

JENNIFER BLOMQUIST: Frank, thanks for being here. So I'm here with Frank Maddox. It is Monday, the 27th of June, 2022. Frank, we're going to talk to you about--or you're going to talk to us today about your life, your time in DeKalb, your growing up--you grew up in Madison--your career, and anything else you want to cover. I usually ask people just to start with where you were born, where'd you go to school, how was your upbringing, where'd you grow up, that kind of thing, and just sort of move through until present day. So kick it off!

FRANK MADDIX: OK, I was--and thanks for having me.

JB: Sure

FM: I was born in--grew up in Madison, Georgia. I was born in Athens on a dairy farm. It was a third-generation dairy farm. And early on I realized I was different. I was into puppets and ventriloquism and my sister's Easy-Bake Oven kind of thing, so early on I found it was pretty difficult to understand how I was different. And I was attracted to guys from the get-go. And especially my father--I can remember just playing with my father at the swimming pool and the hair on his back and his chest and stuff, and that's sort of my earliest memory of realizing that I was--that there was something different about myself.

And I remember my great-aunt, one time my mother made me--because I liked to cook--my mother made me a Pillsbury Doughboy hat, one of those, and I had it on. And her aunt was visiting her, my great-aunt. And Laura was never married and probably was Lesbian, and she saw me playing in this hat and being sort of very demonstrative with it, and she said, "Carolyn, you may not want to encourage that behavior" [*laughs*]. And I remember hearing that, and I remember my dad one time--because I had a bunch of troll dolls--and I never--well, I wanted to get a Ken car and all that kind of stuff.

But I was more--my imagination, I was a kid with a vivid imagination, and I would play out scenarios; and puppets and ventriloquist dummies were part of my childhood. But I remember my dad came in one day, and I was playing with my--I was probably eight or nine, maybe seven or eight--and my dad said, "When are you ever going to quit playing with that stuff?" Later on in life someone told me about all the guys--this is a friend, someone that grew up with my father--said, "Of all the folks that I went to school with, it was--your dad was the one that I wondered if he was gay." So, you know, there could've been---he could've had some latent--but I had no latent aspect; mine was pretty much--I grew up realizing that I was gay. I was a Kinsey 6--that means you're totally 1 through 6, totally a gay person.

JB: Now, did you ever fully come out to your parents?

FM: That's a little bit of an interesting story.

JB: And you don't have to share, and I should say, I won't ask--I may ask questions that you may not want to answer. Feel free to answer questions if you're not comfortable with it.

FM: I find it very interesting to hear people's stories. So there's--

JB: OK, I do, too. But--

FM: My parents were only children. There's no--now, my brother's in hospice now, my sister's older, and I have no children, so the reality is I enjoy the opportunity to talk about this aspect of myself.

I lived in Augusta as a county agent for a while, and I was out of grad school, and I had never been involved with anybody. But I did in Augusta, met somebody. And to make a long story short, we moved to Atlanta, and on the way, we passed Madison, and I stopped at the farmhouse. And my mother was awake, but my father was sleeping after having milked the cows. And earlier we had gone to Panama City on vacation, my family had, and my sister and myself--well, my brother didn't go, but my father hadn't noticed my behavior, and he said, "You know, Frank was really--he's a lover." And Mama said, "Well, I just hope he's not in love Jack Hennessey." My sister told me this. I'd come out to my sister, and so I assumed my mother knew I was gay. So that was several months later, after that vacation, Jack and I were moving to Atlanta, and I stopped by the farmhouse. She was there in the den, and I said, "Mama, there's something I've got to tell you." And I said, "It's bad, it's real bad."

I thought she was going to say, "Oh, I figured this." So she asked a litany of questions. The first was, "Are you dating Helen Smith?" who was an older woman, who was a friend from Blairsville. And the bad thing would've been that she was markedly older, but a dear friend of mine. I said, "No, no--I am not dating Helen Smith."

She said, "Well, are you dating a Black woman?"

I said, "No, Mama, it's worse than that" [*laughs*]. And in terms of--that's how I really thought of it, you know. This was, in my family, interracial marriage was not something that would be accepted. And so I said, "It's worse than that."

When I told her, she said, "Well, I know it feels to have a child die." That was her response, and it stung me, because I thought she knew. But she didn't have a clue. She gave me a *Wizard of Oz* plate when I was a kid.

I said, "Mama, you don't give my brother a *Wizard of Oz* plate." She must've known.

She said, "No, I didn't."

The reality is that was probably the most honest conversation we'd ever had, because, before her death, we reconciled and had a true adult relationship. And I did--when she found that information out, who I was, was very much in her mind's eye, you know, didn't exist. So a

death was a good metaphor for what she was going through. And about a month later, and this is the point of what you were talking about or asking me about, I was finishing class one night at Georgia State--I was working on my PhD--and got home, and my brother called me and told me my father had died, dropped dead of a heart attack. So I got in my truck, and I drove down to Madison, Georgia, to my brother's house, my mom. And when I got there, my mom--and this is what I think is very interesting, when I arrived at the house, people were inside. My mother came out to meet me, and she said, "Don't worry, Frank. I did not tell your father." Because she rightly understood that I would be driving down there thinking, "Oh, no, Mama told Daddy that I'm gay, and he died of a heart attack." So I find that very--sort of comical, the fact that that was what actually I was thinking, "Oh, no, I've killed my daddy." You know, "Being gay has killed my daddy."

JB: So how old were you when you told your mom?

FM: Oh, I had my master's already, moved from Blairsville to Augusta--I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine. And let me mention the dates--I've actually gone back and worked on getting exact dates of when I did things, and there's some inconsistency in that. So forgive me, in terms of the dates.

JB: Sure, that's fine.

FM: But I was not thirty yet.

JB: So how much time, then, passed between that and your father's passing?

FM: When I talked to my mother--

JB: Uh-huh

FM: --when I told her--

JB: Uh-huh, when you told her.

FM: Oh, just a couple of months

JB: Oh, my goodness

FM: Just a couple of months

JB: OK, so I can see how you--

FM: That was in my mind that I had just dealt with telling her and did expect, actually--I thought it was very kind--looking with hindsight, I see it was a pretty kind thing that she came out to let me know that no, that's not what killed him. So I had a wonderful, you know--I was with Jack for oh, about ten years. We were both--drank heavily, typical party scene. And when I left Blairsville to go to Augusta, where I met Jack almost instantly, I remember driving off the mountain and across the mountain to get away from Blairsville in a U-Haul truck. And I was reading a *Newsweek*, and it was--the thing that caught my eye--because I remember it so

sharply--was there was an article about a "gay cancer" that was starting to be a problem, that they had identified, and I thought, "Gay cancer? Oh, no," because I left the mountains because I knew I was gay, and I was afraid I would, if I got attracted to a farmer, and if the reality happened, it would have been sort of a *Brokeback Mountain* that found me in a ditch kind of thing up there. So I realized one day in Blairsville, sitting on the courthouse square, that I'll have to move somewhere where it's OK to be who I am. At that time I didn't know any gay people. I was not aware of how many of us there were.

JB: Is that when you came to Atlanta?

FM: I moved to Augusta.

JB: Augusta first

FM: Met Jack, and then we moved to Atlanta, yep.

JB: And where were you in Atlanta?

FM: I lived in Clarkston.

JB: OK, mm-hm

FM: We--Casa Loma Apartments right across Tahoe. I don't know if you've ever heard of Tahoe.

JB: Mm-hm

FM: But that was the place to live when we moved here.

JB: It's familiar. Growing up in Stone Mountain, Clarkston was just right next door. So I--it rings a bell for some reason.

FM: Yeah, it was great. It was just--I had never been--I had been rejected by my father over some issue, and meeting Jack and falling in love with Jack was just the most exciting time of my life then. And the only thing is we both drank heavily. I've been twenty-five years--this July 15th, I'll be sober.

JB: Congratulations

FM: Jack never got sober. He died in a wreck driving home from a bar. We split up over alcoholism, or we were in the process of splitting up.

JB: I'm so sorry.

FM: And he got killed and never dealt with his alcoholism, and I did not for about ten more years.

JB: So were there--one of the things I've been looking for is ads or flyers or things related to gay bars in DeKalb in the '80s and '90s. Do you go to Atlanta more so, or were there bars, clubs, in Clarkston or Stone Mountain or anywhere like that that you know of?

FM: Oh, no. That's laughable.

JB: OK, so there were in Atlanta, though, right? Because I found some magazines at the Atlanta History Center called *Cruising*, and there's a list--there's so many bars that were like on Peachtree Street or Ponce. But I couldn't find any in Stone Mountain or any in DeKalb, so that makes sense.

FM: Yeah, and it wasn't until just a few years ago, there was one that opened that I remember out of Tucker. But that was--back then, you went to them and to the "gay ghetto." It was--there was Backstreet, it opened. And there was a hotel called the Cabana hotel. It was a hotel on Peachtree that had these flags--I remember that. And that was right across the street from that was where Backstreet was located. And I'm trying to think if anything is left down there. I remember when they said all this development is going to start happening in Midtown, and I thought, "Why would--that'll never happen."

But for a world that I fell in love with was alive and well. And it was--by the time I was in Atlanta--that's when people really started dying, people were. So I lived through the--and I was-- Jack was the only person I was with, so--and then I'm assuming--for the best I know, we were monogamous. And that said, you know, you can have just sex one time with somebody, and it was--you'd hear plenty of people that had that story.

But DeKalb County was the place I lived, in Clarkston. And I worked at a place called Green Tree, a landscaping company, and was getting my PhD at Georgia State in econ. And got my PhD, and by that time I had--Jack and I split up; I met someone else. And it started a relationship that was just--I didn't really--that relationship was sort of just a response to well, I've got to get coupled, because with AIDS, everybody will die kind of thing. And I had no idea that I would live to be fifty, you know, much less sixty-five, that I am now, yeah.

Oh, yeah, it was--COVID was nothing compared to what we--because on top of that was being ostracized because of being gay, in addition to dying. And it was the way so many people were outed and I think is the reason that society moved so quickly is that families realized, no, we have gay folk. I remember when my father died--this is back to that time period--after his funeral, a day or so, my brother and I were in the pickup truck going to check the cows one evening, and we were across the road from the farmhouse. And I said, "John, I have to tell you something." And I said--I told him I was gay. And I expected John might cold-cock me, you know, hit me, because I didn't know how he would respond. My sister had responded so-so. My brother stopped the truck. I thought, "Oh, no. He's about to explode." And he leaned over and kissed me and asked, "Are you happy?" And I said, "Yes." This was when I was so happy with Jack. And he kissed me on the cheek and said, "I love you." And he never varied from that. He never--all of his life, he's been--my sister-in-law, his wife--they have three children. I was, you

know, I was a very popular uncle and still am. And I've enjoyed very much acceptance in my family. And this is rural Georgia, folks--Southern Baptist. So it just goes to show you that, when folks know someone in their family is gay, that makes a big difference, I think.

JB: It's powerful. So you got your PhD in economics?

FM: Yeah

JB: Your master's in?

FM: Horticulture

JB: OK. And so what have you been doing with your economics in your work?

FM: I taught at Oxford College, part of Emory. It's the original campus of Emory out in--next to Covington, is where Oxford is located. Have you been there?

JB: I have.

FM: [First phrase inaudible] stone's throw from Stone Mountain, yeah. So I worked there for twenty-three years. I've retired. And I was not out. I remember my biggest fear one time was a political scientist called me in his office the week before a friend of mine--Rick Stuckey was his name--he was a real estate agent, but he'd been in the military and had been kicked out. And it was something around "Don't ask, don't tell," and there had been a--there was a full-page ad in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and it signed off in a, you know--and to make a long story short, this political scientist had seen my name and my partner's name and called me in his office to let me know that he had seen. He said, "Who is this?" and he said the name of my partner. I was terrified. I don't know to this day whether he was holding that over me to--it felt like he was holding it over me, but I'm not sure if it wasn't to let me know--it was very awkward, what he did. And I never trusted that he wouldn't use that information against me, but he never did. And he turned out to be--he was--he would go to New York a lot and stuff, so he may have been an ally. But that was my biggest fear at Oxford.

JB: Was that your only interaction with him?

FM: No

JB: No, you had met him before?

FM: He was not a friend; he was a political scientist. We were in the same department, we worked in the same division and would have meetings. I never--we would have departmental parties, you know, that kind of stuff. But he was not someone I would say was a friend. So it was--and socially he was somewhat awkward. And he's dead now, but that was the only negative thing I bumped into at Oxford.

And then Oxford had something called the--what we called the "chapel incident." The chapel is a physical church, a little chapel, on the Oxford campus. And after Chris--I'm trying to--

I can't remember Chris's last name--but he worked in Student Life. And Chris and I knew each other there at school and also we both two-stepped--we had joined two-stepping--so I would see him at hoe-downs. Chris met someone, and they were madly in love and were going to have a commitment ceremony. And so they reserved the chapel, and they were going to have that ceremony after school had ended one year--I can't remember the year, but it's easy to Google and find out about that. But somebody--it was a guy in the Development Office--who found out that Chris was gay and took that to the dean and took that to the bishop. And to make a long story short, even though he had a reservation for the ceremony, they disallowed his having the--they took it away. He was not allowed to have the ceremony. And that became quite a pivotal moment--does the name Saralyn Chesnut ring a bell?

JB: Mm-mm

FM: She was head of the LGBT office at Emory, and she'd be a great person to interview if you [inaudible].

JB: Oh, yeah--Sara--

FM: Saralyn--

JB: --Chesnut

FM: Chesnut

JB: Thank you

FM: And she's out, because, you know, she was involved with that office. She was the head of LGBT office. And it was quite a confrontation between--like I called to the EOP office and filed a complaint of harassment at the workplace. I think I was the only somewhat out person. By that time--this is a few years after Bill had done the thing about me--and I had become--I was doing Gay Pride every year, and I started back in the days when you'd walk by the First Baptist Church, and they'd come out--church was letting out on Peachtree--First Baptist Church is where the IBM building [sic] is now, I think. But it was--what was his name? Stanley? Charles Stanley. They would let out church in time for people to come out to the street and shake their Bibles at us. And we were, like, maybe two hundred people at first. We were not very many people, maybe three hundred. But interestingly we'd pass that church. Then after a while we'd pass the Methodist Church, and they'd be giving us water. So that was my early days of seeing, you know, some churches are going to be OK, and some churches are not going to be OK. And I [inaudible] a little bit--

JB: No, it's OK. In terms of the chapel incident, they were not allowed--Chris and his partner were not allowed to get married at that facility. Do you know what happened with Chris and his partner, or was there any sort of action after that, in terms of what they would allow?

FM: Years--oh, no, nothing--they were not allowed to--and Chris left Oxford over this. And I did not stay--I was not a close friend of his, but he did years later, he was--Emory did give him at our LGBT ceremony, gave him a recognition; but there was never anything officially--it was handled so--it wasn't dealt with. It really never was dealt with. The Methodist Church basically--this was a point where Emory had to decide, because that church physically is said to belong to the Methodist Church. And so I don't even know the wording of the relationship--how it was resolved. From my way of seeing it, it really wasn't resolved. It was just like--OK, we're not going to have it, and it's Methodist property. And this was a time when other universities that had religious connections in the background were deciding whether or not to continue to uphold those. And Emory by and large broke away, in my opinion, from its close connection to the Methodist Church. The president started an LGBT Commission at Emory; I was a member of that commission. I was co-president of it at one time. So Emory did start being more intentional about--and then the thing that was really surprising was when Emory started giving--for domestic partners, getting insurance. This was some fifteen years later.

JB: Yeah, my goodness

FM: So from my way of seeing it, Emory did not handle that situation well, because they largely didn't handle it. And it's interesting that I don't see very much indication that this is part of Emory's history, that Emory's going to give much attention to it. I think it's pretty embarrassed by it institutionally, but it's important that we not let the memory of that go away.

JB: Right, and you being here today talking about it is in line with that very thing, isn't it? I feel like talking about it is--

FM: I think so. I think it's important that it--because you say "chapel incident"--I used to run seminars--by this time, I'm very much out at Oxford, I'm the faculty advisor to the gay and lesbian--we had gay and lesbian groups. I had really come out because of AIDS, and I had quite a few speakers who had AIDS come on campus and talk to students and never had anything--never had a negative response. I was untenured at the time when this happened, and Bill Murdy was the dean at that time; he's dead now. And Kent Linville was academic dean.

I got tenure. I had filed a complaint against Oxford College for a workplace harassment because of this, and I expected that I would--so I was fully out by this time because of this incident and my response to it. There was another person who was gay who opted not to--and I'm not going to--it's very--but it's interesting. There were quite a few gay faculty, but I was the only one who opted to become more--you know, because I didn't want to work--I didn't want to get tenure there if I wasn't going to be able to be who I was. That's starting with my mom--in

fact, when I was little, I think I was very much comfortable with being a gay person. I've never seen that as anything alien to myself; it's just part of who I've always been.

JB: So you're a trailblazer at Emory at Oxford in terms of giving other people a voice and saying it's safe to do that here. So I commend you for that.

FM: The campus--the Dean of Student Life--Joe Moon, he--when I was toward the end of my career, he let me know, he said, "You were the person that did so much for the gay and Lesbian"--and he also--he didn't do enough, in my opinion. He did some things politically that I didn't agree with, but by and large he was supportive. Not as much as I would've liked him to be, but I consider him an ally.

JB: That's good. So I just wanted to go back to some other--oh, so I wanted to talk about your--do you still live in DeKalb?

FM: Yeah, I live in Oakhurst. About--just before I got sober, twenty-five years ago, I had started a log cabin. I live in a log house--a two-story log house on Jefferson Place in Oakhurst, and I still live there. After I got sober--that was twenty-five years ago--I had broken away with my second partner because he interfered with my drinking. For some reason he attracted alcoholics into his life [*laughs*], so for about ten years after I--I went into AA, and for about ten years I focused on myself and getting better, and then I met someone who--as the crow flies--grew up just twenty miles, thirty miles from where I grew up. And we've been married--been together about fifteen years and been married--this is our seventh or eighth, I can't remember exactly. But when gay marriage--I remember Clark Lemons, who did the plays at Oxford--he did the Laramie Project. The students did a play--you know what the Laramie Project is, don't you?

JB: I don't.

FM: It's about this kid who got killed in Wyoming, they put his body on a--

JB, *gasping*: Oh, yes, of course, of course.

FM: --Laramie, Wyoming. Yeah, Matthew Shepard

JB: Matthew Shepard, of course, silly me.

FM: Well, there's a play about it, it's basically--and Clark put that play on, and his plays were so good. And it was such a good play. And then after the play, Clark would often ask people to--he'd have a panel, and the students would ask questions and talk about the play and stuff. And I was asked to be on that. And that was the first time in my life that I heard the term "marriage equality." I had always just heard this sort of, you know, in a put-downing sense always, this idea of "queer marriage" or "gay marriage," you know, it was almost--but some students used that term, marriage equality; and that's the first time I heard that. And I think that that term was such an important way of framing that in a context that, to me, in super-speed we

fast-forwarded to having the right to get married. And, of course, now we don't know whether those rights might be taken away--whether my marriage will be annulled or not--but I had been a person who said, "I'm not going to go outside the state of Georgia to get married." Others had gone to New York and other places to get married. So when it became legal in Georgia, within a year we--Tyler and I got married. Got married on the upstairs porch of my log cabin, and it was wonderful. It was the best day of my life, best day. My siblings came.

My mother was dead by this time, but she knew my--this is a fun thing, I think. My mother knew Jack. She didn't like Jack. She thought he was the one who "made me gay." She knew Tom; she was OK with Tom. But Tyler, she loved Tyler. Tyler is from Sparta, Georgia. And I remember--and this is the same mother who said, you know, I said it's worse--this is a little bit racial aspect to it--Sparta, Georgia, is--there's a lot of civil rights activity in Sparta. And Sparta was not--this was a place where there was a lot of--Jimmy Carter went down there one time to take the guns away in Sparta. But--have you ever--do you know any--so you'd have to do research about Sparta to find out.

JB: Mm-mm. I will.

FM: Well, to make a long story short, Sparta was a place--was a Black place in Georgia. It was--I didn't know there were any people lived in Sparta, Georgia. To make a long story short, Tyler and I--he was from Sparta--he's a white guy. And when my mother knew that I was serious about somebody, I would talk about him. I would say, "So-and-so, Tyler, he's from Sparta." And my mother started calling him Tyrone, which is sort of a Black-sounding name, and I said, "No, Mama, he's not a Black man." She thought I was getting involved--and she was OK with that. That was--she was not saying that in a negative kind of way. I said, "No, he's not a Black man. Thank you for being OK if he was" [*laughs*]. And she loved him. She really adored him. In fact--and she told me one time, she said, "He's such a good man. You know, he never told his mother he was gay. He kept her from having to go through that heartache. I think he's such--" In other words, she really thought--was comparing, you know, here's what I perceive as being--he's not out to his family, not much at all, just one sibling.

But I was the opposite. I was--one time, years before, we were sitting on the front porch of the farmhouse, and something was said, and my mother looked at me, and she said, "Oh, I just wish you'd go back in the closet!" And I looked at her, and I said, "Mama, that's the meanest thing anybody ever said to me." And we had that kind of honest back-and-forth, and when she said, there was nothing but love between us. But we wrestled with it. She didn't just accept it; she fought it. She was--but she loved me. I was her favorite of my siblings, I'll tell you that. So complex relationship, but a good one. My father was a struggle.

And then back to the point--sort of rambled and moved through time back and forth--

JB: Can you talk about how you got to be--

FM: We got married on the back porch.

JB: Yeah, you got married on the back porch--

FM: And my mother--my mother was dead by that time. But my siblings attended, and I was very happy. Two nieces came, my brother and sister--

JB: How did you get to hear about DeKalb History Center or be on the board of DeKalb History Center?

FM: Joe Stoner at Oakhurst Baptist. Oakhurst Baptist also was an important part of my gay story. I remember one--when I was sixteen, I had sworn I would never set foot in a Baptist Church again; and I didn't. I was--so I had--because of--I had, you know, basically, said I'll not be involved in religion. Twelve-Step work, though, is very spiritual, and so "Higher Power." And to this day church is not that important to me. Twelve-step meetings are my church. That said, the Twelve Steps is not about worshiping, so I--one Sunday learned about--I'd just learned about that morning in the *AJC* about this church that had gotten kicked out of the--was getting kicked out of the Southern Baptist Convention, and it was in my neighborhood, it turns out. And so I quit my gardening, went in and changed my shirt, and then I walked to the church and found the church. I'd never seen it before. And that became an important part of my story, too, to be in the Pride Parade with the church that had a float and that kind of stuff. It's less important to me now, but for a period of time--it was a pioneering church, and I think it's called the Alliance of Baptists--that's the religious organization that has churches that are--you know, I'm surprised we haven't dropped the term "Baptist" yet, but we're still a Baptist church.

JB: So these are churches, and Oakhurst is an example of a church, that either elected to leave or was asked to leave because they supported gay and Lesbian rights?

FM: We'd hired a gay assistant minister, Chris--I think it was Coleman--Chris somebody, but that hire brought the attention--

JB: Of the Southern Baptist Convention?

FM: --and they basically kicked us out, because we had hired someone who was gay. And then--

JB: So someone in that affiliation knew about DeKalb History Center, and that's how you got here?

FM: Yeah, Joe Stoner, who is married to a woman who is from my hometown. In fact, they were farmers--

JB: Small world!

FM: --they were farmers. Jane, she worked at Georgia Tech in the Development Office, retired from that. She's maybe twelve, fifteen years older than I am. They're both still living. And so I didn't remember her. She knew my family real well. She knew me, and I've become friends with her. And Joe recommended--when he knew I'd retired--that I--he recommended me to be on the board.

JB: And how long were you on the board?

FM: Just one term.

JB: OK, was a two--how long is a term?

FM: Three years

JB: Three years, OK

FM: And during that three years I got really involved. I was not a very good board member. Soliciting funds is something I can't do. And really, I learned that through this experience. And during that three years I got involved with something called the Frank Hamilton School.

JB: Yes!

FM: And I'm very active there. Like, I'll be over there this afternoon, just playing around. I'm a person who--I like to do work. I strip floors, I [inaudible] rugs, you know, I'm that kind of a--I was a very effective board member for that board when I was on the board. And so I enjoyed the History Center, but it wasn't a passion for me, and music is.

JB: Do you play instruments as well?

FM: I play the fiddle. I've got a fiddle class, just got back from a week of fiddle up at Mars Hill University in North Carolina. And it's [Frank Hamilton School] over at Legacy Park, the Methodist Children's Home.

JB: I'm actually meeting Frank Hamilton next week to do an oral interview.

FM: With Maura?

JB: With Frank himself, yes sir.

FM: Yeah! Oh, good. Because he's such a treasure.

JB: He is, and I realize he's--someone said to me, "Well, he's not from DeKalb, but he's in DeKalb now, and his school is in DeKalb. And he's got such a legacy--literally, in Legacy Park, right?" And so I'm going to talk to him next week. And we're also looking at--I'm off-topic now--but we're looking at having either him or someone else from the school come and do a Lunch and Learn for us and then maybe play. So maybe you can come play.

FM: Absolutely! We'd love to do that.

JB: It'd be fun. You know Claudia Stucke?

FM: Yeah, she and I were on the board at the same time.

JB: Yeah

FM: She also, for a similar reason, stepped back from the board when I was explaining when I was stepping down or not renewing. She said--well, Claudia--the same reason, soliciting funds is not for everybody.

JB: Yeah, I get that.

FM: I can give my own money, but it's difficult for me to do that. That's just not my gift.

JB: I got you.

FM: And that's--this board, you know, that's what the board largely needs to do. That's--and I was involved with the [Frank Hamilton] board while it was getting the building, cleaning the floors, and now I'm not interested in [rest inaudible]. I enjoyed my tenure [with DHC], but it was not a good fit.

JB: Mm-hm, so besides gardening and playing fiddle, do you still enjoy cooking?

FM: Cooking's not important.

JB: No?

FM: Mm-mm

JB: Puppets?

FM: Oh, I just love puppets--

JB: You still--

FM: --puppets and ventriloquism. My--when I was in college, I experienced vocal chord paralysis. I was on the Appalachian Trail hiking one December and got hypothermia. And long story short, for about a year, I couldn't speak. And eventually--and I was learning sign language, I was going to Gallaudet and be a professor--that was my life's purpose was to go. I learned sign language and was heading in that direction, and then surprisingly the voice came back. It was nerve damage that apparently regenerated in about a year.

JB: Do you remember how old you were when that happened?

FM: I was a sophomore in college.

JB: Oh, wow. Now, where did you go to undergrad?

FM: Georgia Southern

JB: Georgia Southern

FM: It was as far away from the farm that I could get without paying--farmers don't pay out-of-state fees, so the idea of going to an out-of-state school was not on our radar screen. So--and I'd never been to Georgia Southern, never heard of it. But my counselor, she--I love this lady for having done this for me. When I told her that I really didn't want to be at Athens,

because it's too close--I wanted to get away from Madison, I needed to get away. And she said, "Well, I know a place for you." And I went to Georgia Southern for four years there.

JB: Fantastic. And did you say--you might have said--where did you complete your master's?

FM: UGA

JB: UGA, and your PhD was at--

FM: Georgia State

JB: Georgia State, OK. Fantastic.

FM: I was biology undergrad, master's in horticulture, and the--it was linked to my coming--I was with the Extension Service. They had sent me back to get a PhD, but it was going to be a semester a year kind of thing, and I was going in AggieCon, and so that--and AggieCon--I loved Micro, so I shifted into--when I came to Athens--when I came to Atlanta--went to Georgia State and got accepted into the program because of my background in AggieCon, and so I was shifting into that extension work.

JB: So what kinds of things are in your garden? Do you garden vegetables, flowers, plants--what kinds of things do you garden at home?

FM: Hardly anything that squirrels eat. Squirrels are terrible in Oakhurst. And so I--when I first was--I had good sunlight, and I had a huge garden in the backyard. And my specialty was bell peppers, that was my area up in north Georgia. And so I was going to have all these nice bell peppers in the backyard, and I never--I have a pear tree that's twenty-five years old that I've never gotten a single pear from. I have a fig bush that, you know--because of the squirrels.

JB: Oh, right.

FM: So I don't garden for anything that squirrels and--so the landscape has been geared toward looking appropriate with the house.

JB: Uh-huh. So what kinds of things are squirrels not interested in? Because I'm--

FM: Boxwood

BJ: Foxwood?

FM: Boxwood's sort of the foundational plants, and a variety of different trees on the property. It's a nice, wooded lot now, and I've planted all the trees. When I moved there, I came here to the city hall and asked--I forget the guy who was giving permits--but I said I want to build a log cabin. And he said, "We don't care what you build, but do you know where it is that you're talking about?" Because at that time, my street had crack houses on it. It was a much more interesting Decatur than Decatur is now. I really miss the diversity that was on my street when I

first moved in. Now it's very gentrified. And, you know, I'm appalled at what they're saying my house is worth, because I don't want to sell it. I want to be able to afford the taxes.

So Decatur--I came and wanted to settle in Decatur because of a mayor, Meyers [sic]? Is that it?

JB: Mm-hm

FM: Mike Meyers [sic]?

JB: Mm-hm

FM: Is he still living?

JB: I don't know.

FM: It was when the--out of Cobb--was it Cobb County? Something right at the Olympics, when the Olympics--Cobb County had some--the county commissioners or the city commissioners--and one of my friends, closest friends, his father was one of these commissioners. And there were other commissioners that had gay children, and they knew it, but they still signed this out of Cobb that basically was disallowing some gay--it was time where that was the thing to do. It was--you're not nearly as old, so you don't remember these hateful times [laughs]. It's not been easy until really recently, that idea of Delta being in the Pride Parade and all these sponsored floats? Oh, my goodness.

JB: So Decatur felt more welcoming at that time?

FM: Yeah--sorry, I'm rambling--Mike--when the out of Cobb--Mike Meyers--

JB: Mears, I think it's Mears. Is it Mears, M-E-A--? I think it's Mears. I'll check.

FM: And I don't know--I've never met him. I've seen him, but I don't know him. But he was famous for saying, "Well, everybody's welcome to come to Decatur." And do you know about the Digging Dykes?

JB: Mm-mm

FM: Oh! You've--it was a group of women, Lesbians, who--I think they were called the "Digging Dykes of Decatur."

JB: OK

FM: And they would be in parades sometimes. I think they did a lawn mower--

JB: Parade?

FM: --parade, parade activity. But, remember, when I moved into DeKalb County, that's--it was mostly women that were--it was known for--gay guys would not live in DeKalb County. Gay guys would go live in Midtown. This was not friendly territory till Mike said that about coming to Decatur. And then--I've not moved away, I've stayed here.

JB: Fantastic. And I'm conducting some other interviews this month related to LGBTQ folks, and a couple of the women that I'm hoping to talk to maybe can tell me about the Digging Dykes of Decatur.

FM: Yeah, and the place that was across from Agnes Scott--you remember? Used to be a hostel. John and John were friends, and they had a hostel with a big teepee in it--it was--and a restaurant there. The woman who does All Saints? What's this French restaurant right around the corner?

JB: Oh, Café Alsace?

FM: This was her job before that. She worked for John and John--I can't remember their last names. But when they sold it to My Sister's Room, I think was the name of it--it was a Lesbian bar after that.

JB: Oh, yeah. I've heard of that.

FM: And now it's condos or something.

JB: Condos, yeah. So across the railroad tracks from Agnes Scott is where you're talking about?

FM: Yeah

JB: Yeah, very good. My Sister's Room. I have heard of that. Do you want to backtrack a little bit, if it's OK with you? Life on a dairy farm--what is that like, Frank, growing up on a dairy farm? I'm sure you--did you have chores? And did your brother and sister--did you guys have to get up really early and help do--

FM: Oh, yeah

JB: What's that--tell me about them and the dairy farm.

FM: And that's partly why I have a PhD is because I wanted to get away from this. This was no kind of work for--and I was very much a gay guy who did not appreciate the fact that I had to get up about four o'clock every morning and milk cows. On Christmas Day one year--this is [inaudible] but I do remember it. We had to get the cows milked before we could go see Santa Claus. And during calving season I remember my dad would--he'd wake us up, and we'd come downstairs and go out and pull calves. That means there was a cow that the calf's legs were starting to stick out. So what--you'd attach this thing, and you'd pull the calf out of the cow.

JB: Oh, wow

FM: And so we'd pull calves and go back to bed [*laughs*]. And that happened a lot during the middle of the night, a cow would have a calf during the night. So during calving season that happened frequently.

JB: I guess you would hear the cow?

FM: No, my daddy would be watching the cows. When a cow--they'd be across the road, and when they were starting to start to have their calf, they'd bring them into this well lot--we'd call it the well lot. And then he would--he was seasoned enough to know about what time we'd need to get up to pull the calf.

JB: And did you have to do that--are all calves the same? You'd have to pull it just a certain way?

FM: He knew--usually, when they were having their first calf, and that could be the harder--but they--it wasn't always the first calf. But that's just part of my--that body coming out of the cow, and then we'd have to deal with it until the calf was standing up and sucking, and then we could go back to sleep. So that's life on a farm. And it was smelly, it was--I remember I was embarrassed by the fact when the school bus would come by, with the smell and that kind of stuff. And so I was happy not to be--

My brother ran the dairy farm for a while. He had a bad wreck and had to sell the cows and never went back in. So it's no longer a dairy farm. It's about a thousand-acre farm. And my brother's grandchild, who's named John Charles--my father was named John Charles, my brother's named John Charles, and my father's--my grandfather's named John Patrick. But all they--five generations--in the same house. It's sort of cool.

JB: Wow. Now, you mentioned before we started that you have relationships to Lester Maddox? I assume that's on your father's side?

FM: Daddy used to say "Cousin Lester." Now, the Maddoxes were not a close group at all. They had a lot of--it was--they were mean. There was meanness in that--my grandfather, when he returned--my great-grandfather--of course, I didn't know him--but they owned in Putnam County large fertilizer businesses. But the boll weevil--this was the boll weevil--caused them to be in financial straits, so that when my grandfather returned from the war, his father had sold his farm--my grandfather had a farm in Putnam County, and my great-grandfather had sold it. I don't know how he had the deed and stuff, but my grandfather and his brother both lost their farms because their father had sold them trying to deal with the debt due to boll weevil. So my grandfather, when he got back from the war, he started being a tenant farmer in Morgan County, where I grew up. And to make a long story short, from having nothing, he died with a thousand-acre farm. And my grandmother used to plow the mule on the farm. And so I've come from very sort of German stock people--hardworking, mean people [*laughs*]. So Lester Maddox was right in there with being, you know-- We were related, but I don't know how.

JB: OK

FM: But it's my father's side. He used to talk about "Cousin Lester." I met him one time, but I never went to any family reunions or anything.

JB: Anything else you want to talk about? You mentioned two-stepping. Are you still two-stepping these days, Frank?

FM: Uh-uh, no. Two-stepping--that was hoe-downs. Hoe-downs on Briarcliff and then in the new location--

JB: Hoe-downs

FM: --next to Whole--not Whole Foods. What's that--Trader Joe's?

JB: Uh-huh

FM: There in the shopping center across from Grady High School? That was the place to go.

JB: That was the place for two-step.

FM: Oh, yeah. And there, Grady Kiether [spelling?] my dearest friend--he's in his eighties now--but he lost a partner to AIDS, and we were good friends. In fact, along with another guy, Ken Oliver, whose father and my grandfather in Toccoa were good friends--it's a small world.

JB: It is.

FM: And so Grady and I would go to hoe-downs--it would be sometimes every night they were open, for several weeks in a row. We did not miss a night. It was that important of a social connection for me. And I was also getting sober at the time. But hoe-downs was wonderful.

JB: That's fun. Anything else that comes to mind? Any other memories or things?

FM: No, we've covered a lot.

JB: You've covered a lot. That's amazing. All right, well, we'll stop the recording here. It's an hour.

FM: Good!

JB: Very good!

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by cgs