

Interview with Ashley Ann Rukes

**Interviewed by Scott Paulsen
University of Minnesota**

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SP: This is an interview with Ashley Rukes. We're talking about the gay community up to the 1980's.

Ashley, to state what we've talked about earlier, you're a transgender person. That is a recent declaration. In the last three years you have been active in the gay community. I want to ask you questions about your adult life. We have talked about your first years, realizing at the age of five that you were exceptional and in school, you could get along with girls and boys, you were very active in church; through all your efforts you found later that you have other things to deal with; you were molding your identity. So, I'd like to get to that part; starting at your last years of school. It sounds like that's about the time when you started to understand that you needed to take responsibility. You mentioned that you didn't feel totally normal in the psychological sense. What did you do when you said through being close to God in church: "I don't know if I can solve my problems. I need to find out who I am for myself"?

AR: Just about that time in my life it was also a time where some transsexuals nationally or internationally had become well known to the point where they were public in print and occasionally on t.v. and newsreels. I was learning a few things about transsexuals and learning gradually bits and pieces of the fact that not only did they exist; they seemed to be relatively normal people.

There were treatments that were available; although at that point in time still very expensive, extremely experimental and socially very risqué. They were available and that always gave me that much of a glimmer of hope that I knew that there may be an eventual way out, that there would be a physical solution on this plane through the medical community itself that I wouldn't have to pray for divine intervention, that I wouldn't have to feel that I was crazy, have some sort of a break down and blow my brains out. There would be some very calm, very rational eventual solution to my problem whereby I could in the only way possible adopt my true sex. That is adapt my body to fit my psychology, my soul.

SP: [inaudible] You are well read and that probably helped you quite a bit in knowing that there was hope because the support which was probably difficult to find?

AR: Non-existent.

SP: Non-existent. A few things first before we go further on that. You went by what name until what time did you change to Ashley Rukes?

AR: Until I came out five years ago, I was Richard Kevin or I was Ricky or Rick to everyone that knew me and business associates until I came out. Why Ashley, I'm really not quite sure. People have asked me that, I really don't know. There are some aspects of our lives that remain perhaps mysterious or cosmic in nature, that are beyond explanation. It's not as if I went through a list of names and picked up my favorite. It's not a real common name but, it's mine.

SP: You decided that five years ago. Before that was there a name that you sometimes went by? I know people who have roles and sometimes certain [male] people will have a name which is a female name. Maybe their profession fits their gender.

AR: I've known those individuals. I never had any real nicknames, never had any pet-names that were given to me. I don't think I was ever this sort of person who was easily nicknamed, except for my brothers. Those were nicknames that we wouldn't find very interesting and useful.

SP: Getting back to the support, who could you confide in to talk to about these things; maybe not so personally but, like on an academic basis, scholarly basis, talk about sexuality. Was there anything like this at the University at Boulder or the U of M?

AR: This is interesting, how this area of our lives, sexuality, sensuality and sexual in particular has really changed in the past ten-fifteen years that I have been actively involved. Longer than twelve years ago, in particular, fifteen years ago these subjects were relatively taboo and they were just not discussed whether academically or religiously or even psychologically in the halls of science. Even twelve to fifteen years ago, possibly ten years ago gay people, lesbians in particular, were considered by the diagnostic and statistical manual that was used by the psychiatric profession as psychotic individuals themselves. Transsexuals were beyond classification. We were just-- the needle went off the machine face. There really was no support. These subjects were not adequately discussed. During those times I was more or less on my own and very often you feel because there is no cross cultural contact of any sort, you feel very alone. But, we've read that the suicide rate among individuals of my particular persuasion have been traditionally so very high; there is a good reason for that and that's probably one of them. For some reason I was only able to hold on to a little glimmer of hope.

You may recall, and most individuals can, historically some of the early transsexuals that had become public figures. Christine Jorgensen, for instance is someone that comes to memory was very sensationalized. This was just unearthly stuff, strictly tabloid material that a man could actually "change his sex". Of course, I don't see it that way and I don't believe that all transsexuals see it that way. I will never be a woman. That term "changing your sex is quite a misnomer in that respect. But it is sensational stuff. There is no doubt about that. Or even someone as recent as Rene Richards, for instance, who has changed from Richard Rasken, who was a tennis pro as a man and continued to play professional tennis and worked as a professional be an entomologist as a woman,

after everything she went through, incredibly sensationalized. This is a wild stuff! The imagination of the public just runs wild to this day in the early 1990's. Usually on television you'll see transsexuals pop up on the screen on the talk shows only during sweeps weeks when their ratings are so important. And these are perhaps the most sensational people they can have on their programs. Usually they are portrayed as budding starlets, as whores, as show girls, as stripless dancers, something but, it is really interesting.

SP: It sounds like that they are still looking at a women's role in the worst possible ways.

AR: Very definitely. Women, in 1993, are still objectified. I think any intellectual lady, woman who'd discuss that with you, would admit the fact that, yes, they are objectified in so many different directions. Basically, you draw your own conclusions and make us the object of what you care to make us the object of.

SP: Getting back to the support you found. When is the first time that you started to identify with a group in Minneapolis, the Twin Cities area having to do with sexual issues: was it the gay community? ; was it women's group? ; was it the transgender group?

AR: This was sort of interesting. Going back just over three, four years ago I saw a small article a paragraph size article in the *Equal Time* a local Minneapolis newspaper, concerning one get-together for transsexuals who was going to be held, just a coffee conversation at a private home. So I called the number; I was interested in going. That number was the home of two very close friends, a bisexual individual and her transsexual partner, a male to female transsexual. These folks were partners and at the time there were six or seven transsexual people that joined in the group and I sat with the group and had coffee. It was very interesting. The conversation turned to the fact that in a few weeks there was going to be a seminar at the U of M that the transsexuals would be at. It might be interesting if any of us cared to go to it. When you know that two weeks later I was there, I saw that there were several professional psychologists that were there from the program in human sexuality at the University; individuals who held doctorates in that discipline. There were medical doctors, a surgeon, all primary caregivers. They were very interested in the field and the room contained twenty five to thirty five other transsexuals that I had a chance to talk to, identify with; I knew I was not alone at the time, there were other "crazy" individuals from around town, quite a bit like me. We had a lot in common and I started, at that point, to feel a little bit more o.k. with myself and where I fit in.

SP: O.k. this was four or five years ago?

AR: I believe this was August 17th of 1989. Those are dates you don't forget.

SP: What have you learned about the transgender community? Going back, what brought them together? Was it the U of M? I understand there was the sex change program around 1968-69. Do you know any people who went through that, who were in contact with people who did?

AR: Oh, sure.

SP: What were the early experiences like?

AR: My closest social acquaintance, my friends are individuals who had surgery, one nineteen and one seventeen years ago. One in New York seventeen years ago. One woman in Colorado nineteen years ago. But you'll find that most transsexuals, having been estranged from their own society for such extended periods of time, particularly after their going through this therapeutic process after they have that surgery, they tend to go back into a closet of some sort more than likely it is a heterosexual female closet. I have acquaintances, two of them, who are male to female transsexuals who are married to heterosexual men. Their husbands have no idea in the world who they are or what their history is. These are very closeted individuals. So that post-surgically, up until very recently, there has not been much of a community for transsexual people because we have always felt so estranged not only from society but from ourselves that once that surgery is completed, traditionally those people have fled in terror within the female ranks somewhere just to say, "well, I am a woman now, leave me alone." That is changing as our pride continues to grow, as we feel special within ourselves and rightfully so. That is beginning to evolve and change just a bit. Now, we see more of the transgender, more of the transsexual community beginning to evolve.

SP: Like you said, many of these people are very closeted. Are there any who are in the public eye you could mention?

AR: Locally, my closest friend goes by the name Susan. Susan Kimberly has been public for many years. She was the president of the St. Paul City Council as a man, Bob Sylvester. Susan, right now,--we have started working on her campaign. She'll be running for an election which will be held in November 1994 for a seat on the Board of County Commissioners for Ramsey County and it is the sort of campaign which takes well more than one year. We've been working on it now since July. I knew of no one, except myself, who is more public than Susan is. Susan has been an inspiration for me, for more than ten years when I first read about her and with what she was going through, she has continued to be an inspiration to me. I have always felt it's important, for us to be very public about what we're doing, about what we're all about and not only for our own personal self-esteem and our sense of self-worth but for the feeling for those within our group, that probably still suffer through the silence; it's very good for them to have role models, public people that are just like o.k. and they're healthy and happy individuals as if to say, "you can look at me, won't you and everything is just fine." There's no reason why you have to stay in that closet and suffer as you are. Susan is very inspirational, she continues to be.

SP: Susan changed from Bob Sylvester to Susan in what year, do you know?

AR: Nineteen years ago.

SP: That would make it...

AR: I want to say 1974, I believe. She was a patient at the program in human sexuality at the University of Minnesota when they first began operation. At that time, Doctor Sharon Satterfield was the head of the program. She is now in relatively private practice at the Family Practice Clinic at the University and she's also doing very privately what the program in Human Sexuality is doing

with transsexual patients on a more public basis. I know individuals that are involved in both programs. Sharon is a friend but she has never been my therapist.

SP: About Susan, when did she become public? Right away or was she like most transgender people who went through almost an incubating period?

AR: As far as I know, I can only surmise, because of course I haven't asked her a lot of personal questions. I did not read much about her until, perhaps, 1978 or so. I can recall the first thing I read about her was a very large picture and story spread in the picture magazine of the Minneapolis Sunday paper and frankly I couldn't believe it. Until that time I had heard nothing about her. I can only surmise that of course it takes a certain amount of time to be a notable such person that really that the media really will feel that your story is significant enough to place it in that sort of publication and which point that you did although at that time it was still awfully sensational. Since that time I have found everything she's done publicly from her time of the actual operation. I read nothing about her until perhaps 1978. My guess would be that Susan would not be privatized, she's just not that sort of person. It's a matter of how much publicity can the media, of any sort, would give to or allow transsexual individuals during those years. I found that the *Star Tribune* [separate papers in 1978] took a real risk in 1978, and they did.

SP: This is when the article was published. The next question I would ask is about yourself, relating to the environment in Minnesota. You were not just stuck here; you went to Boulder. I understand there was an accident in about 1980. Does that have anything to do with you being here? Or were there other reasons why you are here? I want to ask about the reasons for being here. What do you see in the Twin Cities that you have chosen to be here? I want to make sure that it isn't because of your accident.

AR: Oh, no. I am not totally sure about what exactly it is or if there necessarily has to be any particular aspect of the personality of the Twin Cities area that would draw me back. Although I have lived in hypothetically more ideal spots: the Rocky Mountains were wonderful. I lived in the Virgin Islands on the Island of St. Croix for a little over a year and that was wonderful. However, I was born and raised here. My family lives here; there is something about home that is very animal like; it is the same sort of thing as a dog who's lost and will walk hundreds of miles through some innate sense back to his home. It is that entire homing thing. This is where I grew up, this is my home, this is where I belong. I have lived here for some years before that accident and I was of course planning to stay and fortunately enough I did realize that, at the same time, probably the best transsexual program in the country was also in Minneapolis, very, very wonderful but that, to an extent, is beside the point.

SP: Was that conscious that you knew about the program and that it was the reason why you knew about the program and that it was the reason why you were staying here?

AR: Not at all. Not at all. But I had moved back here after my college time in Colorado in 1972. I had consciously chosen to make this my home and more or less did, although I did a short stand in the West Indies, but not very long. I had consciously intended on making this my home. I did not fully begin to learn about local transsexuals until I read about Susan, and that was years later.

Although the program in Human Sexuality at the University had been functioning for some years, by the time I read about Susan, it was not something which was widely advertised. It was not something that you can read about in the newspaper. [In announcement voice] "Hey, transsexuals, there is this wonderful program at the U." It was not anything that was advertised and I had suggested anything over the years to the individuals on that staff.. It's that it is a matter of public information and a certain amount of networking. How do you get this information now to some poor person. That's really miserable, that suffering. He needs that help and assurance and therapy but never hears about the program. I was one of these people and suffered many years without knowing that that program was in the same town and flourishing.

SP: The next question I want to ask is: because you did go to different places in the country, was there ever a draw toward the big gay meccas, just for a broad term, like San Francisco or New York? Was there ever places that you wanted to live something lured you to it? Or did you find you fulfilled being in Minneapolis? Going away just, it sounds like almost for wilderness opportunities like in the Rockies or Virgin islands.

AR: I didn't really find that. Several times I think you see that in my history I have rather sublimated in some directions some of the very negative energy having to do with these problems, not interactions. I did that with religion. I did with studies at one point in my life. But the same thing I did in the Rocky Mountains during those years I was very involved with the Outward Bound school, worked with them as an instructor's assistant all time I was out there in college, simply because I could be in the mountains and I could climb and I could get paid for it. It was wonderful. I enjoyed the climbing. I was very good at it when I had that sense of balance. I put my entire soul and energy into. But, it was also nothing but escape to be quite honest with you and looking back on that now, I can fully realize that it was only and I rather, in the back of my mind, if someone had pinned me down, in question beyond this no, back then, I always knew to an extent that this was the case, that the time would come when there was no more evading the basic issue: that is your gender. Are you black or white? Are you left or right? Are you male or a female. Let's get that straight . Your entire image, your self-definition is built on that, ultimately, without that, without a firm basis of identity, you truly have nothing, I believe.

SP: O.K. So we've talked about your trips away and it sounds like times of spiritual growth and you came back to the Twin Cities. I want to ask you, when you started dealing with those issues of your identity: did you ever feel like going somewhere else than the Twin Cities? Were you comfortable doing it here? I understand it was difficult but is this where you wanted to do it?

AR: Well, of course, part of that issue involves my home turf, a place where I was most comfortable and knowing the resources, whether they would be medical or entertainment, whatever. Also my family and friends: quite a few of them were here and although I had a strong suspicion there would be difficulties and of course there were, I had no way of predicting the total rejection which did indeed take place. But I thought at the time that there was some wisdom and some advisability as far as being close to my family. I saw no importance in being near particular gay mecca per se or any particular mecca of transsexual treatment or therapy because Minneapolis was indeed one of those and as far as the reaction of the gay community to transsexuals at large, I had no idea of gauging what was to be. I knew that ultimately one way or another, I thought that I was

going to have a long go of it and that nothing else was in my home turf, where I thought I could make the best showing I could. I'm glad I was here.

SP: What were some of the resources you found and at what time?

AR: As we were discussing earlier, I did find the program in Human Sexuality and along with that I knew the University hospitals, I knew the lay-out, I knew the lay-out at the clinics. I knew where the various buildings were and, when it came to the bars and later when I became involved with various community projects I knew where certain parks were. I knew where certain community centers were. I knew where the bus routes were, I knew how to get around and all this helped. I really couldn't quite fathom as an example of being in a San Francisco and being involved in something like their pride festival. I wouldn't want to live on the opposite side of town and bus around to meetings in various places and, I needed to know where I was going and how to get things like volunteers and police protection and all the different sorts of materials that I have needed. So, I was doing quite well to be where I knew my way around and people knew me one way or another. It was proven somewhat beneficial and in some instances nearly humorous as I have come out to people in my endeavors as a political and community activist and organizer. When I've come out to people, people sometimes humored and they are very interested in saying that they knew then and they know me now and only wish the best. Usually, people wish no malice, they don't wish bad things on people necessarily, and my reputation has preceded me whether it's male reputation or not and always has been. It stood me in good step.

SP: Now, that's currently. And in the past, could you say that you had that kind of support from people?

AR: Oh not at all. The support has only really come of the strongest support that I've received, has come particularly in the past three years since I've been active as a director with the Twin Cities Pride Festival and as the Director of the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council. Before that, I was flying on my own, although there is a community of transgender and transsexual individuals. We are acquainted with one another and sometimes we socialize with one another widely, but there's no sense of brotherly or sisterly commitment or camaraderie. There is no sense of sharing energy or strength whatsoever within that community.

SP: It sounds like, because you are promoting and educating the gay community and anyone who wants to listen about the presence of transgender people, that has initiated a positive response. In the past, you were still developing your identity a little bit uncertain about that, like you said, the support was not there. So going back to that time, in the 1970's, what were you doing? Can you give us a little time line professionally and I want to know also -- we can answer that later -- when did you first go to a gay bar and what did you think of it? What was your first contact with the gay community? Was it in a bar?

AR: My first contact with the gay community was, oh gosh, I just graduated from high school. Is it all right for me to say names, probably some of these fellows are deceased?

SP: If you feel comfortable with it, certainly.

AR: I think they could be too. At the time although I don't remember the exact address of these fellows, they lived up on Mt. Curve Avenue [in Kenwood neighborhood of S. Minneapolis]. [It was] one of the just incredible homes out there, two individuals by the names of George Shea and Gordon Locksley.

SP: ...Oh yes, these two were public figures.

AR: They were very public, outrageous, especially Gordon. He was Mr. Outrageous Gay Twin Cities in those years.

SP: Would you say they were political or more social?

AR: Totally social.

SP: [Was Gordon] a hairdresser perhaps?

AR: Yes, Gordon at the time ran the Red Carpet Salons. During those years the Red Carpet Salons were to our fashion scene and the coiffeurs' scene, as Horst is today, he was at the top of the hill. [It was] to the point where Gordon in those years was not working in the salon per se. He was an art dealer. George Shea, his roommate, they had been lovers and still sort of were, but these were men that at that time were in their growing 50's.

I was brought over there, quite unsuspecting at the time, invited to go with another individual. We went over to meet them and they had some cocktails and became involved with Gordon to a slight extent; I was curious by that time, in my career, as a senior in high school frankly, I was curious. Was I crazy or possibly was I just gay? [I said to myself] "Let's check this out." I checked it out pretty thoroughly. We had, I would estimate, an eight-month relationship where I got to a time of feeling very comfortable saying to myself "I am not gay", this is not real fulfilling and just fairly reassuring, and underlying one again the fact that I did indeed know intrinsically who I was, and I was a female soul, which only added, of course, to the level of frustration but, that's another conversation.

Gordon and George were interesting people. George was very intellectual, he was sort of a national treasure. I understand he was one of the few people in the country that spoke, read and translated a fairly rare dialect of the northern Japanese islands. [unclear] I had been told by a friend of my father's, in the upper salons of government service, that George was highly valued for his skills in that dialect. He was a very private person, a very stay-at-home, very scholarly and quiet intellectual fellow, whereas Gordon was very public; very flamboyant, odd as they put it during those days, very flaming as a gay man, out and about town. Everyone knew who he was.

I was amazed sometimes when I went to the mansion and visit these guys, when George or Gordon would have he had come upon, in 1966, this guy Andy Warhol who was doing these crazy screen prints and I would come to his house. One time I walked in and all around the dining room and up the stairs to the second floor were prints of Elvis Presley wearing six guns, and in some even

drawing them and firing or something. I couldn't believe this. A month or two later, I came over and here it was Jackie Onassis who was everywhere. Gordon was buying these things 25, 26, 27 at a crack and reselling them and the man was making a fortune.

It's my understanding, the upstairs of this particular mansion was the Columbian Embassy. At that time, Columbia had an embassy in Minneapolis. These two guys, both drove shiny 500 Mustang convertibles back in 1966, they would have cocaine shipped [by] diplomatic mail to Minneapolis, to them. And all they did was party in that circle. So, my first trip to a gay bar was going down to the Happy Hour next to the [then non-gay] Gay 90's. At that time I was well underaged, but I was in the toe of these two Colombian ambassadors. For instance, I've forgot their names it was quite a few years ago. I went with these three guys and I was so already prelubricated as they say in the condom business now. The bar struck me as a very fanciful meeting place. It seemed that everyone knew one another and it was a very promiscuous, very gay scene, a very sensuous, very sexual group of individuals, segment of society. My impression of that part of gay society in Minneapolis at the time, was a rather, at least within their own walls in their own spaces rather a frivolous scene, frivolity. They had a real good time. That was pre-dating the AIDS epidemic; there was no real such thing as safe sex. There was no cautioning anyway necessarily. There was much talk of partnerness, here is my partner or threesome, this and that. Well, we did all kinds of fun things there for a while. There were my early impressions of gay bars.

I was not in another gay bar until 1972 when I moved back to Minneapolis, so that impression stayed with me for many years. When I got back the scene was quite different. I was somewhat more serious politically, then as the community seemed more aware of an emerging political conscienceness concerning there own civil rights and there own place within the city of Minneapolis; it was a far different scene.

SP: The question I want to ask you is about going to the bars [is] did you ever use your name? Was there ever an occasion to tell someone your name or did you use a name that wasn't yours for reasons of anonymity?

AR: I understand the focus of your question. It's my understanding that people did. Escorts that I was with at times when I was in the bars, during that time did give sort of names or aliases; some sort of trick names but I was never really asked. I was just fairly amazed and fairly young and fairly impressed with the whole deal and usually, to be honest with you, all fairly drunk and I was just having a good time. I was never asked and never really talked to anyone I think I was probably seventeen and an half, eighteen, very cute and that sufficed.

SP: The question I want to ask about the bars. Did you run in to anyone you knew from the outside, someone who knew you from another place? How did you interact with them if you saw them, was it one of "oh, it's so nice to see you and this is a place we can talk" or "I don't see you here, I don't want you telling anyone about it"? Any of those experiences?

AR: That never really happened to me in the middle of the 1960's. It did in the 1970's when I was back here and it was always interesting that I can think of several instances where I did run into people that I knew at the Happy Hour or the Gay 90's. Those were basically the only bars that I

went to during these years and frankly I knew an awful lot of people and I still do in the Twin Cities and, of course, I ran into people I knew. Invariably we talked about almost anything but our gayness, what our partners or preference were. We were never seemingly mutually attracted to one another whether I was attracted to them was not the issue and they were obviously not attracted to me. That was never the issue. We were acquaintances who exchanged pleasantries. But I think there was always rather a certain tension that existed. I think, in those years, a lot of discretion was assumed or hopeful. That is, that you would trust in my discretion if I could trust in yours, sort of thing. And you don't dare being discreet, my direction will be your tough luck ultimately. I think that was always an understanding. It was always the way I felt about the relationship.

It's been quite different since I came out as a transsexual. I've felt a lot more fun with it, coming to people who knew me then, both straight and gay and this has happened. It happened last week. At a meeting of a commission, a fellow and I had not met, he is one of the heads of the Minnesota Historical Preservation Society. I think that's the right word. I knew him at the University. We were graduate students and last meeting of the Loring Park Advisory Commission to the Board, he came to this first meeting and we met for the first time since the University. Well, I have always rather enjoyed, not enjoyed the devilish sort of way [unclear]

SP: The next question I want to ask is about the University, the organizations. You might know of some. You weren't involved in them personally but, what did you know in 1972?

AR: 1972. We have seen so many big time changes in the past twenty years. And one of the reasons why I definitely feel motivated to remain a public person as far as speaking and educating and hopefully inspiring even one person that is not feeling good about themselves or what they are doing. The reason that I was going through times like 1972 when people such as myself did not exist, organizations such that exist now at the U of M right now you've got for instance the U bisexual group that meets on a regular basis. You've got the University Lesbians that meet on a regular basis. You've got the University Association of Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Transgender students. You've got Alumni associations. You've got teachers' associations. Just recently the U is coming to grasp health and welfare and retirement benefits or domestic partnerships for gay, lesbian, bisexual relationships and couples as long as one is a university employee. All those things did not exist.

SP: What did exist? I understand FREE [Fight Repression of Erotic Expression] in 1969, it may have been disbanded by 1972 but have you heard of it? What did it mean to you?

AR: Very vaguely, all those individuals seemed to be considered a very fringe element. They weren't entirely clear about what they were doing. The people that I spoke to, concerning that group and their outlook and activities. [unclear] They were confused about their role, confused about their direction and goals and, generally disorganized and rather confusing. That is not something I wouldn't be overly concerned about. Everyone else on the campus proper with in the University structure was closeted. There were no gay people that were out at that time.

When I ran for--another friend and myself, Tim Lynch ran for vice president of the student body, that is in particular the student senate. In the spring of 1973 there was also an individual, Jack

Baker, who ultimately ran and won the election and allegedly he was the only gay person who was out. In extended conversations with Jack, not before he came out, but of course after he came out I was never quite sure how or why he was a gay person. He was unlike any other gay person I had known. Although at the same time he did indeed, have the personal courage to come before whatever student group and whatever meeting was present. He'd say, "I am indeed a gay person, I am very public about this and very proud to say that I am such;" I'll give him that much credit. Although personally at the time, I would say this is a matter of taste, that I didn't care for Jack and I don't think that he was a wonderful representative to the University population concerning gay people. I don't think he is a wonderful representative at all.

SP: Do you think just his visibility inspired gay people?

AR: No, not at all, not at all because he was not an inspiring individual. He was not a real swell person. I did not personally think, nor did I ever talk to anyone that did think that he was inspiring, that he was a wonderful fellow.

SP: Do you think-- From what I've seen, he certainly got a lot of attention. I recall there was a poster for his election where he was wearing pumps. It seemed that it kind of was on the spectacular side. Do you think that was maybe not for a gay community but, also just for a platform? This was freedom of sexual expression and he did it for personal attention?

AR: Yes exactly, I think there's a very fine line between good and bad taste, between sensationalizing for personal profit or gain or taking oneself and or one's goals and cause seriously. I don't think he was, at all, inspiring to the gay community, especially within an alleged scholarly and intellectual community for that very reason. He definitely, I think, cheapened and sensationalized his image and role as a gay person within society. That is "look at me, I don't even take myself seriously at all. Here I am on a campaign poster tap dancing my way across Dinkytown [University neighborhood] in satin pumps. I don't take myself seriously at all. But, vote for me just for the hell of it", which is exactly what many people did; vote for him. He did understand, I think, and once again I give him credit in one respect, I think he did understand a certain amount of student/consumer mentality in that they would buy or vote for the name or the product or the image that sticks in their memory. When students were confronted with a list of names you begin to forget platforms, issues, statements, important things people are talking about but, you remember the Queen in the satin pumps. So, he got the votes and he won. He was a horrible president by anyone's account.

SP: It wasn't that he brought the gay community out and had made something for them to be proud of, it meant it was more sensationalism and maybe some people like yourself, felt a little disenchanted with it.

AR: No doubt about it, I think, the gay community in general of those serious thinking, those individuals that were seriously scholarly in their pursuits and seriously gay in their sexuality were embarrassed. I think he sent a certain movement on this campus back 10 years. Whereas, just as well, I think a straight forward thinking and relating individual, someone who adequately express and discuss the issues involved could have done so much with the access that he had done so

much with the access that he had to further the cause of gay civil rights and general societal awareness. I think instead that sensationalism set the whole thing back. I know the community was embarrassed as hell.

SP: When you say community who are you referring to? How did you find this out? Were these people you talked to? Where did these people get impressions that gay people were not impressed?

AR: Yes, it's wonderful that in all of the clandestine and underground movements that we know of, historically in other times, in other areas of the world, even in modern times, during for instance the anti-Vietnam years when college activists in one point I was considering myself a collegiate age activist although I was never a card carrying SDSer because, most of those card carrying members were clandestine FBI agents anyway. The Gay Movement at that time in Minneapolis was very, very underground, very cautious, very person-to-person, very heartfelt and you were very careful because you knew too well in those years that your professional reputation you career rested very precariously on a very fine balance of heterosexuality or homosexuality. You could go in a way sometimes the wrong look or the wrong words that's all it took. I was reading the other day, about a decorated Air Force individual who was highly decorated and had a very specialized role with the Air Force in the Persian Gulf War. Right now, he's being court martialled on the word of one individual, it is unsubstantiated that he is a homosexual. Sometimes that's all it takes; an unsubstantiated rumor or a whisper. So people were afraid in those days and people still are unfortunately especially, within the military.

SP: Going back to the University, in the early 1970's, mid 1970's, it's usually a good environment for people to experiment to be somewhat open because, they don't have so much to risk. I mean, if they have a job in parking, who really cares of losing their career. I know there was a lot of activism of different sorts like you mentioned in the Antiwar [Movement]. Is that where a lot of gay people could be found; working with something that didn't address gay issues but perhaps there was something underneath, there was a set of people there who were gay?

AR: On different campuses, different environments I truly think so. Historically, it's been my experience from what I've read, especially in the case of lesbians that, yes, there was indeed, the fact. In the early days of women's consciousness of the rise of feminism in general, lesbians were on the forefront of that although they were closeted within their own sexuality that is one way they could express themselves. I found that to be true at the University of Colorado where we were funding actively anti-war activities all around this country with money we were raising on the Colorado campus and that school know about it. All ranks were rife with gay and lesbian people and we were much much more out to one another for some reason in that environment. It was quite a different environment. I found that out there very few people, very, very few people; as a matter of fact, I don't think I met one person at the University of Colorado that had gone to high school in Bolder, to very few from Denver. We were from all around North America. I met students from South America and Europe.

To come to the U of M, this is totally a different environment, this, back then was a special environment. Although the school is huge, much larger than the U of Colorado; this was a

commuter campus, people drove in from the burbs, from all over the burbs, from way past St. Paul and over St. Paul. They would drive home and of course by the dinnertime hours and by the evening hours they were with their hours and by the evening time hours they were with their families of origin. Very often I found those people to be incredibly closed minded, their growth incredibly stunted socially and very closed to new idea. At the time, myself and my running-mate Tim Lynch, who was a graduate student at the philosophy program. Tim in particular was coming up with some very, very tantalizing concepts. Some very tasty stuff for the mind but, people just couldn't handle some of the stuff and didn't care to. There were college students, nineteen, twenty year old kids very often that simply were going on fifty years old. I couldn't believe it!

SP: So, a lot of them didn't have that kind of experience where they could develop their identities. They knew they came to class and then it was back home.

AR: Not at all.

SP: As I see the U now, there's also that group that doesn't fit that; the group that may live in the communities in the Twin Cities. I wouldn't think that there would be their own little groups. I would think that they would be their own little groups, more specialized for them. They could find each other more easily. Do you think that exist where people would, like the Theater Department, was that; I'm just using that as an example; but do you know certain meeting places, like a coffee house or the Theater Department or anything like that had a gay element?

AR: Actually, individuals that I was hanging out with in those years, not to flatter myself but, I know we were some sort of the more avant-garde people on campus. There was one place where we would go, some of us around Seven Corners where Sergeant Prestons is now, it was the original Mixers bar. We would go there and a few of us would play chess, a few of us would talk politics. We thought this was sort of avant-garde, this was wonderful. But, the community has changed so much. It's so great--It's terribly easy for someone who is forty-five years of age, although I'm not that old, it is tempting to say that it would be fun to be twenty at this point. I speak with junior high and high school students who are already so independent in their thoughts and, so clear and realistic in their visions of the world as it exists today; it's wonderful.

SP: Getting to that, from yesterday to today. I'm looking at some figures back in the 1960's and 1970's mainly. Who do you think has made a big difference? I can think of people like Leo Treadway but, that's in the 1980's. He has helped youth with Lutherans Concerned.

AR: Lutherans Concerned and the Wingspan Ministry in general.

SP: You were involved very early with the Lutheran Church. Did you ever go back to it? Was there any concern?

AR: No, I didn't. I spoke to them on several occasions although those occasions were at the invitation of Leo, who is a personal friend. I spoke to them at his invitation. Leo was, is and always will continue to be quite a visionary. I think the only problem that Wingspan ultimately

had...

SP: Is this the 1970's?

AR: 1970's middle, late 1970's, especially in the 1980's. Leo's problem with Wingspan in the later 1980's, even though it just folded here in the past six months with the Pride organization, Leo is a master at spending money and I would almost guess as though he was raised in Edina. He does not understand the value of money. He spends with the best with them. His programs have had that problem. But, he is a very visionary individual.

There are very few within this community and once again, and I reiterate a certain personal commitment that I have had and continue to have for that very reason; that our community has had gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender and transsexual individuals have had relatively few leaders, not that I want to christen myself a leader in anyway. Just as if to say to people in the same way, "Hey, there is no reason why you must feel ashamed and all closeted, of anything, in particular sexuality." I work quite honestly for a day, for a time that I know will come but, I might never see. But a time will come when gender means less of nothing. Whether transsexual, bisexual, male, female, gender is not important. Sexuality, heterosexual or homosexual makes no difference. It's sex simply, something that is. We have some very serious considerations and socially very serious problems to deal with, let's get on with that. Let's forget this other funny business.

SP: We talked about people like Jack Baker and Leo Treadway. Who do you think has really influenced the gay community? I'm wondering if there have been some influences which were bad, which resulted in good outcomes, for instance, right-wingers. I know that Anita Bryant is the person that comes to mind, even though she wasn't local, she had a role here. Who are some people that you think made this [gay community] different, who changed it?

AR: I was contemplating that while you were asking me the question. It comes to my mind that I think more positives have come out of the reaction to the negative forces that had been placed upon our community at large, that positive changes that have come about through any leadership that we have developed within our own community. I can think of very few national or local individuals that you could single out as leaders. Just last weekend, I attended a memorial service for Steven Endean who recently had passed away from that plague [AIDS] which is such a fact in our community it's just devastating. He was considered by so many, a very important leader within our community. Although for every person that I know who thought he was an important leader, as the founder of the first gay rights lobbying in Minnesota and the first in Washington D. C. and the founder of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

SP: Which was in Washington D. C. ?

AR: Yes. For every person I talked to who considers him so significant in that way. I talked to several detractors that just couldn't handle men's politics, men's sexuality one way or another. Women have a very difficult time, lesbians in general with anyone male or female who is a pro-lifer or anti-abortion or anti-choice person. He was definitely anti-choice. That is unusual,

which detracts an awful lot from his ultimate expression of support within the gay community. I find that the majority of men, as well as women supported least the concept of choice; that a woman should have, considering her own biological function. That, I think is pretty basic. Steven was anti-choice. I am sure about Steven but, I don't see much other leadership anywhere within our community that is inspirational.

SP: We brought the point of; is there a community? Because, there's definitely someone like Steven Endean who you can look back and say he did some great things. Look what has happened with this largest gay organization which came out of grassroots politics in Minnesota. He left Minnesota but, still being a part of it. But when you look closer, you see that there are all those little groups, factions which have come together when they need to. Perhaps in a situation like the AIDS epidemic or with amendments being repealed in St. Paul. Things like that. What is your view? Do you think there is a community? And the transgender community, can you tell me: has it moved closer together? What difficulties have been in the past?

AR: To answer the first part of your question...

SP: It's too long. I'm sorry.

AR: To address the first part of that question concerning the gay community: I think the real problem has been and continues to be a certain amount of all these -isms that have plagued us just forever. On not only heterosexism--The entire concept of forced heterosexuality throughout society that has a lot to do with, of course homophobia as part of that and sexism on the way down. On top of that list, that was crowned up there by the particularly somewhere this heterosexism. That concept to force heterosexuality, that heterosexuality is the way it should be; everything else is an aberration somewhere underneath that comes a concept of elitism. I think a big part of our problem that a big part of the gay community in particular has had, I think we still have a real problem with. As of even this fall, when you noticed the Human Rights Campaign Fund had their big gala banquet, a big thing, people's banquet. This is the community's political arm, that banquet. To sit down and eat a plate of cold chicken, it's 175 dollars. We're talking strict elitism. Whether or not it's a fundraiser for Richard Nixon or a dinner for HRCF, I'm not sure if there's a real difference. To me that's the same.

I have been working for several years within the community at low level. That word grassroots level is overused terribly so, I won't use it again. At a level that is like folks just our folks, folks that you meet in co-ops that we know from around town, around the U, just plain old people. We are lucky if we scrape together 10 bucks for a plate of cold chicken. 175 dollars pays the rent.

SP: So that's one big difference. Some people may say, "I don't have much in common with that person, there are living in a different world."

AR: Exactly, and that keeps us apart. When I started working with the Pride Festival, working at that parade. The parade had traditionally been rather free for all. They lined up on that street on Sunday morning first come, first to march. It was a real Chinese fire drill. In the past several years we've organized ourselves, we set ourselves all down, in paper we know who one another

are. We are meeting one another now. I love this, I see my role as much a facilitator in the close networker or communicator. I just love to introduce people and get people going. We have brought people of color, youth--District 202 for instance in the parade last year carrying our flags. This was a big deal. It made the front page of our newspaper. You'd recall the youth with the rainbow flags.

SP: Would that be *Gaze* or *Equal Time*?

AR: That was *Equal Time*. And that's the first time youths had ever been in that parade. Also, last year for the first time, there were two groups: Gaylas and Son Ka Pom are Southeast Asians, and East Asians, Polynesian individuals we're bringing people of color, of multicultural attitude into our own. This is not [unclear] this is humanism. I think that's positive stuff. I think we are getting down to it now. Were it's you reach out to people on a human basis and we're beginning to know that, I don't think that right now our community as strong community exists. I think we're seeing the beginnings of a real wonderful community. I think it's growing every month. I've seen so much in two years I feel really good about it.

SP: As far as the city, are there certain areas that in the past you preferred to live in. What areas have you lived in? What are the areas that you thought were good to live in for gay people or for transgender perhaps, the University, North Minneapolis, South Minneapolis, Uptown, Downtown.

AR: At this point, after growing up, in what was considered at the time the wealthiest, as far as bank balances, suburbs in the country and right down living on Fifteenth Street between Pike and Portland, which is considered one of the most dangerous areas in the city.

SP: That was Edina and now you're living in Central Minneapolis?

AR: Yes, I've seen a lot between. I've lived down the West Bank, South East, Dinkytown and places around the Twin Cities. I lived in South-West Minneapolis. I would rather believe, that personally for myself and personally for the benefit of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals, that everyone for instance who enjoys relative safety, publicly, is best off in an area in town where there's frankly not a public consuming of alcoholic beverages on the street that leads to a lot of violent confrontations. I live in a neighborhood where I've been mugged twice in the past year and a half. That's exactly the reason why.

SP: Is there any area that you prefer to live in? One you think is more for your safety but, specifically for gay people and transgender?

AR: I'm sitting on the Loring Park Advisory Commission. It is very close to beginning to, along with the city planning department, designate an entire area around Loring Park as rather a city arts coordinator area and all around that area, anywhere where gay and lesbian individuals can tend to. I think traditionally our community has identified with arts to an extent either, the written word, video arts. The Walker, the Guthrie all these and different playhouses that are there. If that area is designated such, we can begin to live in some of these areas. We have

always jelled rather, the arts and the gay community. I think there is a bond that can begin to form there. I think a bond that a majority of our community would enjoy. We began to discuss in terms of broad generalities because, there are people that we all know that pregeared a quiet neighborhood somewhere North East where you're comfortable on your back steps reading poetry in the afternoon. We can draw generalities for the rest of the evening and those always will be.

If once again I can draw another generality I don't think we're a violent community. I don't think we appreciate physical violence and don't crave it and I could see us tending to shy away from areas of the Twin Cities where that is definitely a social problem.

SP: The Uptown area is one area in addition to the Loring area and Groveland area which is a gay area now. When do you think it began to be labeled a gay area? I understand it wasn't always that way.

AR: No, it wasn't. The first time(s) or many times I was living in South West Minneapolis I went to the Uptown bar. In those days it was a three-two beer bar and I would go there with a friend who played the pinball machine. It wasn't until really the establishment of Calhoun Square and then you got some people in that area that became interested in forming some alternative type businesses. Look at the Uptown Bar which started its present musical format and entertainment format before it was firmly established that it was becoming a gay area.

SP: At what time is this? When you say Calhoun Square, I'm thinking like 1985, 1986 or are you talking previous?

AR: I'm talking previously. I thought that it was older than that, it could be my mistake.

SP: What time are you talking about?

AR: I was thinking more 1980.

SP: O.K.

AR: That could be my mistake, I'm really not sure. But, so some of these established businesses began transforming I think the personality of the neighborhood before the people came to the neighborhood to those businesses. When the Uptown Bar for instance began drawing that crowd, and some of the other businesses in the area began drawing that crowd those and some of those folks moved into the area and the personality there was transformed there is also, I think, percent there certain styles of architecture, certain types of housing available traditionally at reasonable rents. That's not as though the gay and lesbian community is totally unschooled in the value of a dollar. They know where there is a wonderful habitat for the money. It wasn't too long in the recent past that there was actually habitat available in the Uptown area. Right now it's pretty populated. You've got to know someone to get a choice to joint up there. A few years ago it was much different.

SP: My understanding is that it was not a very special neighborhood and I heard in other cities

also that gay people are like the scavengers. I mean, they go into a place and it is not a place other people want to live in and they turn it into a place which is desirable, it becomes cosmopolitan. The place to be so, the so-called yuppies start buying out all the property and the gay people go elsewhere. Stepping back, would you say before Uptown, what was the neighborhoods rather if there is more than one? Was it like we were talking about in the Groveland area?

AR: Yes, to an extent. However, at the same time you definitely have to have the means to afford living in that area. Although the lower Loring Park neighborhood, just on the east side of the park are Yale and Oak Grove some of those areas have been predominantly gay for years. Your observation of the Uptown area is extremely correct, although I would say now it's getting to the point where the rent prices are getting to a point where you're going to see some of our cohorts being pushed out gradually. Where do we go from here? If it was my prediction, I'd start buying the property now. [unclear]

SP: Yes, I've heard. Although Powderhorn Park, is kind of saturated at this point...

AR: Probably saturated and the neighborhood is thick with lesbians and they own those homes, those duplexes are all lesbian owned.

SP: The new area is right along the river near Franklin Avenue across from Prospect Park. That's just what I've heard. Something else I want to ask about socializing places for gay people. The ones that were businesses and not bars, primarily bathhouses [unclear] Were those in an area that was desirable? As far back as you can remember? You said the Happy Hour were you went to first, which is the same location on Hennepin. It seemed to shape up a little bit recently at least the opposite side of the sidewalk. Has it gotten better? Do you think that was always and area that was a kind of undesirable area where like, Moby Dick's and you know rough bars. Then there were the gay bars but, those were like not very nice places to go. I mean, a lot of street crime happening there.

AR: Yes, the bars at least, in particular the three bars downtown Minneapolis on Hennepin Avenue: the Saloon, the Brass Rail and the Happy Hour in the Gay 90's complex. All the bars other than maybe the Townhouse in particular in St. Paul: Metro and Rumors, that's an entire subject of it's own. We can write a small article concerning the bars. However, downtown in Minneapolis each of these bars seems to have a distinct personality. The Saloon is and always has been a place that is so much more of a pick-up place for older men and younger boys or, younger men have always been. Women are not very welcome there, never totally have been. Drag queens in alternate sexual forms or ramifications of sexuality of any sort are not really overly encouraged. Usually when the Saloon has its underwear parties, they're talking about Fruit of the Looms.

The Brass Rail tends to be so much more of an intellectual conversation type place. Most of the people that go there or go as couples, they know one another and they love to have a cocktail or two and sit and talk or do there game nights or their karaoke sing-along thing. It's well known within the community that if you really want to have a really bad drink, you go to the Happy Hour. That's not a place where you go to drink. However, if you do want a good drink, the

biggest bang for you buck or you want to get off, you're going to the Happy Hour. That place and the Gay 90's complex has more of a social scene than any place in the Twin Cities including Metro and Rumors except, possibly the Townhouse. The cowboys and girls, that's another deal. When we are talking about the Townhouse we're talking cowpokes. At the Gay 90's and the Happy Hour, you've got a little bit of everything. You've got the strong boozing and people that are in the Happy Hour, although they are very definitely queer, and [unclear] they enjoy it. There is some sexuality and some flaunting of such going on there, they are there for one purpose. Usually people going to drink would go to the Happy Hour. When I go to the Happy Hour I want to have to have a couple bumps. However, upstairs there's a wonderful piano bar where Lori Doken sings. You can sit in a comfortable chair and kick back and sip a cocktail and comfortably schmooze around...

SP: It sounds like there's a lot of...

AR: Or, you can go into the Casablanca Show Lounge and see the most outrageous drag queens in town or you can go to the Blue Angel bar and talk with some of our instructors from the Pride Committee or shoot a round of pool.

SP: Can we get back to this question; Why do you think the bars are located basically near the Warehouse District, on the edge like you said both in St. Paul and Minneapolis. They both have their own neighborhoods and when I think of it I think warehouse districts, at the edge of the business stuff, becoming bad streets. Robert isn't the nicest street in St. Paul and neither is Hennepin. Why do you think they are there?

AR: Nor is University Avenue where there is the Townhouse. I think in most larger cities, and possibly in European cities as well, there are undesirable districts as far as residential areas. [There are] wonderful places to live and go and there are red light districts. I think that much of larger urban environments have something like this that either develops by design, like planned or happens. For instance Minneapolis, it'd be quite as much by design or conscious plan, as perhaps as just happening. As it turns out, three of those bars are on Hennepin Avenue. Yes, they are in very undesirable areas. However, I know no one that would care to live on Hennepin Avenue anyway. There has been some discussion as far as the authorities [unclear] leading these establishments alone to purvey their type of entertainment and socialization to that particular area of the community. And, yes I think they do. And, yes there has been considerable conversation that I hear amongst my acquaintances that there are pay-offs made to officials for protection; for leniency ultimately. Of course, I think that most of us would accept the fact that this indeed probably goes on and perhaps for a good reason. I don't know.

SP: Do you know of any people who would have more information about pay-offs, historically.

AR: Yes, I probably do, but I don't know if they would be overjoyed if I would.

SP: Thank you, Ms. Rukes.