

Maria Council

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by Gary Knapp & A. Krummenacker

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

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COUNCIL: Maria Council

GK: Gary Knapp

AK: A. Krummenacker

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This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Winter Term 2010, with Instructor Pat Young.

Introduction

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Maria Council is a drag queen and co-founder/President of Peacock After Dark. This organization raises money for various gay causes in memory of Lady Elaine Peacock's mother, Audria M. Edwards. During our interview, we talked to Maria about how she got into drag performing, some stories of her life and what her goals are for the future of Peacock After Dark.

Session 1
2010 February 12

GK: Okay. Interview with Maria Council on February 19th, 2010.

AK: My name is A. Krummenacker and I'll be sitting in on the interview.

GK: Maria, we've got a couple of questions. Just to begin with, could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your history? Where were you born and raised and take it from there.

COUNCIL: My name's Maria Council and I was born in Walnut Creek, California.

GK: Walnut Creek, oh, I love that city.

COUNCIL: You do? Oh, somebody's heard of it. Yeah, so Walnut Creek. I pretty much was raised until – well, I was a teenager when I moved here, so I lived in Berkeley. That much I can remember. I think I moved there when I was two with my family, lived in Berkeley. Raised Catholic, very Catholic, went to a Catholic school. All of my siblings did. I'm the youngest of four. And I'm the baby-baby. I'm the "oops" in my family. The closest one to me in age is my brother, who since passed away in 2003. But he's nine years older than me. And then my sister's ten years older. And my other brother is twelve years older than me. Yeah, I'm the spoiled one. Somebody had to be, so it's me. I moved to Portland when I was a sophomore in high school, so I don't know, fifteen, sixteen, something like that. Whatever it was, it was devastating. I can't remember how old I was. But it was – you know, I'd rather die than move somewhere in a new state, you know. All I knew was my friends in my block.

So anyway, I moved here, went to school. Went to St. Mary's Academy, hung out at Portland State more than I did at St. Mary's Academy, because we had off-campus, and it was cool to pretend like you were going to PSU rather than going to St. Mary's. I graduated from there in 1982, Yeah. That was it. I lived in Troutdale most of my life – or when I moved here, we moved to Gresham for a minute, but then we got a home – my family, my parents bought a home. And now I've been here. My dad lives here. My parents are divorced. After twenty-eight years of marriage, they decided to divorce. And my dad lives here. My mom lives back in California with the rest of my family. And currently, my roommates are my dad and my sister. Yeah. I mean that's it. I mean I guess I could go into more depth about where I'm from. But --

GK: Whatever you're comfortable with.

COUNCIL: Yeah, I mean as I get more comfortable, I think I'll be more talkative.

GK: Well we understand that you've been involved with Peacock Productions for a considerable amount of time now. What got you involved with Peacock?

COUNCIL: When I – you know, I hung out downtown, because I went to school downtown. I was – I got to see a lot of life that I wouldn't have if I stayed in Troutdale. And so I was already going to the City Nightclub, which was the gay and lesbian underage club. It was called the City Nightclub. Now it's called The Escape. It's changed hands several times or changed names several times. But in the 80's when I was going, it was called City Nightclub. It was on 13th and like Taylor or something. Anyway, so I started going there. And they had drag queens performing. You know, my age, some older, a lot of times they were older. And I – the first time I saw a drag queen, I was like, oh, shut up, oh, oh. They were so glamorous, you know.

I loved it. I loved it. And I didn't really know – I didn't really understand the whole lip sync thing. I didn't you know, I just knew that they were beautiful. They were – you know, and I couldn't believe that – they were like, that's a guy. I'm like, no, it's not. No, it is not. That is – oh, she's beautiful, you know. So I started going to the City Nightclub. And then I turned twenty-one. And the first place I went was Darcelle's. Everybody kind of, you know, that's a right of passage, I think, when you're gay. And when you're gay or lesbian and you're turning twenty-one, you're going to go see other gay people. And so I went there and then The Embers. And The Embers used to have a show on Friday and Saturday nights. And I was just like in awe. I just loved all of them.

And there was a queen named Patty O'Dora. And she was a big girl. And it was the first time that I saw like a big girl drag queen, you know, on stage. Everybody else was thin and model-like. You know, and I was like, she's just like me, you know. I thought – first of all I thought, here's a big Black girl that's lip-syncing, everybody loves her, and she's like Miss Gay Oregon or something, so that's really glamorous. And, you know – and so I – we started talking. I was like, I just adore you. And we start talking. And she was Ms. Oregon. And she had asked me to be a part of a benefit show she had. And she was like, I think you could do it. We could be like sisters. And I can, do your makeup for you and all that. And I was like, okay. You know, I'm game. I'm twenty-one years old. Sure. And it was performing at Darcelle's. And I'm like, so let me get this right. I get to look like you, I get to perform on Darcelle's stage, you know, whatever? And she said, Yeah, you know. And so I did.

So my very first performance – although when I look at it now thinking why did I put on spandex. But, you know, we all have to start somewhere. And I did this number, Hungry For Love, with Patty O'Dora. And we didn't tell anybody. We just dressed me – you know, I did the wig, the lashes. She did me up. And we just acted like I was a drag queen. And I was like, that's kind of fun. I looked at myself. I thought I looked pretty. And I just thought, well, let's just see how this goes.

And so in the drag community, a lot of times you have a drag mom or a drag mother is what we call them, you know. And Patty O'Dora would be my drag mom. And a lot of times in the community, you'll take the name of your – the person that sponsors you or the person that put you in drag for the first time or whatever. But I never took the O'Dora name. I just always knew, you know, she's always been my mom. So I never thought about it or anything. I've always had just one name. It's – you know, it's never been like Maria Council. It's just Maria. Or once I became Embers, it was Rose Em – it's always been Rose Empress 36 Maria, you know. And people were like, What's your last name? I'm like, one name, like Cher, Madonna, Sting. You don't need another name. I only need one. So that's how it's gone.

So anyway, I started my performance, and I got hooked on the whole drag things, started performing at The Embers. And there was a queen that was always at the City Nightclub. She was like the star of it, you know, Lady Elaine Peacock, beautiful queen. She was – she was – she just – she was sexy. She was flirtatious with males and females. I mean, you know, the lesbians loved her. The – you know, we all just adored her. And I started seeing her more and hanging and talking to her and stuff. And then I really got involved in the Rose Court, the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court, which is the oldest GLBT organization in Oregon. I got involved in that. And she was Rose Empress – or she was getting ready to run for – to be Rose Empress. But she was – she'd been Princess and Rosebud, you know, which is the junior court. And so she – everybody knew her, you know. And, we became friends. And she ran for Empress, and I was on her campaign. And that's when I really got started is about that time. I – you know, I'm twenty-two years old, so I did her campaign and watched that whole thing and how being an Empress was and all that. And I started running for titles.

And I ran for Ms. – well, I ran for Foxy Lady, which is no longer around. But it was a fun little title that they did. They had Mr. Hunky and Foxy Lady. And it was taking the guys

and changing them over to be real butch and all that. And then the Foxy Lady was the lesbian title. And it was like transforming the lesbians who wear no makeup and, anything into these glamour pussies. And I ran for it. And I didn't win. I was the first runner up. But I got my first taste of this whole running pageant thing, whatever was going on. I fit in, and I like this, you know.

So I then went over and ran for Ms. Gay Oregon, the female title, which was fairly new for lesbians. It was – it was number four. So, Yeah, it had been four years that they had created this lesbian titles, Ms. So I ran, and I lost. And I thought, I really still like this, and I want to keep trying it. So I ran for Ms. Gay Portland. And that was like, I think 1987. And I was the second Ms. Gay Portland.

So all this time I'm – now really into it. I'm hanging out. I'm not letting people know that I'm a drag queen – or that I'm a real woman. I'm letting them think that I'm a drag queen. They never see me without full regalia – you know, makeup, lashes, all that stuff. And I just got more involved with the court system, ran for Ms. Portland. Then the following – after stepping down the following year, I ran for Ms. Gay Oregon. I was number six.

And then Patty O'Dora, my drag mom, in '91, ran for Empress, for the position of Rose Empress 33. And I, of course, was on her campaign. She was my mom. You know, I'm going to help her and whatever. She wins and makes me her Princess, which is a kind of, you know, second in line or, you know, first in line or succession or whatever. But you have your Empress and your Princess. And those Prince and Princess in the Rose Court are appointed. So there was a big hullabaloo, because by about that time, some folks knew that she's a real woman, even though she does drag. And they're like, well what is she? Is she a lesbian? Is she a drag queen? Is she straight? I'm like, No, I'm a lesbian, but I like doing drag. So we kind of coined the Northwest's First Lesbian Drag Queen, you know, kind of thing.

That was kind of my title, just to explain it. But there was a lot of hullabaloo, but a lot of people were like, do we – this organization was started by men for men. It's a drag organization. Do we really want this woman to be Princess? Finally people were like, she can be Princess. Never Empress, but she could be Princess. It's appointed. It's not big deal. So I was. So I was Princess 21, the very first female Princess of the Rose Court. Well after that, of course I'm going to want to be Empress. I don't care what you say. I could care less.

Within the international court system, you truly are treated differently depending on your titles, you know. And by the time I got to Princess and I could taste that – you know, I'm holding the scepter for the Empress. And people would come up and go, Oh, and you're the Empress? I'm like, Oh, no, I'm the Princess. And they'd walk away, you know, to go see the Empress. I'm like, oh, no, that's going to be me.

I decided to run for 36, Rose Empress 36. And it – I had people tell me before I ran that they wouldn't – love me dearly, but would never vote for me because it's a by-men, for-men organization. When I was Miss Oregon – my Miss Oregon, the drag person, my Miss Oregon, she said she would never ever vote for me for Empress. She goes, I love you, but I would never. This is a drag organization. You're not a drag queen. There's not a title for you. And I got support from a couple of Monarchs, people that – past – people that have been Empress, we call them Monarchs, from them. And I said, okay, I'm going to do it. And I did.

And I had even my Princess, my dear friend, who has since passed away, but she was a really good friend, we spent days and days planning out my campaign. Because it's a citywide campaign, you're out for three weeks trying to get people to vote for you. You're doing functions and all that. So she had everything down. And then about a month before, she came to me and said, I think I'm going to run, because, you know, it is

a by-men, for-men organization. And I'm like, you know everything I'm going to do. And now you're going to run against me?

I just tried my best and thought, you know, I've lost before. As a matter of fact, everything I run for, I have lost up until that point, because – the first time trying out. So I ran for Miss Oregon, lost. Foxy Lady, lost. I ran for Portland, but I was the only one, so there was no – there was no competition. Ran for Oregon, same thing. You have to get fifty percent of the vote, but most likely you're going to, and I did. So I never had a competition. And when I did have a competition, I lost. So I thought, I'm probably going to lose this, but I'm going to try it. So I did. I ran and I won. I was freaking out. Because then I was like, now what?

Not only that, the person that ran for Emperor was female. There were two. There was a man and a woman. Bobaloo is her name. And then – so it was Duane Chad, Bobaloo, and then Penny Michaels and myself. And Bobaloo and I won. So the Rose Court saw not only their first female Empress, but their first female reign. Bobaloo was the second female Emperor, but we – there's never been another female reign in the Rose Court history. And we're on Empress 51 now.

AK: Wow.

COUNCIL: Right.

AK: When was that?

COUNCIL: That was 1993. 1993.

GK: And who was that again?

COUNCIL: It was, Bobaloo, Rose Emperor 20. Bobaloo won, and then me, Rose Empress 36. I know. It was crazy. It was crazy. I was like – we – I mean we both looked at each other. And Bobaloo had way more experience in the Rose Court. And again, you know, an organization where she had dedicated so much time, but they were like – the lesbians need to be over here, you know. I'm like, that doesn't seem quite right. She was Prince. She was – you know, she'd been on the board. She was president of the board for many years. And they didn't care about that. But the minute we wanted to be Monarchs, they were like – you know.

So anyway, I had befriended Peacock all those years and Peacock's sister, Misty Waters. And when I ran and was crowned, Lady Elaine Peacock was very ill and did not come to that coronation. And so the last time – the last time that I had a chance to really talk to him was the Sunday after I stepped up, so it was like October of '93. And we – when you win, the next day you do kind of a bar tour and, you know, you're out. Well I told everybody, I'm not doing a bar tour until I can go see Peacock and make sure that he sees me with this crown on my head and the scepter. Because I know he voted for me, and I really want him to see it.

So we went to his house. And I went upstairs. I will never forget him helping me and showing me how to hold the scepter, how to wear my crown, what to say to people that are negative. I mean he just gave me like the lesson of Empress condensed, you know, in like a thirty-minute conversation. And so that was on a Sunday. And then within that week he passed away. Like three days later or something like that. And I was working. I want to say it was on a Wednesday. But I was working. And I got a call from his partner, Ray Southwick. That he was in the hospital, but he's – he was talking to Darcelle and joking and all that. He's in good spirits. And I go, I want to come now. He's like, No, come later when you get off work. Don't take off work early. I was like, okay, I get off work at five.

It was up on the hill. I got there at 5:30 PM. And he had passed away like at 4:30 PM. I was like, Really, Ray? I could have – you know. So it was Kimberly Van Patten – and at the time, Kimberly and I were together. And her and I were up there and – in the room with Woody's body and Ray Southwick, talking and just spending some time, you know, just kind of deprogramming ourselves. And Ray said, It's Woody's wish to continue – he had started Peacock In The Park. And it was a benefit for his scholarship fund, which he started, which is the Audria M. Edwards Scholarship Fund, named after his mother. And he established that in nineteen eighty – '87 is when he made the announcement at – she died at his coronation when he stepped down as Rose Empress. We were downtown. She had a heart attack backstage.

Yeah. And passed away at his coronation. He stayed to step down, but then left. I know, it was just like, really? So 1987, in October, she passes away. And he establishes the Audria M. Edwards Scholarship Fund. During his reign, he had done – he always wanted to perform at Washington Park in the amphitheater. So he put together Peacock In The Roses show, just a drag show in the park. Did it, then Audria passes away, he establishes the scholarship fund, and decides we're going to do this Peacock In The Roses show every year as a benefit for the Audria M. Edwards Scholarship Fund.

So the very next year, in '88, I believe that's the year that it changed to Peacock In The Park. I don't think it was Peacock In The Roses. It was Peacock In The Park. And then in '89 they gave away their first scholarship. So '89. Then here I am. I'm now Empress. I'm told it's – it was Woody's wish that you and Kimberly keep this going.

And I think – and I've always felt this way, and I could be wrong. But I've always felt this way, that – because I think, why did you pick us? Why would you take the two lesbians – I mean we love you dearly and we'd do anything. And at that time we had been working really hard backstage. We were doing hotdog sales in the front. We were, you know, doing all kinds of stuff. And I was performing on stage. Kim was always doing

all the stuff on the side and making sure that I looked good or, you know, everybody else looked good. And I think because at that point we were losing a lot of people to AIDS, a lot of queens that we – you know, took a big ‘ol chunk out of the Rose Court from AIDS. And I think – I think Peacock was thinking if I give it to so-and-so, they may be sick as well. You know, and back then we didn’t look at lesbians going, well they’re HIV positive. So I think that’s why. I think that was his thinking. I don’t know. But I’ve always felt that way. And so in June of 1994, I was the hostess/MC, we always call me the hostess, of Peacock In The Park. So that’s – that started. We ran that through eighteen years. 2004 we stopped because it got to be too expensive. People – it was like the biggest party in the community. But people weren’t – it – it’s supposed to be a fundraiser, and people weren’t fundraising, they were partying. They were bringing their barbecues, but they weren’t doing anything else. So we stopped doing it. And then we thought, we need to do something. We’ve got to keep this scholarship going. It’s not mine to decide to end. It’s the wish of somebody that can’t fight back now, so it’s our job to keep it going. What are we going to do?

And Poison Waters is one of my dearest friends, known him since he was a teenager. He was talking to Kimberly and I one day, and he was like, You know what? We should do a show at the Performing Arts Center. I go, Yes, we should, because I’m always about yes. We should, let’s do it. And so we contacted them. And they gave us a date. We were like, For real? We can bring drag queens in here? And we got a date. It was September 9th, I think was the first year. It was three years ago. In September, I know that. We did the first Peacock After Dark. And we did it inside where we could have a ticket price, and that way we could make money for the scholarship fund. And we did it in the Newmark Theatre. So it’s the biggest theatre in there. It’s gorgeous. And I just was like, okay, this is fabulous. This is fabulous. We were all on this professional stage with like, you know, curtains that come down and up and lighting effects and all that. Not some concrete slab outside or, some bar where you just have a spotlight and that’s it. So we did the first one. It wasn’t sold out by any means. Some people – a lot of

people were negative, because that's how they are. People don't like change. And they're like, You know, it used to be a party where it's free, now you want to charge, you know. But it's a little bit different, you know. We're giving you big production numbers and sets and scenery and, you know, excellent off-the-chart performances, you know, aerialists last year and, you know, just all kinds of stuff. It's really fun. And the ticket price is \$25. That's really not much. It's very inexpensive, you know. So, Yeah. That's what we did. And so that's how I got involved. So that's how I got involved with Peacock After Dark, because of Peacock In The Park and Lady Elaine Peacock. And that took me a long time to get to that question, sorry about that.

AK: Okay. Was that when you guys started – went from Peacock In The Park to Peacock After Dark?

COUNCIL: So 2004 to 2008. Yeah. Because this is – Yeah, September 2008 was number one. And then we did it in October last year for 2009. And this year we're back in September. So we're – it's a fall thing, but we don't – you know, Peacock In The Park was always the last Sunday in June. But here we're just kind of at the mercy – because it's kind of like, you know, you get that little spoonful and you can't get it out of your mouth. And so now that we've done it once, we want to continue to do it. So we're kind of at the mercy of them. But I think once we establish a long-term relationship, we'll be able to say we want this date. So it's just – it's getting bigger. The second year we had more people.

And now we actually have someone in St. Louis that is starting a scholarship fund. And it's called the Pride Of Peacock. We didn't really want them using Peacock or do Peacock After Dark. And they're going to do the same idea, a show and raise money. And then it'll be, you know, using Lady Elaine Peacock's name. And in their history it'll be while we did this after this queen in Portland, Lady Elaine Peacock. So we're spreading our wings.

GK: What are your fondest memories of the Peacock productions?

COUNCIL: I think it's that – that theater. I – you get out on that stage and it's like, oh, wow! You know, it's so beautiful. It's so beautiful. And to be able to do things that you vision – you know, you have this vision in your head. And actually, it can come true, because you're on a huge stage and you have professional, you know, tech people and, you know, all that. So not the first one, because I – the first one was kind of like surreal, you know. I mean – I didn't sleep through it, but I just – it – you know, the anxiety was so much that you kind of forget. But this last year, we – in – in October '09, we had a children's number. We did a live version of It's a Hard Knock Life. And we had this wonderful lady, Susan Overcast, who is a big huge supporter of the community and just funny and talented and great. She played Mrs. Hannigan. And we sent out info via Just Out at Pride asking parents if they had kids that liked to perform. And we got about twelve kids that did It's a Hard Knock Life live. And the gal that played Annie, played it in the Northwest Children's Production of it. And she was nominated for whatever Portland's version of a Tony would be, for playing this this Annie Character. And she – it was – she – they were so – they were so cute. I mean in the rehearsals, we were all crying, you know. I mean just the tiniest little girl running around there pulling on Mrs. Hannigan and stuff. And the – you know, the choreography was very simple, but the kids had microphones and you could hear them. And they were singing, and they were having a great time. And so that – that, so far, is my best memory. And we really want to always – our focus has always been to make things all ages. Everything we do, we try to include everybody. And so we want to hopefully continue that and always have a spotlight where there's a kids number. Not anything else but, you know, kids just having a good time. Yeah, so that's my fondest memory so far. But there's lots more to come.

GK: Well let's look at the opposite of that. What are some of the worst things you remember about it?

COUNCIL: The worst things about, Yeah. The worst things about, not the show. The worst thing for me is that you have to tell people no. I'm not very good at that. I really am not. I don't like to tell people no. But you have to because we, you know, we have a limit. You can't. I mean, I got a text message, at 12:30 AM Wednesday, or you know, Tuesday night Wednesday morning, someone saying please, please, please let me perform at Peacock After Dark this year. Like it's after midnight. On a Tuesday! Really.

And you have to, you know, there comes a point you have to say no and I really, I really wish I could say, Yeah, everybody who wants to be in it can and I can't do that. I'm not sorry we try and say, okay, you know, and you're given a slot but it has to be a group number because then we're hoping that you'll incorporate more of the community, and people can at least be on stage and perform and not, you know, be sitting out there. So that's the worst part I think. Cause I just want everybody to have a good time and be in it and be involved if they want to but, you know, there are some people that, and I don't want to say like they're, everybody has their own talent and I love and can appreciate everybody, but it has to go along the lines of what we're trying to give, and so, you know, that's hard for me to say no. It's hard for me to be mean, or, I just, you know.

AK: Seems like you want to make people's wishes come true.

COUNCIL: I do! I hate saying no. I think, you know, that's a, probably something my parents probably told me no once or something. I don't know. I just, I really hate it, so that's, yeah, that's probably the worst thing. Other than that.

GK: How long have you been working for Just Out?

COUNCIL: I'm a newbie. I got here in August. I worked for attorneys for fourteen years downtown. For Stoel Rives, downtown, and, I went to work for them as a receptionist for

the summer in 1994 when I was Empress. I was just supposed to work for three months. I'm backing up a little bit, but prior to that I worked for Hallmark corporation, and I was very closeted, and, then I became Empress. It's kind of hard, you know, I mean, doing things. And I went to, I transferred over and went to manage a store downtown for this guy that I thought was wonderful and I just thought it would be a good move for me. And then I became Empress and at Christmas time I hired some people to work for me just for Christmas that were some college students I knew that also knew that I was gay. And it wasn't that I was, I wasn't closeted, I just didn't talk about it you know, I didn't mean to, I didn't have a need to talk about it. I'm just, I'm Maria, you know, and that was it. Well, while we were doing something one day she was, one of the gals was like, "I'm so glad, thanks for hiring me. Are you and Kim still together?" and I was like, well Yeah, duh, Yeah we're still together. She said "that's so great" and the next day she said, "you know, they were asking me why I asked about that asking if you were gay and I thought you had told them." I'm like, Yeah, nothing to worry about. They didn't ask me. I didn't tell them anything. I don't, you know. I didn't care. And the next day I got a phone call that said, "you know, we just think you're not working out here."

Yeah, so, I don't think it had anything to do with me being Black, I don't think it had anything to do with me being overweight, I really happen to believe, although I did nothing about it, I think it had to do with me being gay. Call me crazy. So I didn't work and a friend of mine was working with Stoel Rives and said, "you want to come be a part time receptionist, just for the summer because everybody is taking vacations". I said, that would be perfect. It would be a little money in the summer and then continue on because as Empress you're traveling around representing your organization. But we are volunteers. We are not getting paid for this. We are not sponsored. I don't want to say we are not sponsored. There are people that are gracious enough to say, you know, you're the Empress and I want to give you this gift or whatever. But for the most part it's your own money and you're going.

I went to New York and Canada, they have several courts, and all in California and Oregon, Washington you know. So you're traveling on your money, so I thought, I'll just take all this money that I'm going to make working three months and I'll use it for my coronation, to buy my big gowns and all that. Well, that was in May of '94 and I left in September of 2008, and my dad was pretty sick, had been sick and for the last couple years I'd been trying to work and take care of him and at that point it was just me and my dad living here and there was my families in California and it got to be too much and I had taken a, the family leave of absence because I needed, my dad was really, really sick and in the hospital, had to have 24 hour care. And while I was on that family leave, I was like, I don't think that I'm really that happy there any more and, life is kind of short you know. My brother died in 2003. He was 46 years old. Was not overweight. He was not a drinker. He was not a smoker. He had a broken heart, and he was stressed out and he had a heart attack and died instantly. 46 years old. So, I thought ok, that's not happening' to me because I am overweight, and I tend to smoke and drink a little bit and I don't want to be stressed, and, so, mutually we agreed that I, it was time for me to go and I needed that, and so I left and took a year off and Marty Davis is the publisher of Just Out. She posted, because she was one of my Facebook friends because I'm so into you know, I'm so hip and out. And so I have Facebook and Myspace and I get somebody to show me how to log on to it, and.

She is one of my Facebook friends and she said, she posted that she needed, just a part time person. Administrative Assistant. Part time person. Because like I'm kind of interested in part time because now my dad's at the point where he still needs the care but I have things in place. I can't be gone all day but I need to be gone some of the day. You know. So I begged her for this job. And she like, "you're my friend." I go, "that's even better. Trust me, this'll work out." And so, probably against her better judgment she hired me. And I started the end of July of '09 and soon became the administrative manager, the assistant to the publisher, and the calendar editor. So I do the out and about section of the paper and I work full time.

But, as things work out, my sister was looking for a change and she decided to move to Oregon so she moved here July 4th. She came with her stuff and said, "I'm here" so she takes care of my dad. So, I work full time. The three of us live together. She doesn't get paid, she takes care of my dad and between my dad and I we take care of the business you know. And so it all works out. And I love working here. I love being gay all day, even though where I worked before they knew I was gay. And they knew I was gay because, Just Out put me on the cover.

They put me on a, it was Black history month and they needed somebody Black. And they knew me and so they spotlighted four or five Black people in the gay community who put me on the cover and again, I never said anything. I didn't deny being gay, I just, I didn't even talk about it. I didn't have to pretend. Nobody asked and I never said anything. And some people close to me knew you know, but that was it. But the person that hired me, or the person, that, my friend to this day, that told me about the job you know, he's very gay, and he knew, you know. And so I as on the cover and it happened that a gal that worked for the mail room, one of her favorite reads is Just Out so she gets an issue every time it comes out. And she picked it up and goes hmm, that looks like the girl that works on the 20th floor. And sure enough she read the article and then, she works in the mail room.

They go floor to floor to floor and she was showing everybody and I didn't know this and I came back from lunch and sitting, in my office. By then I, I started out as a receptionist, I ended as a litigation specialist so at that point I think I was a coordinator for something and the executive director came and was sitting at my desk in my office, and I was like, what are you doing and when he was sitting there he was holding a newspaper and he held a newspaper up like this, and I see this newspaper with my face on it and I go, oh. He goes, hmm, had no idea you were gay. Yeah. He goes, how long you been gay? I go, kind of a long time there sir. He's like, I think it's wonderful. I stopped this from

being passed around this firm because I don't think it's appropriate. But he was very supportive, he's like, if you have any issues, any problems let me know. And I was like, oooh, that's refreshing since the last job I had booted me. Hurt you know. And then, but still in the corporate world, and this is so, it's hard, it's so true. You just, you can't always be yourself.

AK: Yeah.

COUNCIL: No matter what it is. And you can't be, you can't be gay. You can't be Black. You can't be female. You can't be. You know, there's so many, you can't be who you are you know. I remember several times there was three of talking, three gals and we all are Black. And one of them, eh, somebody walked by and looked at us. Another one walked by and kind of looked at us and I remember her saying, "we better go because wherever three or more are gathered, they think it's a gang and we'll get in trouble." And I was like, ah, that's funny. But it was true. I got reprimanded for talking, for the three of us talking but I would see other pods of people talking all the time. You know, so I spent a lot of years there doing that. You know, just doing a wink and a nod to my talk because I want you to know, certainly I didn't talk about being gay, although, I don't, you know, I'm not saying they were a bad place to be, I learned a lot. I'm appreciative of the experience that I got, the knowledge that I got, I could probably go to another law firm any time and work, you know, because it's a prestigious law firm. But I just couldn't be myself totally and I hated that. So here, I get to be gay all day. I just get, you know, I can say Monday morning, I can go, oh we went to Embers and we partied or we went to CC Slaughters or, you know, and number one I don't have anybody at work going "What's CC Slaughters," they all know. You know.

AK: It's a steak house.

COUNCIL: Right. You know. They know, and I love that, or, you know, whereas before I go, we went out with some friends to a club or, you know. So, so that's really nice. That's really very nice and it's nice to have somebody she's totally understanding, Marty, of, you know, the deal with my dad and you know, and you're able just to be yourself, casual, I mean, hello, I mean I'm in sweats.

AK: Nice

GK: That is so important.

COUNCIL: It is.

AK: I was telling Gary, I work in a church, and it's a little conservative.

COUNCIL: Yeah. I can only imagine. I go to the, what I believe to be the oldest Black church in Oregon, ok. I think its roots are. It's published so it's got to be that.

Its roots are the, you know, the oldest Black church. Not the building we are in now but that's its roots. And it is a hundred; we're getting ready to celebrate a hundred fifty six years or something. I don't know. I could never work at my church. I, can't be, I have, they know, they know everything about me. It's not, um, you know, it's not that, they're all, you know, accepting but it's just old ways, old minds, old, you know. I can't do it.

AK: How has that been, I mean in the Black community there's been a, you know, the down low. How has that been for you?

COUNCIL: Well, there's three of us. So there's power in numbers. Power in numbers. It's interesting because my church is fine. My congregation is fine. But, in the conference,

it's the Oregon, Washington conference, with Seattle, Vancouver, we have a church saying we have a church, Portland's, my church is first church. Sometimes it's kind of iffy, you know. We had a, at one point we had a bishop that was really against it. Our minister of music is a lesbian, and I am president of the choir. And so, you know, maybe they thought we were going to take over or something. I don't know but, my church is very accepting. And one of my things about going back to church, like I said, I was raised Catholic, and, but I'm not any more. I'm Methodist. And, and one of my things that I was looking for was that I wanted to go. I love gospel music. I like, I like the, the, the upbringing that I got, you know in the church, But I didn't want to just go to a church that was a gay and lesbian church because it was a gay and lesbian church.

I wanted to find something and I was hoping that God would steer me in a way that I could feel at home wherever I was. And I tried different denominations and I totally believe that God gives me signs louder than anybody else. You know. Some people are like oh Yeah, I'm fine. I'm God. You know. But I believe to them he kind of whispers. I'm a little hard headed. I'm a Taurus. I don't know. And so I need like big time. You know, like this is the place. You're going to be happy here. But I kept getting invited. I like now, I'm not going, I'm not going, I'm not going, I don't, you know. And when I walked. I finally went. One morning I just sprung out of bed and I was like, I'm wide-awake. I'm going to church, and the church is very close to where I live and I walked in and it is an older church so when you walk in the front there was these two big grand doors you know. So you think that's kind of it to the church, but it's not because it's an older church and the sanctuary is upstairs. That's to the fellowship hall. So I wasn't really sure where I was going and here comes this really distinguished looking older lady. I mean at this point you knew she had a life that was exciting. I could tell. I could see it in her face. And, but now, she's, you know, needs help walking and she's got a cane and all that. And she's like how you doing baby like she's, you know, known me forever. And, I was telling her that I wanted to come to the church and visit and I didn't know which door. She goes, right here. This is your first time huh. And I was like Yeah. She goes, well welcome, my

name is Della Reese. Now Della Reese is my favorite, favorite, entertainer of all time. And this woman has the same name as my favorite.

AK: Oh.

GK: Oh, that's fascinating.

COUNCIL: But it wasn't her. Her name was Della Reese, right. She came and let me sit with her and introduced me to everybody. Like, like we were related. And, she's like, okay now, I'll see you next Sunday. I go like, I was just visiting, I don't, I don't really think, you know, I'm going to be a member, I just came here. She goes, "I'll see you next week." Okay. Well, I said okay so the next week I had to go because I told Della Reese I was coming. And there she was waiting for me. And I, just kept going. And about, I don't know, six months later I joined. I've been accepted. I feel. Maybe not overall but it's again one of those things that we don't My Pastor talks about it all the time. We don't judge. We don't care. You're going to sit in a pew. It's not about, I'm not sitting there because she's sitting there. We're really a good tight knit family. But overall I think there's people that have issues with it. But again, I don't care. Not anymore. You know. So. Yeah.

GK: Well I have a question we thought of in regards to drag queens and it is: If you were to give advice to an aspiring young drag queen, what would you feel the most important thing for them to know?

COUNCIL: Wear makeup! There's a transition in the gay community. In the drag community right now. And the look is. It's a term called fish. Real fish. Real fish means you look like a real woman. You're passing as a, a woman. So there's not a lot of makeup wearing around any more. Well in order for a guy to look like a woman, you really need to put on some makeup. You've got to contour you know and all that. So, seriously, I mean it's kind of funny, but that's what I tell these girls at drag race because I'm a judge

for drag race Portland edition. And it's a twelve-week competition. I'm like, you have on no make up. You look like a man in a wig and I don't like it you know. And, drag is overstated you know so if you want to be in drag, wear some makeup. You know. And be real. I think everybody's pretty, no matter what.

There's also that one time too. She's like, when somebody puts on makeup, and they put on that, that queen puts on makeup for the first time, even if they just take blue eye shadow and goes like this you know. Just rub it across their eyes real quick and put on a little lipstick, they're looking in the mirror, they see pretty. So you don't want to tear them down. You want to encourage them. And say, maybe you should do blue and pink. And so you know, instead of going uh, what's up with that blue eye shadow, you know. And it's true. That's what happened to me. The minute Patty O'dora put makeup on me; I was like, All right. I'm gorgeous. I'm ready. I'm going to do this. You know. So, you just. You need it. I don't know. Where were we at. Sorry.

GK: I know you've been involved with the annual all ages show. What can you tell us about that?

COUNCIL: So, that was started because we thought how fun would it be if everybody could go to Darcelle's. It would be great, you know. How fun would it be that we wouldn't have to get babysitters if we wanted to go out. Let's do an all ages show. Kimberlee Van Patten, almost, almost everything that I'm involved in has been a vision of hers. You know, she, she's the dreamer, and I'm, I'm kind of, I'm the believer. You know. I don't. There's some things that I do dream but she really does good. The effort into it and comes up with most of the ideas. But I think this is like our fifteenth of sixteenth year coming up that we've done this. I know it's been a long time because there's people coming back at me going, Yeah I remember you when I was like seven. And they're like married with kids so. It's been a while. And, it's at Darcelle's and she. OLCC allows her to suspend I guess is the word, her license for a night. There's no alcohol whatsoever. You

can't see any. You can't even order, like, a Shirley Temple, or a Roy Rogers, or you remember the we used to, you know. The drinks we got when.

GK: Yeah. The kid's drinks.

COUNCIL: Yeah, the kids drinks when your parents went out. I'll have a Shirley Temple which is not alcohol, but you can't say it because it's associated with it or whatever. So we do like hot dogs or corn dogs or whatever and fries and have some food back there. And then the kids get to come in. It's inexpensively priced. It's like five bucks you know. So, you know, parents can come in and they do a Darcelle's show. It's with the Darcelle cast. And then there's special guests in there so a lot of times we'll spotlight a Rosebud Thorn, to perform. We've had them as young as like seven performing. You know I had my niece perform on stage when she was eight years old. You know, it's just. We kind of throw in some kids and so it's like we get to see the kids entertain. They get to see what their parents are doing when they go out and you're in with the babysitter. They get to see Darcelle who they know but can't get into the club. You know, and so. And it's really cute because they come in, it's really cute. You know. They're going out. And it's early. You know. It's like five 'o clock on a Sunday. You know. And it's over by seven. And a lot of them come in, and they're dressed up and the girls will have their purses, and they tip the performers, and take pictures of the performers and, you know, they get to kind of. You know. And so it's just a, it's a fun event for all ages. But mostly, it's about having the kids come here and see what we do. You know. It's really fun. You should come. It's really fun.

AK: I would love to.

COUNCIL: Yeah, it's really. It's coming up June six this year 2010.

GK: All right.

GK: You're also involved with Sweethearts of Portland.

COUNCIL: I am. I'm involved in a lot of stuff. So, I was, I was given the honor of the Order Of The Sweethearts which is. I never was a Sweetheart. I never ran for the competition. But it's like an honorary member. And I'm the House of Peacock, order of the, Order of Peacock which gives me the right to entertain at their pageant. We've been a recipient of monies that they raise, because they sell raffle tickets for like three weeks and that's how they make their money and they donate their money to other organizations. So Peacock Productions, or Audrey M. Edwards has been a recipient of that and that's about it. I've never sat on their board or anything like that but been supportive and been bestowed that honor and emceed several times and stuff like that. Yeah, it's a good organization. So nice. They do good things.

GK: And then you're also involved with the AME scholarship fund.

COUNCIL: And that.

GK: Yes.

COUNCIL: Yeah. Audrey M. Edwards scholarship fund. To raise money for that. And that's why we do Peacock After Dark. Yep.

GK: And one, one final question. Who would you consider your hero in the local LGBT community and why?

COUNCIL: My heroes are the drags that did this. Everybody that did this before we did it. Lady Elaine Peacock. Dora Jar, Champagne 25, and that's when I start getting emotional. I'm sorry. But, Drag is about having fun. Living life with a smile. You know. And

that's what they did. It was. It wasn't uh. It was fun. It was glamorous. And it was larger than life. You know. And it had to be hard. Back in the day. Back in the days of Darcelle. In the sixties. In this town. You know. Raising money and giving it away to. At that time like the Shriners because there wasn't a bunch of gay organizations to give it to. So, you're trying to be a community activist or you're trying to, you know, support your community but you're giving it to the Shriners and I've heard stories that them donating it in somebody else's name because they wouldn't dare take money from a gay group. You know. So those people that decided, screw it all, I'm doing it anyway are my heroes. And that's those pioneers and Mame, Darcelle, Champaigne and Lady Elaine Peacock who really, seriously changed my life. If it hadn't been for her I wouldn't have known anything about this thing they call drag. So, I can't really pick one, but there's a lot of them. And we need them. You know. We needed, we needed them. We need them. We're blessed to still have a lot of them with us, to teach us and help us get through, and supportive. That's what it means to, you know, stand on the shoulders you know. I don't think I ever really understood that when my mom would say it or whatever. But as you get older you understand that you really are standing, you know, you're standing tall because somebody else fell. Now you're standing on them because they worked so hard to get you to this point or, you know. And maybe they didn't do it with that in mind, but they did it. They were successful. You know. And so. I love it. I love them. And I love, I love drag! I love drag.

GK: Is there anything you can think of that you would like to share with us in regards to history of the community? Of the drag community, etcetera.

COUNCIL: Well, I think we've shared everything that I've been involved in, you know. Who I am. We touched on the court. Church I think we, you know, it's pretty well rounded.

GK: Maria, I think you're incredible. Thank you.

COUNCIL: Thank you. It's been so much fun. Thank you.

GK: I really appreciate the time you've taken with us and I appreciate you specifically.

COUNCIL: Oh, thank you very much. This was very nice. I was very nervous.

[End of Session 1]

[End of Interview]