mother was very wealthy and I think she was kept. But he had this beautiful townhouse and then on the end of it was a carport and then above it was created into a party area. There was a fence around it. You could have a lot of food up there so his actual living space was on the second level and then the...with this, this over the car thing being big and then being inside it was a huge area. He could accommodate 60 to 80 up there people very comfortably. The kitchen was up there, the bedrooms were downstairs. So Ms. Dorothy decided she is going to get to be his very best friend and does. She as soon as we move in she just hot foots it across the street and we became the darling of the A group.

IV: So when you met...

KVC: Dorothy...

IV: Dorothy... Dorothy was already somewhat linked to people in the lesbian and gay world?

KVC: No she had dated, she had been with people in college (which I didn't do) and so she had

already had some of that kind of experience but she was a real ambivalent about who and what

she was. But she did like those parties. And of course everybody just made over her. I mean she just, men, women I always said, "Men, women and German police dogs loved Dorothy."

Everybody in town loved Dorothy." But we just walked into a huge glamorous, beautiful, sophisticated wealthy thing over night. We went from, cute, well dressed kind of women to this door opened and boom there it was.

IV: Now this group by this time has already...

KVC: Kind of gelled.

IV: With the Diana's too right?

KVC: Well...

IV: Because the first Diana, Diana one was in '54 or something?

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KVC: Yeah but see we went into that because I think I asked her when Brandon was doing all that stuff we were all trying to figure out when we got into it. I think I went to the third one. But it was started to gel but that whole bunch was started to gel and what they mainly wanted of course was they wanted other women who looked good, who had charm, who had education to join them in business things.

IV: Oh in business things to go along with them.

KVC: To be a fit.

IV: Yes.

KVC: So the ones like Dorothy that were very charming and socially real adept and educated and cute and very well dressed we're talking about nails, we're talking about lots of make-up, we're talking about hairs always done every week kind of thing. And I liked that because I found out I just loved gay men. I liked gay men better than any bunch of people in the world. They were interesting and fun and good to us you know. If I needed my hair done I'd call someone and it'd be 8:00 at night and "Oh girl come on over I'll fix it for you." So you know we had access to a lot of generosity and I had been forever grateful about that. That and it's still going on. And in my own life I always have at least one or two very close gay men friends like brother and I'm real tight with them and I see them really more than anybody else. So Ms. Dorothy and I, just you know, we just kind of got to be "it."

IV: And this where you lived...

KVC: We lived in apartments across from Charles Herbert.

IV: So there were a lot of gays and lesbians living right around that area weren't there?

KVC: Yes.

IV: Because I read about that in the Diana.

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KVC: Yeah. Virginia Caldwell she had a house behind Saint Ann's so she was the bigger star than us. Because the first two people that everybody talked about were Virginia Caldwell and Phyllis Land and they lived in this really kind of grand house. I don't know how Virginia bought that house. She was real big friends with Rock Hudson and Tom Clark so but she also had a dog grooming shop and catered to River Oaks and I don't know whether she made that kind of money then or not but she had lots of good stuff. Then there was us but at that point everybody was really watching who brought people to those parties. They and it created a safety thing. There were no tricks. There were no dyke-y women. There were no people of color. There was not anything like that because you had to be extremely careful what you did so I felt very safe.

IV: You felt safe because at the parties... did you ever hear about parties getting busted at that point?

KVC: Well later on in Bellaire they used to raid parties but in Montrose I knew... you know the thing about it is there is a lot of money in there. When Liberace came to town he came there. When Rock Hudson came to town he came there. When Patrick Dennis who wrote Auntie Mame came to town that's where they were. They were a lot more hands off to people who had money. Whether it was in River Oaks straight or whether it was us. And you have to remember I'm on a teacher's salary. I couldn't afford a lot of stuff but the guys had to help me. So then there was another woman named Janine and Janine was so glamorous she was always "the glamour woman." Janine and I and Janine I'm trying to think who she looked like. She looked a lot like... well she kind of looked like Lauren McCall.

IV: Wow.

KVC: ...and she was as outrageous as anybody I've ever seen. They all used to drink at that bar on Main Street (Brandon knows what it is) but anyway they used to go there and drink a lot.

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They used to drink French 75's out of fruit jars and it would be Janine and 15 guys because they all just adored her. Then she would go across the street and steal flowers. Well she did end up in jail one time. She also wore picture hats and the only kind of transportation she ever had was a scooter. And so she would have to get... and she made the paper all the time. She would be dressed in a woman's suit with this picture hat and these white gloves driving the scooter down the street. She did run it into the wall in a parking garage and that was the demise of the scooter. Later she was a decorator so she was really fun. I mean these were people I'd never seen before like.

IV: Exactly. Well do you think, now when you all moved to that part of town and these people you were mostly centered around house parties...

KVC: Yes.

IV: But there were some bars but was this known as Montrose at that point or just?

KVC: Underground real underground. The first time I ever went in a gay bar I was real drunk.

I'm trying to think how I got there. I think a gay guy that I really didn't know very well somewhere I met along the way asked me if I wanted to go to this bar and it was in a house I think on the corner of Mason and you know here's Westheimer and here's the first block there's a big old house right there and then this... it went down this way and I walked in and the first time I'd ever seen a man dance together and the only thing I thought was, "God damn this is where the good looking men are!" And I just sat in there and got drunk and watched them and stuff and they were very nice and then somebody called me a cab and this cab driver drove me all the way to Garden Villas about 10 miles out and he lectured me from there to there. One about being drunk and not really knowing what I was doing and the other one was, don't go

places if you don't know people. It wasn't against gay people it was, "You don't have any

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sense." And I always appreciated that. So anyway we... we went to the [group] (23.52) I didn't... in those days you didn't date your girlfriend or your boyfriend you went with the two went with the two. But you always had a date and we made the papers a lot. And the Dianas started up and the first one I remember and it was all this controversy with Brandon about it was I remember going to Ed Hill's house on Riverside. Diana was an old Jewish section then. I remember tables set up and it was connected to the Academy Awards. The Academy Awards were very short and everybody just got rip roaring drunk and I think they had food then but it was connected and you would sit there and watch the Academy Awards and drink and be all dressed up in evening clothes. And I was real cool. Well I started winning all of the awards for women because I did I just did real outrageous things.

IV: It would be the Diana awards that you are speaking of?

KVC: Yeah and I will not tell you that it was for the greatest behavior in the world but that's what they were looking for. So, Dorothy was running around. She would call me from different places, "Would you please come get me?" It may be at somebody's house. It may be some bar. Everybody kind of hung out in La Carafe downtown and somebody told me, called me one day and said, "Dorothy is sitting in the curb down here." I said, "Then take her home. I'm not coming down there." So and it's funny because she was so outrageous and she's really turned out to be the kindest of any of that group. She got sober. She got in the Episcopal Church. She is really a worthwhile person. Very kind, very sweet. So she did come around.

IV: Well let me ask you so right at this time let's stay in the same time period do you recall any kind of news media... you said for instance let's go back there where you said that you made the papers a lot. Explain that.

KVC: In the society section.

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IV: In the society section, of course this would not have had anything to do with lesbian or gay you would just be in there because of...

KVC: Well the people we were with very well known the men.

IV: They were just well known?

KVC: Yeah everybody knew him. Charles Hebert was I think was in banking and Bill Bridges, I forgot what he did but his father was a doctor and he was very wealthy. I'm trying to think of who else was in there. My college roommate's uncle lived across the street from us and he was the one who wrote most of the Freeberg I've forgotten what his last name was but Freeberg he looked like a turtle. He did not go over too well in gay life because he looked like a turtle. He wrote these parodies that were so outrageous you just wanted to... that's what I liked was the cleverness and the glamour and the sophistication and this welcome, "We're so glad you are here. Thank God you look good!" You know kind of stuff.

IV: Where did these parodies end up?

KVC: Well at the Diana's it was in the beginning it was like a roast and so they would have these songs. One of them. We all remember this one. It was "I lost my love at Weingarten's and cried all the way to Sears." There was a Weingarten's over by Sears on Main Street. It was clever, real clever. Any parody that you have heard anywhere it was equal to that. Polished. And they knew what everybody in town had done because this was a real close group so everybody knew everybody else's stuff. And they would ferret that stuff out and put it in there and people would just die. Now at that time they started, Bill Bridges and Mary Ann Bridges, Mary Ann Shaw and Bill Bridges got married (convenience) and everybody, they went to their honeymoon with other people and when they came back everybody wanted to have a party for them. So they had the volleyball game which I think still goes on. And it was so funny because

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Linda Melet who had been a drum majorette and some other people got everybody, got the band they had a band they put together because a lot of these people were semiprofessional musicians and played bands and they all got way down the street. Bill Bridges has this house with a great big yard next to it. Now this is real brave stuff because it's gay. If you've got any sense and you look at it then, "Those are gay people." All of the sudden I heard this, now I was standing out there just drinking and laughing. I heard this music going down the street and Linda was coming down the street like this waving her fake baton and all of these musicians were behind her and they were playing this music and I thought, "Well I'll be damned gay people can come up with anything!" So they came in and there were seats up here and they sat down and then I forgot, it may be the women played the men but we also had a lot of mastery level P.E. type people and they were going to have a volleyball game and drinks and food. That later turned into I think a fundraiser. Diana's turned into a fundraiser.

IV: Right.

KVC: So what they what started off as a private way to entertain ourselves you know it's always think about minorities in general. Like blacks, they had house parties because you know they might have a bar someplace but they weren't welcome anyplace so what you do is you keep your stuff you know in these house parties. And then as society opens up then you move out into society. And nobody gives those things anymore that I know of. The last time I went to one of course when I quit drinking I didn't do a lot of that stuff anymore but I remember I went to one over by Bering Church and it was fairly elaborate. First of all I don't think... people don't drink like they use to so that's out. People don't want to spend that much money on other people anymore but for its day it was fabulous.

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IV: Well let's see do you think when we are back of the beginning when the Diana's starting and it's going on each year was there yet any kind of publication that you all passed around or anything that was written that was passed around or was everything entirely by word of mouth?

KVC: There was no internet. There was also a lot of other parties. A lot of, there were a lot of men couples and with a lot of money and they would have parties. One of them was the country dinner and I think Bill Bridges and them started that. But they would have they would send the invitation out through the mail and it never said gay anything on it. It just had cartoons, drawn cartoons and all of us had a name and then it would say the people who are invited are: they called me cleavage, van cleavage I had great tits. And everybody had this name and so they kind of used that name and then the food had really interesting things. Now that one everybody in the beginning brought something. The last time I went to that it was at the Polo club. Somebody belonged to that. And for that period of time I can actually say that was the best part of my life. Even as drunk as I was. It was wonderfully interesting. You know one night some guys invited me to come to River Oaks and Petula Clark was there and I got very bored with a lot of people chasing money because I had grown up with my aunt that had this money and then people lived on a farm so I didn't care one way or the other. That's one reason I don't do it up anymore. I live the way I want to and I don't give a rat's ass what anybody thinks. I make myself happy and I try not to be injurious to others (although sometimes that happens). But I would watch people that would just chasing the big bucks. So I was in this party and it was a doctor's house and I was sitting on the stairs and watching all these people rushing all around, "Oh where's Petula Clark? Woah!" And about this time this woman came and sat down beside me it was Petula Clark I said, "Girl do you like this kind of stuff?" She said, in her nice British accent, "Not at all." She said, "I'm just as down to earth as you seem like you are." And she said, "This kind of stuff

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really bores me if I have to do the house parties." She said, "Because I'm flown in by these people. I am their guest and therefore I have to put up with this." She said, "I will tell you I do not like it." So from then I was a big fan of hers because I thought, "She's pretty cool."

IV: There's real there. About the middle let's see early 60's, let's see '63 and '64 there was the first mass media that actually discussed a gay subculture or a gay and lesbian sub culture. Did you, were you aware of it?

KVC: We didn't... let me tell you what. We kind of considered ourselves apart from that. Because we were the glamorous natives and most of the people connected with that were the people that I now admire the most. The people that went out on the limb. The dykes and the drag queens and you know the activists because our main concern was our careers and our houses and how we lived. We had to protect that at all costs. So you know to this day I have friends, I've told you this the other day, that are like 80 and they've got more money than they know what to do with and I was at a party and they were all going on about Logo the channel logo and "Oh Logo it's just so wonderful." Because that's their first experience of really knowing that gay people are out and about and being looked at and everybody thinks it's cool again, like it was about the time AIDS hit. You know we come in fashion, we go out of fashion. Well we are here to stay this time. We have normed our lives to ourselves into mediocrity and boredom. But no we didn't, I didn't pay much attention to it none of my friends did.

IV: What was going on? Okay so we already talked about Montrose and how you... well you were already living in Montrose definitely before it became known to what gays refer to Montrose as.

KVC: Well it was very Greenwich Village. And so if you liked Greenwich Village you were going to love Montrose. From lower Westheimer down to what is now, that was not cut through

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then Montrose and Westheimer were just houses with restaurants in them and bars. You could just go in and out and in and out. I mean it was... Saturday night it looked like Bourbon Street.

IV: Wow.

KVC: So it was eclectic, Camille Waters had the Natural Child I think that was the name of it and it was the first Health Food restaurant down by Texas Art Supply, Nico Nicos came in and that was unusual, nobody had ever heard of that and there was a lot to do. I mean the crime for the most part in the beginning was minimal. So you were kind of safe from people. Because it was an unknown factor and it was just a lot of fun and then those art festivals, everybody just waited for those to come and now they just go.

IV: It's a different thing. But being lesbian or gay was a place you could feel less threatened and more comfortable and fit in better?

KVC: Well I felt that about most of town. So my position was that I just liked to be funky and it was that and I've always wanted to be different and I've always been different. In my family if you were different you were successful. So my sister and I both tried to be different. So to live in Montrose was different. When I moved to the Heights, nobody would be caught dead living here back in '76. And I moved out here because Barbara Tungate told me to. Well guess what? I got to be funky again! And I made, you know inadvertently made a great decision and I now live in a historical district. That's the progress but it's the same thing. But I didn't feel bothered. We usually drove our cars places we didn't really walk around much. And I was always very careful when I came out if I was by myself at night. But you know that's just common sense.

IV: Okay so organizations you had found the Diana's and you had participated in those were there any others ones that you can think of that you?

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KVC: No except the house parties and they were so regular that I somewhere I had my calendars I think because I'm getting older I decided to throw a lot of this stuff away, including some pictures that I'm real glad I got rid of. But they would start back in September, October, November, December every night there was a cocktail party someplace. Every night!

IV: Wow.

KVC: Every night we'd do our hair and put our make up on and put our clothes on and all that kind of stuff, every night. Then the ones if they had one that had a theme to it the next year they had the same theme.

IV: Goodness.

KVC: And we just thought we were hot shit if you want to know the truth.

IV: But that replaced the need for bars really, but didn't replace it but made it because you didn't really need the bars.

KVC: No.

IV: The bars that you speak of at this time were they gay bars for the sake of being gay bars owned by gays for gay people or were they more...

KVC: They were owned by the mafia.

IV: Okay.

KVC: No they were smart they knew where the money was. The mafia owned most of the gay bars around the country and

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KVC: Where that burger place you know there's the Mediterranean and then there's that place I think it is an upscale sliders are in there and all that.

IV: Yes.

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KVC: Right in there was this bar and it was an old house and it had a big patio on the back and the men and the women went in there. That was the first bar that any of us went in regularly.

IV: So it was a real mixed crowd then you weren't divided into.

KVC: Oh no.

IV: ...leather people here and men here and women here?

KVC: We didn't see other people then. Because this was kind of a button down bar so to speak. And we would go and we might meet a couple of other people and that sort of thing. So you kind of accumulated people along but there was still that demarcation that if you were with stereotypical kind of people then you could be spotted. So and now I think, thinking back because I did I took a course in advanced sexuality on Master's level and I think a lot of those people were transgendered. So that's one reason that I have a lot of compassion for transgendered people because I probably had an attitude from hell about them. Keep talking I'm going to get us some water.

IV: Okay so we've got the bar and we're in Montrose at this point.

KVC: Okay then there was Mary's Bar. Of course I think Mary's around longer than anybody. There was Effie's Pink Elephant.

IV: Okay thank you.

KVC: There was I can fill in that one. There was one there used to be a restaurant that was on Main Street and it was an old Railroad car. A lot of people would go in, they would get drunk (men) and there was a bar right next to that and we went in there. Then eventually on Tuam was The Red Room.

IV: Okay.

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KVC: And The Red Room was a big drag bar. So I went in there all the time because I thought that was real fun. But that was it. Oh wait a minute there was one on Thymes Boulevard because every once in a while you would want to go dancing. And that one was kind of where LaPepe was on Thymes Boulevard over there in Rice Village. And it... but it was the only after-hours bar. So in the beginning if you wanted to bar hop you would start at the Numbers and drive all the way down Montrose to Bissonnet and go to that other bar. Then when there was nothing going on there you would get in your car and you would come back here. You just went all night long from one of those bars to the other because there were no more.

IV: And that's very spread out. That is not centered in Montrose at all at that point.

KVC: No. But I understand that there have been people who say that they own their own bars outright but I want to tell you something. I was told by a friend of mine who was a bar owner in New Orleans who had to pay the Mafia and she told me that they told her that every bar in Houston with very few exceptions was owned by the Mafia. There was enormous money in it and they are not going to let Joe Blow get that kind of money you can take a bet on that.

IV: Did you remember having rules of behavior in those bars? You mentioned being spotted a minute ago. Was there certain types of clothes or two men couldn't be seen standing together having a drink or were there any of those kinds of rules?

KVC: When we went down because sometimes on Saturday afternoon everybody would go to LaCaraffe which is a straight bar downtown and they were really particular about you touching anybody and my sister was down there with me and we were kind of holding putting the arm around the other one and looking in the juke box and they told us to not do that. I said, "This is my real sister." They said, "We don't care don't do that." And The Gallion, later on the Gallion that was on Richmond was everybody's favorite bar. It had a pool table it had pool stuff it was

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run by a guy we knew that had been in the big, because either the bar owner or the bar manager was friends with you then you would follow him around. But then all of the sudden I went in there one day and I had on slacks that zipped up the front and they told me I couldn't come in there. I was not pleased. So they managed to keep a lot of women out of there eventually and blacks. Because the logistics of women's slacks. We will now discuss that. When they first started making slacks for women they zipped up the side. Okay those are horrendously hard to get in and out of. Because you have to put them on you have to button up on the side and you have to get that zipper up. Then they started making the zipper in the front because with women being bigger in the butt you can construct the pants differently and then you can button them and you can just do like you all do and just pull the zipper up and it was a lot easier to put on and that's the way everybody started wearing them that way. But if you look at the old Katheryn Hepburn pictures and all of hers were on the side. Marlene Dietrich they were all on the side.

IV: So that's one of the ways they would, could discriminate more was to not allow front fly pants.

KVC: I called Less the guy that managed that bar at his house and I said, "Listen God Damn it I just got thrown out of your bar! And if you want me to make life a living hell for you I will!" "What?" I said, "I knew you left that man in charge of but they don't like women and that's their problem."

End of recording 1

IV: Okay let's start with lesbian and gay world and stratification as in class, race, clicks and that sort of thing and how do you think that was an impact on the way things were here as opposed to anywhere else?

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KVC: In the south well at one more time the south and the north was quite different in the 60's and 70's. And remember the 70's is when the "revolution" civil rights stuff was starting up. But in the south everything was very genteel and there was a definite class system. There always is with people. I don't know why everybody gets worried about it. It was based on money and looks and good clothes and nice place to live and all that kind of stuff. The ones of us didn't have any money because I was making practically nothing. If we were lucky enough to find people who were helpful and I don't mean we took advantage of anybody because I never asked anybody for anything. But we had a very nice life and a lot of times you know the guys would say, if I moved some place they'd say, "Well I've got some curtain material I'm coming over and fixing your house." So we didn't have to have a lot of money but the guys had a lot of money. And they went to New York all the time they went to Puerto Vallarta all the time, they were kind of not what we call jet setting today but they took vacations that were just superb. But then there was another class of people and this is when you get into even back in the 60's there was a division between the men and women. If men... a lot of women don't like men and I think personally that the reason that happened was because that because the women that I know that dressed like cowboys and stuff like that when I would talk to them a lot of them had been molested or been hassled in a lot of ways that show that Hillary Swank did about Brandon whatever his name was, her name was they did that as a defense. So I often wondered whether that was a transgender effect or whatever. Now I have this straight PFLAG mom friend that never can understand why I don't put on a lot of make-up anymore. Stuff like that. Why don't you do that? I said, "Because I don't dress for men. When I dressed for men that's how I looked. I look real good. But I don't have to do that anymore." And if you want to know the honest good truth it's just a pain in the butt. Now if I'm... if I have enough sense to know that if

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I'm going to go to one of these civic associations I can't go looking like this. She never gets up that she doesn't do her hair, she doesn't put on two inches of make-up and all this kind of stuff and of course when, when she and her husband started hanging out with us comics buddies the women that I hung out with who were at that time the ones who really didn't have men friends were real suspect of him. And I never get suspect of anybody until they give me a cause to.

That's because they were having a culture clash. You know they were sitting down thinking she's pretty foolish and she's sitting around thinking they were real dowdy. So there is that kind of stuff that goes along. Who was in the first gay pride parade? Bull dykes, drag queens and go-go boys in Houston. It takes the fringe people with the guts to create a revolution. It wasn't us in our nice little outfits you know sitting in somebody's house drinking martinis. People like us were not involved in any way. We just kind of figured that was somebody else's stuff to do and I think that was needless to say very arrogant and unnecessary. There was, I told you the story about Rocky there were black people that came to the bars. They were usually... I found out later that they actually had some of their bars (much later) but they, there is still a lot of prejudice in the black community so if they managed to hook up with some guy then you would see them but it was still considered to be odd. Not awful, odd. We never saw any black women.

IV: Oh really?

KVC: No they were really closet-ey. They stayed home, just like the feminist women they usually were the long term partners. They would get together and eat and that sort of thing and that was about the end... a lot of times they would play poker and stuff like that but that was the end of what they did. And you never saw Asians. The only time I ever saw some Asians was I belonged (much later) I belonged to the first online they called them bulletin boards in those days. It's before you could get on the internet and I was the only woman of this group of about

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300 guys because I had a modem so they were gay, I was gay so I asked them if I could join their group and they said, "yes." And there were several college professors from Rice who came. And I thought, "Oh there they are. I see you!" And you know Hollywood Dan the guy who owns all of those Hollywood...

IV: Yeah.

KVC: He was there and he's worked his ass off and provided for his family in Vietnam or wherever he's from. Then what was the other one that was on there? There was several classifications.

IV: We talked about races and you were talking about class. So as far as, your class you call yourselves the A Group

KVC: No we didn't.

IV: Or they called you the eggers.

KVC: You never heard one of us say that they called us that.

IV: Who is they?

KVC: The other people who didn't come.

IV: The other people who didn't come?

KVC: In the beginning it was a lot of hairdressers but then they were so clever that they you know somebody would bring one of them and that was cool because they would show up looking nice. They didn't... they put a lid on being real flamboyant, you know they were running pressed for the fact that they were there and of course they looked fabulous and looking fabulous was the whole idea. But they were the ones who started that.

IV: And the looking fabulous and the heterosexual dress, role and dress that... you were enjoying that as much as doing it for protection do you think you enjoyed?

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KVC: Well you know how does one get their culture? How do you develop a culture when you have none? We grew up in straight life. The morays and the ethics and the manners and everything else came from our straight parents and the people around us who were straight and to say I ain't done, done it. Came from there were things that you learned not to do because it was not considered polite society. So I grew up you know I didn't even come out really until I was about twenty-five so that whole time I was basically living in a straight world and whatever seemed to go was okay with me. I thought I looked pretty good.

IV: So do you think... at this time did you know of or we'll refer to a working class population of homosexual people that were meeting or mixing?

KVC: There was a bar that Ricky Cortes owned. There was one bar called Just Marion and Lynns it was on Fairview and it was more of a working class kind of situation. They had a real good dance floor so a lot of times we'd all go down there. When we all got sober we would go down to the Lambda group which was you know within two or three blocks and we would go to a meeting and go as a group. That's how we would be kind of protected when we were doing that and we would dance. So we would meet other people but they were not real interested in us and we weren't real interested in them. I think that's a shame because I think I missed knowing some interesting people but you know you only hang with people you've got something in common with. Somebody was talking about somewhere I worked last that all the blacks sat by themselves and this is a mid-management group and I said, "Well yeah." I said, "People will sit with, eat with and hang out with people that are the most like them."

IV: There's a lot that goes beyond sexuality.

KVC: Oh yeah.

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IV: What you have in common. Okay. Let's talk just briefly about people that you say that as the black experience the places to go for security and safety were in church but gay people met in bars. Do you know people that met in church groups though because some church groups opened up and I've heard some other people say that they came to Montrose to become affiliated with the gay groups under certain church groups?

KVC: The only church that I know of that was accepting the gay people was the MCC and it started I think in somebody's house and then it moved to a very small building that was where Lamdda used to be over real close to where Nino's restaurant is and they were just a very small bunch of people. For a long time MCC seemed to have members who were real disenfranchised. The ones that really felt alone didn't have a family. I've met Troy Perry two or three times and I asked him, you know because he was a Pentecostal minister and they told him he had to leave the church and he went home and he thought about it for a while and he thought, "I'll just start my own." And that's, that's and then I had a girlfriend that was a gospel singer (another one of those) and so we went to a lot of the MCC churches around the state of Texas and Louisiana and Oklahoma and they were all like that. They were very small. It was more working class kind of people. They were very loving. They were very kind and I didn't have a bit... I didn't have anything in common with them. You know I wasn't particularly religious. I was a manager, the manager of the store.

IV: Did anybody in your group maintain ties with their regular churches that they were affiliated with before they knew they were or as straight people?

KVC: I think most of them unless they were Catholic or something drifted away because unless it was for some formal thing like a funeral because they were just... one thing I have refused to do starting way back was to give money or sit and listen to myself be run into the ground. I'm

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just not going to do that. We grew up Episcopalian and it was supposed to be the most tolerant people in the world and as it turned out they are not and I was even thinking about starting back finding there's really kind of like a Celtic Irish group out here but I thought, "Wait a minute they are still Episcopalians and they are still a member of the group that sits around and bashes us all the time. I ain't paying my money into something like that." The MCC then came down here, on Washington and they bought an old church and they started being successful then. A lot of people that were more mainstream started coming. There is a minister there and I think he had been a Methodist minister and he was... whoever is in the MCC depending on what their thing is like Methodist a lot of mainstream people started going because the way the services and everything were was more what they are used to. And you know I have the singer girlfriend I would go down there and I kind of liked it. But I never did feel real comfortable with it because I'm back to point zero. How am I going to talk to these people? Then she pissed off everybody and they wouldn't talk to her either.

IV: Which point do you think or if ever I suppose Diana's almost made maybe never did this become political? Did anybody become political and say, "We want to start making statements about our identity."

KVC: Charles Herbert got murdered.

IV: Year now this would be?

KVC: I don't know this might have been the 80's or something like that. Charles Hebert was murdered in his bed and at that point the function of the Diana's really you can do a roast when everybody knows the stories. You can't do a roast if 90% of the people there you don't know. So it had gotten that way and the people who just knocked themselves out to pull that thing off

because it is very time consuming, very expensive were usually people that had been in show
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business and of course when I quit drinking I quit going (in the beginning) and I can tell you right now that if I went back there I would know nobody in there. So then people in our group had gotten rid of trophy wife number one and they had gotten somebody maybe more working class. They came in here. The guys went off they got younger guys working class that kind of thing. So the tenure and I would assume this was every place in the United States in a big city. Then all of the sudden the security was a little lax. I had somebody's little boyfriend decided he was going to blackmail me I told him I'd shoot him. I took care of that! I didn't even have a gun. But anyway the people just weren't as interesting let's just put it that way. What made it special was gone. And at that point it just got to be more of a chore to go because I'd sit there for two hours and they would be talking about hundreds of people I never even heard of. So I got to where even after I got comfortable in sobriety and could go back I didn't really want to do that. There were just a lot of other things to do. So when Charles Died it was always, it had become a big money maker. And I think the guys sat down and said, "Why don't we take this and make it a fundraiser?" And I think that's a good idea. I think that a lot of people who are very talented and artistic were the men anyway, have taken those talents and created a lot of money. And the reason I started my newsletter was that the women didn't understand whether it was the sisters whether it was the Lesbian Health Initiative, whoever it was didn't understand that a lot of their money was coming from the men's groups and I thought, "I think I'll fix that!" So and I started talking about because I would get messages that Lambda or you know some of this other stuff that were fundraisers were actually giving to the sisters, were giving to Lesbian Health Initiative. And I don't know of any women's groups that ever gave anything back to the men. And I've said that before. "We just don't make as much money." I said, "You don't give a damn about

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them like they do about you." I said, "Historically they have spent a lot of money on the lesbian community and gotten very little in return."

IV: Do you think, so let's go back about being political just for a second. When Stonewall happened in 1969 and many people said the birth of gay liberation meaning the movement to move for more equal rights were you aware of that or what was going on?

KVC: The first thing I was aware of was when Anita Bryant came in town.

IV: Okay and this would be do you remember the year?

KVC: I'm not sure you can look that up. We were... we had heard about it and she was saying really ugly stuff about us and even people like me that weren't used to being seen on the street with a large amount of people, we all met at the Lambda Center all of us several people and we all car pooled down to a walkable distance and we all had candles and stuff and we walked down to the Hyatt Regency and started walking around it and I felt so empowered it was unbelievable. And that was the first thing that I remember that I did or any of my friends did that was considered political.

IV: Were you all worried, you weren't out of the closet at your jobs?

KVC: No.

IV: But you were still willing to go do this?

KVC: Right and I think that that and I told you that before that they have AA conferences big conventions and the Lambda group had their own room for coffee and those things were open to anybody and all of the sudden I was faced with, "Okay if I'm up there and I'm in that room people who are at the other meetings that I go to are going to figure out I'm gay." And I thought, "Oh what the hell." So I made that decision to do that. So I kind of edged into it. And I was

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much better at it in many ways then most of my friends. I think I just have a better ego strength or something or care. I think I care.

IV: You care. Maybe because we haven't said it lets briefly touch on the AA aspect because you said how important that was because it gave you a sense of community and then it also led to your sobriety. What year would that be?

KVC: I got sober in '74.

IV: And you eventually started, you all started what became Lambda.

KVC: Jerry Davis and some guys had the first groups at the Unitarian Church or the gay group at the Unitarian Church. And there was a woman named Helen and I think she went and I went and I made the statement that I thought I was the only living person and somebody corrected me about that and I said, "Hmm. I still think I am the only living person." But I felt it important because I'd been going to the groups at River Oaks and you couldn't say anything if your partner was killing you. You couldn't say anything that was of importance to do in the program what you needed to do which was to get all this garbage out of your system. You had to just sit there.

And then there were flight attendants that were there who couldn't really talk about things. There

were doctors there that couldn't talk about things so it wasn't just our problem. But Jerry was

thinking about starting a group and that was the first one. Then they went to the bicycle shop and

at that time that's on Wall right next to the pub down there on Wall where that pub thing is.

There was a shop right there and it was for rent and we started to have meetings and then we

made a decision because some straight people showed up and we had a group conscience about

whether they could be there or not and we made the right decision we said it was open to

anybody. Now this was taking a chance because if they walk in and see you there but we

decided it was more important that they were able to come. And from there it moved to another
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location and more people. Everybody in town just about everyone in town knew who I was and so the fact that I made this outrageous change in my life, after they got over it... because it was like, "What the hell do you think you are doing? You don't even drink as much as everyone else?" But I was tired of living that way and something told me that if I would give it a shot and see what happened and I gave it about 6, 6 months into it I knew that I felt so much better. And I just... but I had a real bad anxiety and I told... I wasn't used to talking about myself or anything like that, not the things are important. So I just got real mad one day and of course everything to me is high drama. I get out of my car on River Oaks Boulevard, did a little mad dance. You know you have happy dances and mad I was just like teddy on the roof, "God I've done everything I can and I still have this anxiety I want to know what you are going to do to get rid of it!" I don't know why I didn't get arrested. I was screaming in the middle of the street like at high noon and I got in the car because I wasn't able to drive... I hit one of those anxiety things where you can't drive and I got in the car and I felt enough peace to go home and I went to bed and I got up the next day and I never had anxiety again.

IV: How great!

KVC: So I said, "If you get me out of this mess I'll never do it again." So I got out of it. So I never did it again. It's just that simple. Was it easy? No it was horrible.

IV: I'm glad to know the link between you know with AA because I have not included that before but that is very important the Lambda group. That is going to be an important network.

KVC: Well and what was happening though was once again if you study culture it started to be a family and the difference was that those class wars and all that stuff and people of color and transgender people you know we had to coexist and I think it did us infinite good. We just had all kinds of people in there and it was a good mix. And we would be just as invested in you know

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Tiffany Jones the drag queen getting sober as we would somebody who had a bunch of money.

Humbling experiences make you a better person. So that was our major focus for years was taking care of each other, making sure everybody was okay, doing the program to the best of our ability.

IV: Impressive, very impressive. Okay let's cover which type of organization so we've mentioned several the social organizations, bars political church and then service organizations which became more later. Which do you think has had the most influence or significance in Houston's community formation?

KVC: I think what happened to Houston was this. All the gay people are running around together. The women's conference of like 1984 something like this happened. It got national coverage. The men sat around and made fun of it like, "Oh the women are going to sit there and vent." Well they had Barbara Jordan. They had Ann Richards. They had Maya Angelou, all these people. I wanted to go because if it got my tickets early enough I could have gone inside. But I used to go and stand out there, Gloria Steinem and everybody else is coming down the street and something happened from that to me because all of the sudden I realized that I had put up with a lot of crap. First of all in school when you teach school everyone gets the same salary so that was not the same as some of my friends. I got real mad about the whole thing. Pokey Anderson went down there as a new person right out of college and she had already been doing feminist stuff and that's how she got to be kind of the well-known lesbian in town because she went down there and took them on. They did not want lesbians in their group. So there was a lot, because in those day if you were a stand up woman everyone thought you were a lesbian or that was one way to pull you down. So Pokey who looked like just a little college girl went in there and raised hell and I think that they made some and I think some of the black women that were

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there were the ones that were instrumental in this said this, "If you are going to make it for women National Organization for Women it's going to be open." There was a lot of fighting and negotiating and everything and we were all following that. The world was looking at that. So after that started women's groups started more of now and more of stuff and they still didn't want to get involved too much with that stuff. But that was going on. So in the gay community all of the sudden women were saying we need to be separate and I had a fit about that. When they started the Lambda Club and I don't use the term lesbian. I think there's gay men and women. I am not more a lesbian then I am a Babylonian. That's silly. Well anyway they wanted to say it up, I mean we argued about this for three months whether to say gays and lesbians and I said, "I'm not doing that I want it to say gay men and women because we are all in this fight together this sobriety fight and those terms are divisive." So, that's where that went on. The gay political caucus that Pokey Anderson and my best friend Bob Rogers his deceased partner started there were about 5 of those. Ray Hill and all them said that they did but they didn't. So there was a beginning of that dignity the Catholic Church version and they were starting to be that kind of stuff going on and everybody it was so new that people sometimes kind of gravitated that. But we're still out getting sober. You know we're trying... by that time I was sober what, 7 or 8 years. As you very well know if you are sober for 5 years you have about a 50% chance to make it. So we were spending more time doing that then anything. Then the political caucus kind of cranked up some more but there was no, of course, political candidates or anything like that and Houston was known as a big red neck city. Which Kathy Whitmire didn't like and Anise Parker doesn't like and I don't like. I think it's the worst place in the world to have a vacation because there's nothing to do. That's silly, go to Galveston and get in the tar balls. But there's new money in Texas. There are people who have moved here from everywhere else from L.A.

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and from New York who settle that crap you know in the 80's. If you need somebody and they could do something for you, you better be on good terms with them and I think that's the basis of all that and... you know then they started these bars and you would have leather bars and you would have the country western bars so there began to be like a bar for... and they would have there was a bar off of Main Street, I forgot what the name of it was, all the button down guys went to. So there was a bar where you could still go in and be with people like you. One day in PFLAG this guy came in and he was newly come to terms with himself and he was a senior at UT and he said, "What am I going to do?" I said, "You're going to have to find a bar." "I just don't look like these people." I said, "No you don't. You have to find a bar that looks like you."

IV: So this is what, let's try to clarify at what point do you think that everybody divided into types? Was it by '70, early 70's don't you think?

KVC: Well yeah because you know you were looking... I think didn't the prides, isn't a lot of that pride stuff out in San Francisco start somewhere in there? Well all of the sudden you turn on the television and there's dykes on bikes and these drag queens and all this stuff and we are all going, "Golly look at that!" But it was the first time we'd seen it. You just don't act real tacky in the south or they will get you! They will get you. So that was even more divisive. So you have some of them going to MCC church, a few other places unless they were underground, you know unless they were real closet-ey and I wasn't doing that. I'm just not going to do that, that's tacky. Or you have the house parties were kind of dissipating. But they were beginning to do these as you and I talked about more normalized living. You have Republicans, you have Democrats you have Saint Stevens Episcopal Church they were the first to be really diversified.

So as this stuff starts to appear then people who have an interest in that become part of those groups. Because the object of everything in society is you've got to find a family and a lot of us

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gay people who have no children, no grandchildren I have one cousin I'm close to and that's it. See I can get on the radio and stuff. I don't want to blow my family up anymore is that we have to have a family. The AA thing for a long time was a family. And what's happening now is to me is that I have created a family with my newsletter to some degree and I finally decided that part of my age has to do with cultures, the better cultures, a person at my age is known as the wise person and you get a little respect off of that. And I have spent most of the last 5 or 6 years, because I've got kind of a sarcastic when I was drinking the stuff so I had to get over that. But really being interested in other people that's the secret, being very interested in other people and trying to be as helpful as possible but to be genuinely concerned about them. Now if they are awful I'm not going to fool with them. But I think that you know some of my friends we're talking about, you know our friends are starting to die off and they said, "What do you think about that?" and I said, "Well I've done everything that I wanted to do." Except have a long term relationship. But I think in my case I was so intellectually stimulated by what was going on around me that I would have really driven anybody crazy. My friend, the PFLAG mom said, "You just so ADD." I said, "Probably so!" I said, "But that's what makes me interesting." I said, "I will go off and do a little this and study this and study that. Come back and think about this. That's what keeps my brain stimulated." But I know that I'm slowing down and I know mentally I'm slowing down because I can see it in my typing. I can't type worth a shit anymore. But the opposite side of that is, is that most of us become very wise. We ain't sharp but we've got the wisdom that goes down under.

IV: You've got all the experience to fall back on.

KVC: Yeah so if that's what I get out of it that's fine. Now I will tell you that to this day I'm not very political. I do, I spent a bunch of money on Obama. I spent a bunch of money on University of Houston

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Anise. I know what I'm interested in. I'm not going to go out there and beat the bushes and stuff like that. Some people are interested in that. I call this the Jane Wagner, Lilly Tomlin idea of life. When they got together in the early 30's the last thing Lilly Tomlin needed to be was out to anybody. So what they did was they made a bucket load of money and they've always funded groups. For a long time they did it and nobody knew it and they've kind of come out recently. But then it has also come out that they really spent a bunch of money on things. I think that's as much value as it is marching in the street.

IV: Oh yes certainly.

KVC: So I don't particularly, I'm not interested in a lot of stuff. I do vote on some gay issues. But I'm not going to be voting across the board and stuff like that because I don't... some of these people I don't particularly like.

IV: Yeah that's a very good point. Let's take a moment. We started touched on the lesbian and gay men and being separated and working against each other when in the earliest years they worked together more.

KVC: The AIDS thing is what got them back together some.

IV: Okay.

KVC: Because here they are all marching around being feminists. The guys start getting sick. I'll never forget. I saw that, they said there's a gay flu going around and I said, "No it's a plague." And I mean I was so devastated I used to go to, I started gaining weight when I went in the AA and I went to an overeaters anonymous group and there were a lot of gay men in there and they started dying and one guy told me one day he'd lost 20 friends in the last year. It was horrendous and all of the sudden the working class people rose up, women... rose up and

became caretakers. And I think that all of the sudden that ability to not say, "Well I'm a man and

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you're a woman" because "we're in this together." So that created a different feeling. And now days the difference is, is because you know, I'm not gay first. I'm a woman first and I'm an educated woman that's second and then I'm a southern woman that's third and I'm a lesbian you know. At this point in the game that pretty much doesn't enter too much into anything. So I don't have to go around identifying myself about stuff like that. So when you do that you get away from labeling you. I label myself as a woman. You're a man okay. So you know about the program, so I know about the program. Now all of the sudden we get to a deeper level. Of course you have a partner and I don't but I just think that those kind of big "A" kind of stuff is out of the way. But it was necessary. Drag queens and the go-go boys and the stereotypical queens and that sort of and the bull dyke's they were necessary and they've never, never gotten their place in history and I think they deserve it.

IV: Well speaking of other areas lesbian generational do you think there's differences in values, the lesbians the mid areas, 70's, 80's and now? Is there friction? Is there...?

KVC: No there's not friction at all. I still go to some parties and stuff and the younger ones they are really... you know they are just very respectful and inclusive. Their lives are real different because most of them are making a great deal of money and they are kind of back to the kinds of things that we did, you know. They had their friends, special friends and house parties and that sort of thing but they also belong to the Human Rights Campaign. And they may be donators for SNAP you know the spay and neuter clinic. They seem to have special philanthropic things that they do. And they will talk about that more than anything else. They are all educated, successful, equal to men's salaries and stuff like that. They are real curious, I think they are curious about us. Now one thing I don't like to do is go to a party where I'm the oldest person there.

IV: Who does?

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KVC: This woman lives down the street from me and she's, she's 62 but she also looks like she's 40 and she's got all these friends and she wants to know why I won't come down there. I keep thinking her, "Leave me alone. Girl leave me alone!" I don't want to come down there you know being older than them I don't care.

IV: That's great can you think of anything else that you wanted to add that we haven't touched on? I think we've done a good job going through our...

KVC: I'll tell you this story. I went to PFLAG...

IV: Okay tell us real quickly what is acronym stand for?

KVC: Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians.

IV: Okay.

KVC: I got involved in that. Now that's one thing I do, do but I've kind of gotten tired of it. Blake Riser is this straight woman who is now 90 years old who is the biggest character in Houston. The smallest big character in Houston. And so I met her and she said, "Why don't you come to PFLAG?" and I said, "Oh I don't know" and she said, "No, you're coming." She made me walk in the parade. She is fascinating. But anyway... what was I going to tell you about that?

IV: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays?

KVC: Oh they have a speaker and then they have group because a lot of these people the parents are coming through there and they are horrified, they are more scared about their children's protection than anything else. Everybody's got gay friends and everything so it's not that as much as the grief of the history and then, "Is my child going to be safe." Well anyway it was around Christmas time and everybody kind of divides into groups and I got in a group of a whole bunch of young guys. And so they said, "When you were younger how did you feel?" I said, "One of the things I really resented was, particularly with one woman I was with is because

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I really wanted to hold her hand.” And they said, that they hold hands in public and they do all this stuff and they are just out. And I said, “Well do you have any discrimination at the college age?” “Do you have any discrimination?” “No. We go, we do have gay group at University of Houston.” And I said, “I’m astounded.” I haven’t been around so I didn’t really hear. So there is... you have to stop and think about from where we were to here down here, in 50 years it’s like the thing I wrote in my newsletter. In 50 years I’ve been sitting here watching several things. Civil rights was one of them, woman’s movement but the big thing for me is we’d gone in 50 years completely changed and the stuff that everyone’s bitching about right now about same sex marriage and the military thing is just a matter of time. I mean you always have to have someone to blame stuff on. We have a war or we have the oil spill well we want to talk about marriage. You have to have that in your pocket to blame stuff on to scare up the conservatives. But after that the only thing is you and I talked about on your list is those days because we were chameleons we changed color all the time, stripes. We had...it was like being James Bond you had little code words. One of them was “Are you a friend of Dorothy’s?” because of the Wizard of Oz and you had just this wonderful life that was glamorous and only you knew about it. So you could go around you know...

IV: And now everything is just normal.

KVC: And now everything is just normal. So there is a loss to me at that. And when that cute guy was Doogie Hauser is up there and he’s just out and cute and has a lover and all that or Ricky Martin. You know I just sit there and think, “You know thank God this happened because they can have a life that makes them happy.” Ricky Martin has those twins and nobody goes around saying much about that. You know the story about the totem pole?

IV: No.

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KVC: Okay totem pole were class things. That's the reason you hear the expression, "You're low man on the totem pole." That's what that was about. So whites are up here and blacks are on the bottom. Well blacks got real aggressive so in many ways they were able to move up. Then you have Mexican-Americans who historically have been family oriented and not very political and now they are moving up the totem pole. Asians have kind of been working in the background. They are the ones that make money and then spread it around. So who is the bottom of the totem pole? Gay people. Well gay people said, "We're not having this." Somebody's got to be on the bottom of the totem pole and now I wonder who it is going to be.

IV: That is a very good point.

KVC: Yeah. We're not, blacks aren't. Mexican's aren't. Asians aren't. Indians, American Indians that will be who will be on. The ones who made the totem pole.

IV: The ones who started it. Okay well we'll wind it up thank you very, very much.

KVC: I've enjoyed it.

End of interview