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My friend Roger died in October 1986. I pretty much thought that what I had to do then was get ready to die. Fortunately, there were people who told me that I had to leave some kind of record. And I decided to do that and began to write. Find your



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poet and novelist Polman, that says of his work. I want to leave a record for the future about what we're going through now. And it's quite a record he's leaving. Pa has published 12 books beginning in his 20s with a focus on poetry. His most recent works love alone, and borrowed time and aids memoir, speak eloquently of Paul's relationship with his lover, Roger Horwitz, who died of AIDS in October 1986. Our interview with Paul was done in in sunny West Hollywood home just above Sunset Boulevard in early January 1989, where he is currently working on his new novel entitled, afterlife. The story is three aids widowers.



01:21

It's amazing to me that I don't ever spend a lot of time thinking about my my younger years, or giving them much credit. It always just seems like a bad time, I sort of think through from the age of six to the age of 20 is just bad stuff. And I discounted I think in my own head a great deal. I was born in New England grew up in a town north of Boston, parents working class, very decent Episcopalian, God fearing types. And it was a reasonably okay, prosaic first six years. But when I was six, my brother was born. And my brother was born with Spina Bifida. And he has spent his life in a wheelchair. He's an extraordinary man, and very dear to me. And he and I have always had a great relationship. But there was a sense that our house was plunged in darkness by the arrival in it of a handicapped child. And my parents were very isolated and compressed into a kind of depression and bewilderment by that, during most of the years I was growing up, but I really didn't become myself, become the man I want it to be, or hoped to be, or felt that could be until I met Roger, who's the man who became my lover for 12 years. And that's when I was 28. By then I had been through a couple of years of therapy. And I finally stumbled through the notion that well, wait a minute, I'm really not straight. And I really would like to find a man. And I love being in love. But I really want to be in love with a man. What I didn't have, from the ages of say, 19 to 25 was a carnal period of, of what coming out in some kind of outer sense, sowing my wild oats among the men of the early 70s, the post Stonewall

smorgasbord, I just didn't have it. And that has been a real loss in my life. And there's a sense I have that I missed something. I missed my training. I met Roger at a dinner party in Boston. On Labor Day in 1974. I had just got off the train from New York, where it spent three days with a man who was 15 years older than I whom I refuse to give any six to whom I was making miserable, because I didn't know who I was. And I came back from that weekend, bathed in tears, and did not like being alone on that night of Labor Day and called a friend and said, What's going on tonight? And he said, well, so and so it's happening, some people did and are wanting to come. And I did. And I met Roger. And in some ways, it was love at first sight. It was more that way for me and for him. He was starting work as a lawyer the next day, he went into law late in life and didn't start being a lawyer until he was 32. I was 28. And he was not nearly quite so ready to tumble into love as I was and he was still seeing a psychiatrist who was deeply Freudian, who was telling him he was straight and That's where he needed to move. I remember Roger saying to me after we've been together for a couple of months, you know, this is terrific, but you are a guy. And yet that that first autumn of that relationship was a very, very happy time. And it was, for me the first time I'd been in a relationship that really made sense and at work. I never thought Roger would get sick, Roger never thought Roger would get sick. Roger was not somebody who was out there very much. He maybe had five or six contacts, individual contacts outside the context of our marriage. Over the course of 10 years. I was more of a pig. But it happened anyway. And Roger was diagnosed in March of 85. So I would say that in Los Angeles terms, we were early. And it certainly felt when Roger was diagnosed as if we were utterly alone. In the experience. I then knew enormous numbers of people in New York who had been sick and died. And I knew how embattled things were in New York. But there was a sense of a magic circle. Still, in Los Angeles, there was a way in which people in Los Angeles still thought of aid as a disease of San Francisco and New York. And it's somehow we would figure out that the cohort of AIDS, what really gave it to you was some kind of popper equivalent of the smog in San Francisco in New York, it just wasn't going to happen here. That magic still persists, because I talked to people from places like Long Beach in Santa Fe and all they still talk as if it's not going to be there. So it was a kind of a double experience. Watching my best friend go through the tortures of the Damned. He was diagnosed in September 1983. He died in November of 85. When Roger was diagnosed in March of 85, I felt as if my world had come to an end, and that began a really terrible siege of 20 months, until Roger died. I don't think I acted very heroically during that time. I think Roger did, Roger kept me together kept me hold during that time. I think by the end of it during the last six months of Roger's life, we really had some quality experience and I, I would say now, two years later, that I understand what people mean when they say Betty Buckley's brother told me this about losing his lover that it was the most heightened and extraordinary time of their lives.



08:15

Staff Sergeant Perry J. Watkins is making gay history. On February the 10th 1988, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled tuned to one in favor of Perry Watkins in the case of Watkins versus the United States Army. If upheld, it would be the first time in the history of the US judicial system that gays were granted protection of their rights. Over the past seven years, civil rights activist Perry Watkins has committed himself to the fight not only for his own rights, but the rights of all homosexuals. Melinda Tamayo interviewed Perry as he was being honored by the Los Angeles gay and lesbian community services center. Sadly, the same day the interview was being done. Another gay military hero Leonard Mettler, which died from AIDS complications.



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Well, in 1967, I told the military that I was gay. They drafted me anyway, I requested discharge three times within the first six months of my enlistment. They said no, because we can't prove you've ever committed a homosexual act. So therefore you have to remain. In 1975. The military gave me a discharge board that unanimously said no, I should be retained because I did nothing that was detrimental to unit morale, mission accomplishment, or my own job performance. And then in 1981, that same military came back and said, Oh, we're sorry, you told us you were gay in 1967. We now have to put you out, at which point I took them to court. Actually, I took them to court before that, but we've been in court for the last seven years fighting this case, and just in February ruling was handed down by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Now that gays do constitute a suspect class, and that the Army Regulation barring reenlistment of homosexuals is unconstitutional. Now they've now decided to rehear that on BOC, which means 11 justices are going to hear it and make a decision. And so therefore, we're now waiting for that rehearing date to come up.



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That's some stories. Yeah, let me go back here for a minute. Let me get back to a minute here. When you went to realist was your homosexuality brought up again at that time,



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that was an issue that was constantly being discussed in the military, for example, the initial reason I went to court was because they revoke my security clearance. However, it wasn't the first time the army had revoke my security clearance. This was the fifth time the army had revoked it. And every single time they did exactly the same thing. They said, We're going to revoke your security clearance because you're gay. And I said, Fine, you go right ahead. Then they would wait about a month and a half and come back and say to me, Well, since you're an admitted homosexual, you're not a security risk. So therefore, you can have your clearance back. And I would say, Fine, thank you. And I would go ahead and continue to work. Well, the fifth time they did this, I was tired of the crap. So I wrote a letter of rebuttal, which the army absolutely refused to answer for over a year and a half. They gave me absolutely no response. The minute I took them to court to get my security clearance back, they then decided that, oh, well, since you're gay, you can't be in the army. So therefore, we have to



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put you out. This is all documented.



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Yes. Definitely. Without about why



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do you know why this happened for nine years? You

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were the service? You were? No, no, for 15 years? 18 years? I'm

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sorry. 15 years? You were in the service? Yes. You were an exemplary soldier.

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According to them.

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They knew that you were homosexual. Yes. So why did they pick you to stay? What happened to you? In other words,

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they put everyone else out who said they were gay? Why did they let me stay? Probably someone with very good brains simply looked at my recommendations and things and said, Well, yes, there's no reason for this man to be put out. That's the only thing I can think they simply did what needed to be done. They judge me as an individual, as a soldier and judge me on my merits and my capabilities, rather than by a stupid, idiotic regulation.

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Well, that's a very nice way to think of it. Certainly. Yeah. It's a very Yes. non judgmental way to think about

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Sure. They judge me like they do any other soldier. If I was doing the job. They said, Fine, you can stay what you're doing in your private life makes no difference. Until some idiots in the Pentagon decided, Oh, well, no, we don't want to do this and started ordering the officers on my bass to put me out. And that's just what they did. And that's exactly what they told me. So I'm only repeating what they said. So if that's wrong, it's there.

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At this point, today, it is in court again. Yes. And what we're, what is the status of the case right now?

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Well, it's not going to be reheard on bonk, which means that the initial ruling was handed down by a three judge panel. And I'm back ruling means that nonbank hearing means that a 11 justices from the Ninth Circuit will be seated, and they will listen to the oral argument and then vote as to whether or not exactly what kind of ruling they want to make. Now they can either uphold that ruling, they could totally throw that ruling out. They could rule totally in favor of the military, they could rule totally in my favor based on totally different grounds. So it just basically means that the case is now still basically on the appeal status that it was before except for now instead of being heard by three judges, there'll be hurt by by 11.

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Incredible what you have to go through. This has brought you today why you're here. And now you're wearing let's talk about this pin you're wearing. It's got a pink triangle. And this what is this in the pink triangle?

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That's the sergeant e6 type that was my rank when I was in the army, okay. And it says rebel with a cause, with the cause. Yes, rebel with a cause is a nonprofit foundation that has engaged me as their keynote speaker to send me on a nationwide tour to discuss civil rights, homosexual rights and homosexuals in the military. Basically, we're fighting for all civil rights. It's not just really a gay rights issue anymore. One of our basic themes is this kind of the same thing we figured Reagan has given us so much as as victims of this society that we wanted to give something back to him. So our basic theme is zero tolerance and discrimination. It simply isn't acceptable, regardless of what level you put it on. So

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obviously now your career, you're going to be an activist, aren't you? Isn't like an activist. That's

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it. That's it. For 15 years my career was was defending this country, the rights that citizens of this country are supposed to have. And now my career is going to be seeing to it that we do get those rights

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Michael Kearns admits he's many things. He's not just an openly gay actor working in Hollywood's movie and television mainstream. He's not just the flashy, happy hustler. And he's not just a talented and successful director of gay and lesbian theater, he's all these things and more.

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And I was always around course, boys and I was around designers and I was around makeup men and hairdressers. And, and I just looked at these people as people. And I, I guess I identified with them, and I knew that I was going to be gay. So it was never because of that theatrical background. The gay thing was never a big, big issue. I was always in touch with it. I always knew that I liked boys I liked I remember being very, very little. And my brother was six years older and always being attracted to his friends. I would even call them my boyfriend. I remember saying that. And I guess people just indulged me or thought it was cute or amusing, or I don't know what they thought. But I would say, you know, oh, is my boyfriend coming over? And it was like my brother's best friend. So I had those thoughts. I don't even remember not having those thoughts. Well, you know, I mean, I've been in Hollywood now. Almost, well, 17 years. So the reaction to my gayness in Hollywood has has gone through a huge metamorphosis. Yes, I certainly believe that Hollywood is essentially a pretty homophobic place to live. And I think that if I had to capsulize and say why I think that is I think it's because it's the TV industry. And the TV industry thinks that they're catering to the lowest common denominator, which is they assume to be homophobic I don't think that's necessarily true. I found less homophobia in Des Moines, Iowa appearing in in the theater there for straight and gay audiences, then I find among some studio executives and and powerful people in LA. So this is sort of a myth that has been handed down from generation to generation, the tragedy of rock Hudson's life, I mean, the fact that he died from AIDS, this is an exemplification of that sort of lie that is has been told over and over and over and over. And we must describe to the theory that there are no gay actors that you cannot be gay and live in Hollywood. And I've always taken that as a sham. When I first came out here, you know, I had all the promise of being another Rock Hudson, I was on the Waltons, I was the boy next door, I had a good acting background, I had, you know, I looked a certain way and all those things pointed to an acceptable career. Yet I was gay, and I was not willing ever really to lie about being gay. And then of course, the the happy hustler thing occurred in the early 70s. And that brought me out of the closet firmly and and irrevocably. And that's the greatest thing that can be said about the happy hustler is the fact that it did bring me out of the closet and, and there was never any opportunity for me to lie about my sexuality. Now, all these years later, there was a period I'd say in the late 70s, and even the beginning of the 80s, where my gayness really didn't seem to get in the way too much. And it almost was the it was the period where the happy hustler was in the background and and I had emerged as as being something else, which I think was an actor and an activist and people started taking me more seriously but then along came aids and something that's transformed all of us and certainly transformed the way the world in a bigger context thinks of gay people and certainly has has affected the way Hollywood perceives gay people. Most of my work you know, for the last six years has dealt with AIDS even if my work is in a play like James pickets dream, man, it's a play that was written in light of AIDS and it's there's a heaviness in that theater piece obviously, and, and then a lot of my work is more obviously dealing with AIDS. The theater is going to be the most passionate honest documentation and chronological view of this illness. I think that this epidemic this disease, I think that we're really gonna go and look at the human emotions in the theater and Larry Kramer's play and in Jim Pickens play, and Robert Chesley is jerker, here's where we're really

going to see a community fighting for its life struggling with its past looking at its future, aids us all those are examples. And I remember I remember reading *Joker* sitting out outside here reading, I read a lot of scripts and I was out there I got to the end of *Joker* and I got started to get up from the chair and just like fell back, I could not move I was just paralyzed by *jerker* paralyzed by it and, you know, against all advice, mounted that play because people you know, said it's obscene, it's dirty, it's this I mean, they could only really see the dirty words they couldn't see the heart and soul of that play, which of course now has everybody seen the heart and soul of the play and everybody's written beautiful things about it in *The New York Times* and in the *LA Times* and everywhere else but this was early on this was before *jerker* became a cause celeb. And then the FCC thing occurred where we aired portions of it on the radio at I MRU, which we've been doing for years, we've been airing portions of plays, to promote them locally. It's one of the best ways to promote a play locally in town is to get a little snippet of it aired on I MRU. And you bring in an audience, which is always hard to do. What happened was we added about 20 minutes of *jerker* and and never thinking that we were doing anything wrong. I mean, there's a disclaimer ran, it was after 10 o'clock at night. By this time we'd heard those words so many times it didn't mean anything while the rest of course is literally history. A minister heard it and called in the FCC, the ensuing lawsuits etc, which eventually caused the FCC to rewrite their rulings on indecency and obscenity and and of course that became a an incredible amount of publicity and gave us an opportunity to once again point to the homophobia that existed and the effects of phobia and and it certainly took the play over the top