

# David Hays

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gay, bar, waterloo, cedar falls, gay bar, started, iowa, friends, aids, people, parties, called, community, uni, state, couple, drag, local, years, met

## SPEAKERS

Elliot Wesselborg, David Hays

- E** Elliot Wesselborg 00:01  
Hello, my name is Elliot and I will be having a conversation with David Hays for LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa, a project of Grinnell College. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of LGBT identified people in Iowa. It is June 29 2020 and due to social distancing as a result of COVID-19, this interview is being conducted remotely. Hi, David. It's good to be talking with you today.
- D** David Hays 00:27  
It's great to be with you even if it is remote.
- E** Elliot Wesselborg 00:29  
Yeah, over a screen works as well. So if you could start off just tell me how, who you are, how you identify.
- D** David Hays 00:36  
I am Dave Hayes. I am considered a gay adult male, very adult. I am in my late 60s, and my gay history goes back into the 1960s as a child, so.



Elliot Wesselborg 00:56

Tell me about your life growing up.



David Hays 01:00

I grew up in Clear Lake, Iowa, a small town that time about 6000 or 7000 people in North Central Iowa. And I was born in 1951 so I, by the time in late 1950s, early 1960s were going, I was in about third or fourth or fifth grade. And that's when I started to realize that I was different from other kids and I didn't understand what it was. In that era, there was no positive press, there was no positive image of gay, lesbian people in movies or on the news. Everything was negative, so I didn't even relate to any of that, because it's what I felt wasn't negative, it was just me. And the more I started to realize what was going on, the more scared I was to be around other kids. Because there was already name-calling, there was already verbal bullying. And so, as I heard that and I felt different, I didn't want to be picked on even more. So I kind of withdrew from being around other kids; I became an isolator. And that avoidance cost me learning social skills, it cost me learning sports skills. My isolation from other kids just was really, now looking back at it, a very poor move. But I was trying to save myself at that time from having to go through more misery. I seemed to enjoy doing things that the girls in my classes would enjoy doing and I didn't like the things the boys were doing, whether it was sports or talking about things I didn't relate to or anything like that. That was in the era of late 1950s, around 1960 when the first sex changes started happening in Denmark and Scandinavia. And immediately I thought, oh my god, that's me—the reason I'm feeling this way is because I'm born in the wrong body. And so I went through years of feeling suicidal thinking, how am I going to get out of this and what's going to happen to me? And I started going to the public library—I didn't dare go to the school library and be seen—so I went to the public library, and I started to look up stuff. And that's when I saw the word homosexual. And as soon as I read th-



Elliot Wesselborg 03:43

Do you remember where you read that?



David Hays 03:46

It was in a book of some kind in the reference section of the library. And it was very medical explanation, but as soon as I started reading it, I related to it. And it was kind of a sigh of relief, okay, now I've got a name for it, but that's a damn big name and it's scary as hell. Because at that time, sodomy, crimes against major, uh, just being gay was still a criminal act. And I read in Des Moines Register stories about raids on bars and picking up

people and putting them in mental health institutions and how horrible these people were. So I thought, okay, now that I know, I really had to keep this secret. And throughout high school years, as I got older, I was really even more. I had very few friends that I associated with and I just kept secrets and I was full of anxiety and paranoia and depression. My teenage years I was suicidal; I thought of it quite often. And it was just a miserable existence.

D

David Hays 05:08

I had, uh, there's a few fun times—I found some escapism by getting involved in music, both band and choir and theater, stereotypical things you think of gay people doing. But all those people that I was associating with, I didn't know that any of them could have been gay, lesbian or bi or anything else. You know, everybody was keeping their own secrets because it was too dangerous to be out in the public. So, you know, I went through a long time like that, and that included after I got out of high school. I went to Nyack(?) in Mason City, and spent two years going to that school and I saw a couple people that I was pretty sure were probably gay—they were pretty flamboyant. But I avoided those people because I didn't want that guilt by association. I was still paranoid, and, uh, I was still, you know in 1969 when I graduated from high school, it was a month after I graduated that the Stonewall Riots took place in New York City. And so all hell was breaking loose in the media and it was not pretty, it was very negative press coverage. And that just confirmed my belief that I just need to be quiet and avoid people and not say anything to anybody. And that carried me through out of junior college or community college. And I was working, and by this time I was working for grocery stores, I was in supermarket management training. And I ended up in a store in Waverly, Iowa, which is just about half an hour north of Waterloo-Cedar Falls area. And that time, it's about 10,000 people at that time, and I was working in a residential treatment center called Bremwood Children's Home. It's for adolescents who are troubled and in trouble with the law usually. And one of the women that I was working with I became very close to, and we were paired up to work two and a half day shifts pretty much living in the cottage where we had to work. And when we got done with our shifts, we would go to the nearest pub on Bremer Avenue in Waverly and have a few beers and just unwind and talk. And after a few months of this, I just started feeling like, okay, she's getting way too attached to me and I don't like, I'm not comfortable with the way this conversation is going. But I don't know how to tell her, I don't know what to say. And I told her at one point, "there's something we need to talk about" and I just, I couldn't say it out loud—I was just scared to death. I didn't want it to get back to work and I could be fired for being gay at work, especially working around teenage kids. You know, that stereotype was so big. And so I was just horrified when she said, "don't tell me, you're gay, right?" And I just started sweating bullets and I chugged a beer real quick. I said, "okay, what did I do that was so obvious? I've been trying

to hide this and you figured it out." And she said, "don't worry about it, two of the last guys I dated were gay." And then, you know, within a couple of weeks, we were at a party and she invited me and introduced me to her gay friends, the first gay people that I ever met at age 26. So I would be considered a late bloomer, at a point.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 08:56

I wanted to ask for a second, uh, did the people in your community ever talk about gay people or transgender people or anything?

D

David Hays 09:03

I never heard a word said in that town. All I heard was negative name calling, a bully. And Clear Lake at that time—I don't know if it still is, I haven't been around there for a long time—it was very cliquish town. And I was not a part of any of the cliques. I wasn't part of the jocks or the theater geeks or anything. I was just always on the outcast. And so yeah, I didn't know anything in my hometown, and I couldn't wait to get out of there. And it was the same when I went to community college in both Mason City and Fort Dodge. I didn't see anybody, I didn't recognize anything and those I did were too obvious for me to associate with. So you know, I was still a loner until 26 when this coworker introduced me to her gay friends. And it was about that same time there was another guy that I was working with, an older guy, who had been at one point in his life a blue collar worker who had worked and lived in Waterloo, and was familiar with all the old bars around the meatpacking plant. And he told me one day, he says, "you know, I want to go back and relive some of those bars. Let's, let's get in my car and we'll go bar hopping in my old stomping ground." And I thought, okay, this doesn't sound like fun, but I'll go. And one of the second or third bars we were in, I looked around, and I recognized it right away. I'd never been in a gay bar, but I knew this has to be a gay bar. And I was watching the bartenders, and so was my friend from work. And he says, "yeah, things have really changed in here since I was in last." And the bartender says, "yeah, it's become a gay bar now. We opened about six months ago." And my friend says "well, I need to go to the bathroom." And he went to the bathroom. "So, okay, we gotta go." He was very nervous. And I, while he was in the bathroom I just looked at the bartender and says, "I'll be back."

E

Elliot Wesselborg 11:12

And what was the name of that bar?

D

David Hays 11:14

That was the Inn Touch lounge--I, N, N Touch. And it was right across the street from Rath's packing plant right in the middle of a bunch of redneck bars and they caused trouble all the time.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 11:27

When you went in-

D

David Hays 11:29

Our cars were always vandalized when we parked near that bar. We had gangs of young men coming into the bar with weapons to break it up. And it was a horrible time, but it was a wonderful time.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 11:43

When you went into that bar for the first time, who was there?

D

David Hays 11:47

We were early enough in the, or late enough in the afternoon, early evening. There were very few people there. There were just, I don't even remember, just a couple of people sitting at the bar and the bartender. So there was almost nothing there. But when I went back by myself a couple of weeks later and hit a Friday night, I could barely even get in the front door the place was packed. I mean, it was just a tiny, at that point just a one room bar with a dance floor on one corner and a little DJ booth hidden back in a alcove. A few months later, they remodeled a second storefront and expanded and built a new dance floor and room for a pool table. But at that time, it was just a tiny place and being one of only three or four bars in the state of Iowa. People were driving in from as far as Iowa City and Des Moines to come visit the Waterloo bar. And it would be the same with Waterloo people wanting to go to Iowa City or Des Moines or Cedar Rapids to meet new people and see what they've got.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 12:57

Was it mostly men or a mixed crowd?

D

David Hays 12:59

It was very mixed, both gender wise and racially, which really surprised me because I had

never considered the option that an African American person might be gay or lesbian. I don't know why that never occurred to me. But I started to realize very quickly, we are just a big cross section of the general population. And all these years I had been stereotyping in my own mind what I was supposed to be as a gay man, and I wasn't fitting the stereotype that I thought and I just felt real uncomfortable with that.



Elliot Wesselborg 13:34

What did you think you had to be?



David Hays 13:37

I thought I had to go into hairdressing and prance around with my pinky up in the air and fall in love with rainbow colors and glitter and, you know, that just wasn't me. And I started seeing guys that were wearing leather harnesses and women who are in flannel shirts and women who are dressed up and had lipstick. Everybody was breaking all the stereotypes that I thought I have. And that just gave me a freedom to discover myself. And that was an amazing experience to just be free to be me. And I'm not even sure who I am yet.



Elliot Wesselborg 14:22

When you went back, like, did you see many of the same people week after week or was it kind of people came in and out?



David Hays 14:28

Yes. There were a few that would come maybe once and look in and try it and see and they felt so uncomfortable, they left and didn't come back. But most of us on weekend nights were the regular crowd. And in those early days, I've been also doing a lot of research in the era before I came out. And I found that there was a very healthy underground party scene in the Waterloo, Cedar Falls area, and there would be parties in people's basements with 20 or 30 people, both men and women, and that group of people just carried the party into the bar. So there was already a core community kind of started even when the bar first opened. And it was easy for those of us just coming in as newbies to get into that crowd and pretty soon I had a lot of friends. But the odd thing was, it was still against the law to be homosexual in Iowa at that point. The state law wasn't changed until after a Supreme Court case in 1976, in Iowa. Until 1977, all the laws were removed that had crimes against nature—which is what gay was considered to be. So at that time, the bar had been open for about two years before that law was changed. So we were still very afraid, and not only because of the raids by the young toughs that would come in and

break up the place and threaten people—I was beaten up in a parking lot one night by a group of six or seven guys that pushed me to the ground and beat on me. And that was just common. But there was also this sense of, I need to protect myself no matter what and I can be fired from my job if word of this gets out. There were a couple of old guys that always had their cameras with them because they wanted to record all this stuff. And most of us would turn our backs to them as soon as we saw the camera come out—we didn't want our face to be seen. Very few people used their real name; we either had nicknames or people made up names. This was the era before cell phones so we could give people our phone numbers, but we didn't know until they got home and back to our phone, whether it was a good phone number, or they gave us a bad phone number, which happened frequently. So yeah, it was very tense, but it was very exciting because we were all exploring and learning who we were as individuals and as a community. And with that, that sense of impending doom not knowing what waited for us outside the door, the last song of the night, after the dance music ended, they would play a slow ballad type song that would bring everybody together. And we, I can remember very, very much, everybody joining in a circle around the dance floor, holding hands and participating in this song, and I cannot remember what song it was. And there's only two or three people I know of that can remember that, yeah, there was a song in those early months. But that was the whole feeling of a really tight knit community, where we would join in that circle and then go on our merry way until the next weekend or if we got brave, we came on a weeknight when there was very few people there and it was a little bit riskier. We did have, after multiple calls to the police about these raids and the vandalism, we did start seeing policemen on beats stop in once in a while, and sometimes it was more frequent on weekends. And at first that made everybody a little bit tense. But after 1977 when the state law was passed, everybody kind of made a sigh of relief and discovered that the policeman just came in and just wanted to have a cup of coffee and sit and watch and just make sure nothing bad was happening. We began to accept them as just friendly tourists coming through and helping us keep the peace.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 16:20

Do you know why they were so amenable to having a more positive relationship with the bar?

D

David Hays 18:54

I have no clue whatsoever. Because that is so unlike, even today what we see with some police forces. But for those that are viewing this in future times, we're going through a lot of strife and turmoil right now with police forces that are taking excessive action in some communities, against minorities of all kinds. And so there's a lot of distrust and hatred of

police departments, but I can tell you that in the mid 1970s, the Waterloo police were, seemed to be, fairly friendly. And now that I've done more research on the history, I have discovered some things that go back in the 1950s and 60s when the private parties were going on before the bar opened. There was a point where there was a legal case in Iowa that came out of Sioux City, and in fact there's a whole book written about it that I've gotten and used as part of my research because it tells them what life was like in the gay underground in Iowa.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 20:02  
What was that book called?

**D** David Hays 20:04  
The book is called *Sex Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* by Neil Miller.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 20:11  
Okay.

**D** David Hays 20:12  
And uh, it's an out of print book, but I was able to find one copy in the used bookstore in Iowa City and there may be others that are available. It was printed by Allison Books and, uh I'm looking for a publication date--2002 and it's already out of print. But it talks a lot about the MHIs (Mental Health Institutions) that are scattered around the state and how they were doing conversion, electroshock therapy, and how the police force were raiding bars and raiding private parties to to grab homosexuals to get them off the street and lock them up. And so you know, that was the way the police were handling it in several cities and then the Sioux City case came up. It was about a little boy who was abducted and murdered. They just assumed it must be a gay man doing it. So they found a gay man and arrested him and locked him up and made him confess after they gave him a bunch of drugs and electro-shocks, and years later, a court threw out the case because it was, you know, they forced him into a confession that, you know, never happened. But what this triggered in Sioux City was that the sheriff at the time in Blackhawk County where Waterloo is located, the sheriff followed what he saw the Sioux City police doing and that was to collect names of anybody he could find that might be homosexual and have them arrested, locked up or sent to MHI for conversion. And those raids, there is a series of raids over a couple of months in 1960 in Waterloo. Earlier raids had taken place in Sioux City,

and so, excuse me, getting a dry voice because I'm, allergy season. So yeah, the police changed their attitudes sometime between 1960s and the mid 1970s and I don't know what changed them, other than the old-school guy is retired and left.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 22:37

That's really interesting. I'm sure someone, there's a lot of research to be done, I guess there.

D

David Hays 22:42

I have done quite a bit of research. I won't get into all of that now, so that gets away from my personal experience. And we'll save that for a later time.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 22:52

Okay. Um, so, were you meeting people at this bar?

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David Hays 22:59

I kind of met people, I was still very shy. And I found a group of, probably, most of them were a little bit younger than me, a group of people that I related to, we had fun together. And most of us did not drink at all, or very little. And so we all just kept getting the same table and sitting together as a group of eight, nine, ten people. And we would sometimes go to parties together. And we'd never really associated outside of our little circle much. But there were occasions at after bar parties where I would start meeting men and start hooking up. You know, one night stands was quite the thing back and I wasn't any different than anybody else and exploring my attractions and finding where they took me. I explored a lot of other things too, I got into some social drinking and these parties after the bars were also notorious for a lot of drugs, not only pot but pills and all kinds of other stuff. So I experimented a little bit and I'm not, I didn't like most of it and I just stayed with my booze that made me feel a little lightheaded and gave me the freedom to get out of my shell and party with the others. We would, uh, at these parties, there would be some people that would pair up and go off and most of us would just play music and dance and drink or whatever, talk. We would talk sometimes until dawn the next morning. And there were large groups of us that, after the bar would close or after these parties, would go out to a local restaurant and have breakfast together before we go home and sleep all day and take a nap and start again that night.

E Elliot Wesselborg 24:59  
Who hosted those parties?

D David Hays 25:01  
Everybody went to those parties. We had gays and lesbians, bisexuals, we had drag queens that were still wearing drag. We had a lot of straight women who were going because they felt safe and comfortable and able to drink without being, you know, attacked.

E Elliot Wesselborg 25:19  
Yeah, who was hosting them though?

D David Hays 25:22  
Oh, the, anybody who was in the bar. We get closer to two o'clock closing time and people would start buying their six packs to-go or whatever it was, because you couldn't buy booze after 2am in stores. And somebody would yell out "where's the after bar party?" And sometimes no one would come forward and volunteer their house because your house was pretty much guaranteed to get trashed that night. But there were a few people that did. And one of them happened to be a very popular radio DJ at the time and he was very closeted, but he was extremely active in the gay underground and hosted a lot of after bar parties. And they, it would be not uncommon to have 70, 80, 90 people in his home. It was a wild time. And so, you know, if nobody else stepped forward, he's come forward with the party, "okay, we're going to my house."

E Elliot Wesselborg 26:24  
Was it always in Waterloo? Or did you ever drive outside of that?

D David Hays 26:27  
Almost always in Waterloo. Cedar Falls, even though it's a college town, is much more conservative. In all the history that I've got, oh, I don't know, maybe 14 gay bars had been in the area, they were all from Waterloo. There were attempts a couple of times to look into it and the Cedar Falls would never agree to a liquor permit for a gay bar. And so the parties just stayed in Waterloo to the gays and lesbians. And the LGBT people of all kinds that were at UNI, or before that, the State Teachers College, pretty much isolated and

stayed on campus, they didn't associate with the community. And so the community didn't associate much with them either at that time. It's a lot different now, but in those days, there were two separate worlds. So yeah, there wasn't much to do at Cedar Falls for people. And no one wanted to drive that far. I mean, it was only, you know, another 10 minutes or 15 minutes, but when you're in the middle of a party mood, and you got a hot date, you don't want to wait 15 minutes, you want to get to the party now, so. Some of those houses were within two or three blocks of where the bar was located.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 27:42

And those houses hadn't--were most people who were part of the scene, like, had they lived in Waterloo for a long time, or what was, like, age wise, what did things look like?

D

David Hays 27:54

Yeah, almost all of them had been there all of their lives. They were Waterloo-Cedar Falls natives or from a small town in the area. There were a lot of farmers who would come in from some of the small towns within 20 or 30 miles of the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area. And we sometimes didn't even know that's who they were until, you know, we'd get into private conversations with them weeks or months later and find out oh my gosh, they're a farmer from Nashua or they're a farmer from Rhinebeck. And we, yeah, we had no clue at the time. Course that was them protecting their privacy. During that era, once we got a taste of that freedom to feel who we are, and still having that stigma, and society pressure, and all of the negativity that was still going on, it was much easier for our more mobile friends just to take off and move to a different city. During that era of the 1970s and early 80s, it would not be uncommon every month to see three or four more of my friends pack up everything. There was a cluster that moved to the Twin Cities and a large group that moved to Denver, Colorado. Chicago was a big destination for a lot of people. Some of the more daring even went to New York City or San Francisco. So it was, and we had to form new friends, because those people were out of our lives. We didn't have cell phones or computers, so we kind of lost touch with each other at some point.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 29:32

Do you know what those people who moved away were hoping to find?

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David Hays 29:37

A better life where there was, uh, they could go what was affectionately called "gay ghettos." They could go to sections of some cities and drive for blocks and blocks and not

have to deal with a straight person. They could be with their own kind and not have to deal with the cruelties of the outside world. But that, for some reason, that never appealed to me. By the late 70s, both of my parents had died and my only sister had moved to California and had, a lot of my mother's side of the family had moved to California. There was a lot of pressure on me to move out there. Even before I was out, they were trying to get me to move out there and I visited a few times, but it just, it didn't attract me at all. I was just an Iowa boy, so I'm just going to stay here. And after a while, I started to seeing it kind of as my mission--to be here and be part of the community and try to improve things from within instead of just avoiding and going outside and starting over someplace else.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 30:50

Outside of the bar scene, did people feel, like, did people feel safe being out and about in Waterloo?

D

David Hays 30:56

Absolutely not. No way, no how. There were a handful of people that might be a little more visible and everybody just made the assumption in town that that's the gay couple or there's the lesbian couple, but nothing was said. And even though they may not have had any violence or verbal harassment, that stigma was still there. So there weren't very many people that came out.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 31:29

But there, were there couples that were, like, openly living or as, I don't know, but people would assume they were just gay?

D

David Hays 31:38

There were several couples that were together at that time and are still couples. I've got a couple of friends that are in their 30, 40, 50th anniversaries of being together. So some of those relationships go back to the early or late 1960s or early 70s. They are still together and have now been able to legally marry. So yeah, it was, it was kind of commonly known and accepted. But you didn't make a big deal of it, you stayed, you stayed low-key.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 32:14

Yeah.

D

David Hays 32:15

Last thing you wanted was to draw attention to yourselves. And that included newspaper interviews. Whenever there was something happening in the news, they would try to contact somebody from the local gay bar, and try to do interviews with people. And we wouldn't allow us to be interviewed with full names or pictures. There were a few articles that were written in the early 80s, talking about gay issues, because it happened to be in the news at the time for this reason or that reason, but names were changed to protect the innocent. And the papers went along with that for a while. That all changed later, we'll get into the AIDS epidemic later, but that's that's when things started to change and we actually became open and started using our real names. But that would have been 1989 or 90 before that happened.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 33:08

Yeah. So what's, when things were kind of shifting from that bar scene, how long was that bar around? Were there other bars that cropped up in Waterloo at any point?

D

David Hays 33:22

The Inn Touch opened in September of 1975 and it was closed in October of 1979 by a fire that was very suspicious. They could never prove that it was arson. But it was under new ownership at that time, and everything was just kind of awkward. People suspect that the new owner may have done it to get insurance money, others thought maybe it was vandalism and arson fire. The new owner did try to use the insurance money to renovate the place and it never did reopen, there was another fire about two months later that burned it to the ground. But in that meantime, while the Inn Touch was open, there was a second bar that open for about six months in 1977 right in downtown Waterloo on East or - West Fourth Street and that was called the Gaslight Lounge. And it took over for a former straight bar that was a country western thing. And right inside the door as soon as you'd walk off, Fourth Street in Waterloo is kind of the main street through the downtown area, and as soon as you walk into the door, there was a big carved wooden plaque that said "you are entering a gay bar, we have the right to refuse anyone, behave yourself, you know, act appropriately" or you know, something to that effect. So, what that, that was fine for some of us who are feeling more comfortable, but those that were still very closeted, they didn't like being that open and being downtown Waterloo. They prefer to go back to the Inn Touch back over the industrial, dark area of town, there's, you know, no streetlights and no big signs or anything saying it was a gay bar. But that Gaslight Lounge just did not last long. So after the arson at the Inn Touch, another bar opened, also downtown but not quite on the main drag, it was called the Trinity Club. And they operated, they took a lesson from the Gaslight so instead of just having a sign on the door

that said "you're coming into a gay bar," they actually had a booth built with a person sitting in the booth. And they had to look at you and look at your ID before they would allow you in, it was kind of a semi-private club that way. And they kept out some of the riffraff and that was a very popular bar, in fact we, one night, stood outside in front of that club and looked across the river, we could see the flames lighting up the sky when the Inn Touch burned the second time. I have a vivid memory of that night. The Trinity Club did quite well and it expanded into a third, second and third, storefronts. And one of the memories I have of that bar is, it must have been during an election year around 1980, or campaigning, early campaigning in 1981, I remember one of the Kennedy women coming into that bar with her entourage and a great big fur coat. And she was campaigning for, I think it was for Ted Kennedy or maybe it was for Bobby. I don't remember at that point who it was campaigning for, but she was reaching out to the gay community and we just thought that is really cool. It really impressed a lot of people.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 36:56

Wow, that's crazy.

D

David Hays 37:00

There's a whole 'nother bar history. In Waterloo, there were a few weird moments when one bar would close and a replacement wouldn't open for almost a year. And that was devastating because that was, again, before computers and before internet access and cell phones, so we had no way to meet each other or socialize other than, you know, knowing people's real names and having a good phone number. And having parties. There were a couple of times when we actually had two bars open simultaneously. But in a town this size, Waterloo being about 70,000, I think the county is a little over 100,000, that's not enough of a community to support two bars actively. So one always buckled to the more popular of the two and that's been going on up until this very day. Now, the last couple of years or maybe the last five or six years, there are straight bars that are gay friendly. So it's not such a big deal now to find a gay bar because there are a lot of open people, you know, the laws have changed, discrimination in Iowa has not been a thing for many years, legally. So, you know, the straight bar, in fact, the owner of the local gay bar currently, the Kings and Queens Club, also owns two other straight bars or so called "straight" but that has become a second home to a lot of the LGBT people.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 38:39

When there were two bars at a time, were they serving, like, more or less the same clientele or were there different groups that gravitated towards--?

D

David Hays 38:47

There was a lot of crossover. A lot of us attended both bars, we would see, you know, which one was the busiest that night or which one of our friends was going to which bar and make a decision, and then we got bored, we'd go to the other one. Sometimes one would have a drag show and the other one wouldn't or one would have male strippers and the other one wouldn't, so, you know, it just depended on--they had a lot of competition. And there was a time, there was two bars, one called the Dutch Mill located downtown and one called Logan's, which was in a very large warehouse, several miles away, in a not-so-good neighborhood. And the competition between those bars was very heavy. And Logan's seemed to win out on a lot of the big events and big crowds. And the clientele that went to the other bar didn't like that so much and we think some of the problems were coming from that bar, rather than from straight people trying to cause trouble.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 39:49

Interesting.

D

David Hays 39:50

The police were called. Yeah, the police were called several times on us, saying that there were illegal activities going. Yeah, what number called us to, you know, to get that information? Yeah, it was, there were just some really awkward times.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 40:07

I wanted to go back for a second to when you were saying you'd talk with these farmers and have no idea that they were, that that was their life until you talked with them. Do you, are there any stories that, like, stick out to you from that time of just, like, people whose paths you crossed but really surprised you?

D

David Hays 40:32

There were, yeah, some of those farmers, it was shocking to me because that went against every stereotype that I had. Blew my mind. And I came to find out that, yeah, their local, neighboring farmers or local townspeople had no clue, they were so deeply closeted, but they had a cluster of similar farmers throughout this 10 or 12 county area. They networked together and they would get together and have parties or picnics or potlucks. They'd do a hog roast or one of them built a pool and he had a lot of pool parties at his house. And

you'd get together with all these farmers and there's one of them is a millionaire farmer with a huge, you know, acreage in cattle and, you know, it just, the stereotype of that kind of blew me away. And, after, you know, several bars later into the 1980s, I started meeting people and once we started opening up and actually talking to each other and being honest, instead of covering up our lives, I found out that there were people who were doctors and lawyers who were coming to that bar. There were professors from UNI that were coming over. One of those times, I remember going out with one of my straight friends, we went to a white cloth dining experience in Cedar Falls, very upscale, and we went out for, I don't know, it was my birthday or something, and I looked over at the next table, at this fine dining place, and I, it was all I could do to keep myself from screaming at them. There were two of my former high school teachers from Clear Lake who were on a date and came down to Cedar Falls to get away from crap. And I'm thinking oh my god, they were there all the time and I never knew. I could have gotten so much information and support from them had they been able to be out and so I could come out to them. But the old stereotypes just prevented the student-teacher, you know, that whole bogus thing, you know, it can't be open and so, you know, he can't provide support, because people were going to assume there's recruiting going on or, you know, all those, the old stereotypes. But that was quite an eye opener, seeing them in that restaurant.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 42:57

Yeah, the last thing you expect to happen. Do you know how all those farmers met each other? Or got in contact?

D

David Hays 43:08

I don't know, other than maybe they met each other at other bars in other parts of the state. I know a lot of them go to the Twin Cities or Des Moines. Some of them may have met each other here at the Waterloo bars. Some of them seem to know each other dating clear back to the pre-bar days of the 1960s. Some of them have been active in that small core of partygoers in private.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 43:34

I also wanted to ask about, like, knowing older gay people who could be kind of mentors. Were there people at all that you knew who able to mentor you later on?

D

David Hays 43:45

I'm not sure I would call it mentoring, but yeah, there were some old timers. That, one in

particular, I'll use this nickname of Boz, everybody in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area knew Boz. He was one of the original party organizers of the 1950s and 60s in Waterloo and very flamboyant in, working in the retail business. And he toyed with drag a little bit, but his main purpose in being with the bar was as soon as he saw a young newcomer coming in, he'd take them under his wing, and say, "okay, this is this is what we do, and here's what you shouldn't do. And you want to avoid this person or that'll be a good match." And he was a real Yenta trying to match us up with people. But he was also very protective of those that he took under his wing. And he was a dear soul, but boy, you didn't want to get on his bad side--he'd let you know about it. There were a few other old timers who were hanging around. And those of us being young and active and wanting to be on the go and meeting exciting new people, last thing we wanted to talk to was an old man sitting in a bar. So yeah, we pretty much avoided those old timers, which I really regret now, knowing that I've got stories to share from my early days, they probably did too. And a few years ago, I was an editor for a statewide newspaper called ACCESSline and I did an interview with one of those old timers before he died, and got to talk to him about what things were like as early as the 1940s in the Waterloo area, and how gay people met each other. And the bars in the lobbies of hotels were frequent spots, or the areas around train depots. Especially during World War Two, a lot of people came in and out of town on trains and the place to meet people was in the hotels near those train stations. And they would very discreetly be there and they would give each other a nod or something just simple and they would know. And you know, they could go off to a private party then or do whatever. And there are some other bars that I have found out since then, away from those hotels, that were pretty much dives that the people did not like going to. Well, the gays did, because very few other people went there.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 46:29

Yeah, what were the names of some of those, if you remember?

D

David Hays 46:33

The one that I've heard about was called the Tick Tock Tap. The building is long gone, but it was quite the dive that attracted a racial diversity of people that most of the white clientele tended to avoid back in that day. And so the gays felt right at home there and as long as they were discreet, and--I experienced a little bit of that when the Inn Touch closed and before another bar had opened. There were a few straight bars that we knew of that had gay-friendly workers or owners. So there's, clusters of us would go to some of these straight bars, but we had to be on our toes. We had to be careful of what we were saying out loud, we had to be careful that we weren't hugging or kissing or touching. We had to avoid dancing. All the things we take for granted in a gay bar situation, we could

not do any of that. And they would put up with us as long as we behave that way and then conformed to their demands. Soon as somebody did something that was deemed to be a little bit out of line, we were all out. They just, they would clear the bar, "okay, everybody gone."

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 48:04

Would you, and so how long were those stretches kind of between bars usually when they happened?

**D** David Hays 48:09

I think the longest one was about a year.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 48:11

Okay.

**D** David Hays 48:13

So we would find bars that we could feel comfortable in. And I remember one, it's also long gone now, it was called the Waterfront Lounge and the chef that worked there was gay. And the front side of the bar was an actual bar-restaurant, and there was a private party room in the back. But most of us stayed in the front. And they would have live music, singer-songwriter, things like that, on weekends, especially. Those of us who were gay, to kind of signal each other when we didn't know each other, we would have little signs. And I remember one phase we went through--it must have been from a song that was popular at the time, I don't know where it was--but they had little pocket-sized teddy bears. And I remember having a little, about a four inch teddy bear, it was sticking out of my shirt pocket. And that was a symbol to everybody, "okay, he's gay, he's safe, you can talk to him." So there were odd little--it wasn't quite underground, but we were very, very careful when we were in that atmosphere of being around straight people.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 49:24

What were some of the other signs that you used?

**D** David Hays 49:28

Well, in those days, there was a hankie code, that, I don't know that anybody around here

followed it very closely or knew, but different colors meant different things that you enjoy doing sexually, and that didn't, it never really took off here. But yeah, if you had some color hanky or something else. There were some symbols that have been used within the gay community underground for years that people, if they were educated at all into gay history, would recognize, like a pink triangle. Not quite as open as the gay pride flag that came about in, I believe, 1979, but the pink triangle was used by the Nazis to label homosexuals in prison camps, so the pink triangle became a symbol. The lowercase lambda was an underground symbol for a long time. There is a--let's see, I've got a note to myself here about the lambda--I don't see where it is, but I know it comes from chemistry and science. And it talks about synchronicity of the many becoming one and the energy of moving forward. And that was adopted; there's, still today there's some remnants of that with Lambda Legal, the big national legal service, Lambda Rising bookstores and literature. So lambda is still a little bit of it; very few people even know what it means anymore.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 51:08

How did the teddy bear thing come about? Was that just for Waterloo?

D

David Hays 51:12

I think it was just local. And I don't remember what it was other than--I remember having those feelings once a gay bar closed, and we couldn't be open in public, some days, we just needed a hug. And that became kind of a symbol, if you had a teddy bear, you were safe to hug. And if you didn't, you didn't know what was going on, you might be straight, so don't even get close to that. That's all I could come up with. I can remember that feeling of needing hugs, and we thought teddy bears would be a good way to symbolize that.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 51:53

Did you have access to, like, any kind of gay magazines or literature or anything that connected you to the scene outside of Waterloo?

D

David Hays 52:01

Yes, very definitely. Many of us subscribed to magazines like Advocate, Out, several others that have faded from history now, where, you know, a lot of us subscribed to those magazines. There were little Reader's Digest size books; RFD was one that comes to mind, it's a rural, they print stories and things like that. So a lot of those were in circulation, so we knew what was going on around the country and around the world. We kind of kept in

touch that way, because the news media still pretty much had a blackout on anything dealing with LGBT community for a long time.

E Elliot Wesselborg 52:50

I know RFD was founded in Iowa. Did you read that regularly or what are your memories of that?

D David Hays 52:55

I was not a subscriber to it. I had two or three copies that were handed to me from other people. I got more into the Advocate and Out Magazine that, they included more diverse stories, features, travel, you know, interesting things.

E Elliot Wesselborg 53:19

Yeah. Um, I kind of want to move a little bit forward into the 80s and things with AIDS. When did that, when did you first hear about HIV and AIDS?

D David Hays 53:35

Sometime in the mid 80s we started hearing about it through Advocate and Out, in some of those national magazines, so we knew it was coming. But we didn't really want to think about or deal with it. I'm going to pull up some of my notes here so I've got my timeline right. Looking back at it now, February of 1983 was the first AIDS case diagnosed within the state of Iowa. And we're pretty sure there were others already here, but they hadn't been diagnosed yet or they were diagnosed outside of the state and they'd come back to Iowa. But it was early 1986 that professional people in the community in Des Moines, Iowa City, Davenport and Waterloo formed what we then called AIDS Coalitions. And sometime around July of 86, the one, the AIDS Coalition of Northeast Iowa formed in Waterloo, and that included as many as 60 different people from across the 12 county area of Northeast Iowa. Could be a few doctors, there were lawyers from Iowa Legal, there were professors from UNI and Wartburg College, there were somebody from the Veterans Association, a couple of ministers were there for their churches, it was just a broad spectrum of the community, Anybody that thought they might sometime in the future have to deal with people with AIDS was involved in that. And we started immediately to organize what we can do to educate the public about AIDS. And it was in that moment in '86 that some of us for the very first time were sitting next to straight people, and getting the same respect that they were giving to other straight people. And we started realizing we are on equal par with everybody, we're all in this together. And that gave us the

courage to start using our full names and some of us went public in the newspapers, using our full names when we talked about things with the AIDS coalition. It was kind of a second coming out phase for a lot of us. And in November of '86, the AIDS Coalition of Northeast Iowa, which was probably one of the more progressive coalitions across the state, wanted to design a safer sex brochure for men who have sex with men, and offer free condoms in the local gay bar. And the state health department, when it came time to funding this said, of course, "absolutely not, we're not going to do anything that discourages--or encourages homosexuality." So with that in mind, we thought, well, we've got to do something. So those of us who were gay and participating in the AIDS Coalition formed our own organization and after some trial and error, we ended up with an acronym ACCESS—A Concerned Community for Education and Safer Sex and Support. And ACCESS in Northeast Iowa started meeting men at the gay bar at the time, which was the Dutch Mill in, near downtown Waterloo, and right away, we designed our own safer sex brochure based on information we had from San Francisco. And we registered as a nonprofit in the state of Iowa and put all of our names on the line, right out there, for the first time for most of us. And by February of '87, we did our first fundraiser in that gay bar, the Dutch Mill, and raised enough money to print that safer sex brochure and buy enough condoms so the bar and the local, we called it the dirty bookstore, had a supply of condoms and our brochures also. And it was shortly after that, that one of our friends came home from California sick and he was the first person that we knew living in town who openly had HIV and AIDS. And, almost at the same time, somebody local was diagnosed, one of my dear friends who was living in a small town of Grundy Center. And so now we had two people who were friends and one of them did die. And we did a fundraiser at the bar to help pay for funeral expenses, because his family didn't want to deal with him. So we took up a collection and got some benefit going for him.

D

David Hays 58:37

There was also, at the same time, a local LGBT church called the Church of New Hope, part of the Metropolitan Community Churches. And they got heavily involved in fundraising and education also, and they were part of the AIDS Coalition. So out of that work, we started doing educational programs and we decided to split into two big committees and one of them was educational committee, one was services and support. And, at that time, the Red Cross was active in AIDS education, they decided to chair and take the lead in the educational efforts and organizing all these programs and presentations and Cedar Valley Hospice stepped forward to take care of the support and physical care of people with AIDS. Even though it didn't necessarily qualify as a hospice program, they were the agency that best seemed to be fit. So we took off and we got involved in both service and education and that's when the community, the gay community, really started to come together and be a community for the first time. We

were out in the public, we were active, we were vocal, we were pushing for rights, equal rights. We pushed for the Waterloo-Cedar Falls and Blackhawk County boards to include people with AIDS, or those perceived to have AIDS, in the non-discrimination clauses of each city. It took a long time, but we did finally get Waterloo to change theirs and Cedar Falls followed shortly. But it didn't include sexual orientation, it just included those perceived to have AIDS, which we hoped would say, yeah, they were saying "gays have all got AIDS." So, yeah, this is a protection of some kind, it's a start. And we were doing, I've got a note here that in 1988, we were given the governor's Volunteer of the Year Award for the AIDS Coalition because we had done 120 educational programs to 70,000 people throughout Blackhawk County. And we had developed the first AIDS educators' manual in the state and printed the first Iowa brochure for HIV drug users, and we developed outreaches in the African American and Hispanic communities, and we started hosting statewide aids conferences. All of this was just an amazing time, a lot of energy and a lot of positive experiences for LGBT people. And as we got more active, more people joined us and the community seemed to get larger; those who had been closeted and afraid to speak out got more involved.

D

David Hays 61:46

We did things like in '88, when the AIDS Quilt went to the Metrodome in Minneapolis, we caravanned and went up there. That inspired us to do a local display of the AIDS Quilt, we did that in 1989. We ended up raising \$10,000 to bring the AIDS Quilt to Waterloo and it was at a desperately needed time because one of the service projects that had we decided to do, was to have what we called, what got called "AIDS House." But it was a hospice home for people with HIV, because nursing homes would not accept people with HIV at that time. And, if it became known to a landlord, you could be discriminated against and kicked out. So the county recognized we need to have a safe place for these people to live and the county put forth \$25,000 to help us establish a duplex. And the same week that somebody moved in, that two guys moved in, there was an arson fire. It was suspected that one of the guys may have done it, he had a criminal history but we could never prove that. It went to case or, went to court and he was found not guilty later and they never did solve it and most people had died after that. So it was a very exciting time with ACCESS being heavily involved. As the AIDS Coalition took off, ACCESS was left more free to start doing pride events. We started hosting picnics in the local state park. That was something the MCC church had been doing for a long time, but very quietly, and it wasn't well known and the crowds were pretty small. ACCESS increased the size a little bit, but we still didn't get a whole lot of people because it was out in public—it wasn't in a gay bar where it was safe. It was just a very exciting time. But as more and more people locally started getting sick, and as more and more of our friends from the 70s and 80s who had moved to other cities started to come back, we were really quickly overwhelmed. And

it was too much for our little circle of friends to be able to do. We were volunteering for ACCESS, we were volunteering for the AIDS Coalition, we were volunteering for the Cedar Valley Hospice—we were burning ourselves out. And during that time, we were all emotionally fried. We had gone from having a lot of pride and goodwill and a sense of community to watching friends die rapidly; sometimes two or three a week, were dying out of our group of friends. And some of us started dropping out, we just couldn't deal with it anymore. That was about the same time that my consumption of alcohol took off and I just stopped going out to gay bars. I just started staying home and drinking and I became an alcoholic at that point, which took me about 10 years to recover from. I'm in recovery now, but that was a very dark time for me. I went through a 10 year period from the late 80s until the probably mid 90s, where I lost 80 friends that I kept track of. I would, every time I would go to a display of the AIDS Quilt, I would volunteer to be one of the readers of the names, which takes place in every display of the quilt. And rather than reading the list that they gave me, I always carried my list of 80 names that I would read. And, invariably, I couldn't get through the list; I'd get to a couple of people who had been former lovers of mine or intimate friends and I just choked and couldn't finish reading. So it was devastating and the community pretty much burned out. And by the year 2000, not only did we lose the gay bar that had been open for a long time at that point, we also lost ACCESS, we lost the MCC church, we lost the group that had started called PFLAG, which is Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Virtually every organization that had started with all that energy and full of life, died from burnout. And so there was absolutely nothing in the early 2000s left in Waterloo—it was horrifying.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 66:28

I want to go back a little bit—what was bringing everyone who had moved away back home?

D

David Hays 66:36

We never know who we would see walking into the gay bar and we could always tell if it was somebody that was sick. We got to recognize what the face looks like when it's being devastated by the ravages of HIV/AIDS—the sunken cheeks, the dark eyes, the skinny, you know, it was just very visible. So, when we saw somebody come in that we hadn't seen for a while, first thing we did was see how healthy they look. And if not, then we knew they were sick. And we, well, we went and talked to them anyway to find out how they were doing, what was going on. Sometimes we didn't see them at all—we had family members reach out to us. And one of those was a sweet lady who still lives in Cedar Falls, who showed up at the AIDS Coalition because she had found out that her son, who was in the Navy, was sick. And got discharged when they found out he was gay—by becoming sick

with HIV, they assumed he was gay, so they kicked him out of the Navy. And he ended up in Phoenix where he became an AIDS activist, but as he started getting sicker, he wanted to be closer to family. And so she knew about that, she got involved with the AIDS Coalition so she could meet some gay people. And the night that he flew into the airport at Waterloo, she was at a meeting and before they even went home, they stopped by the gay bar so she could show off her son from the Navy. And we all got to meet him and talk to Brian. And later on, I became one of his hospice aids—we call them buddies—we'd get paired up with somebody who needs services. You know, I became very close friends; it was very tough to lose him.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 68:27

When people came back, were they mostly coming back to their families, or were they still on their own, or?

D

David Hays 68:34

Most of them were coming back to one or two family members who were sympathetic. Some were coming back to family members that had rejected them when they came out as being gay and maybe they were trying to make amends or mend bridges before they died and came back to do that. But I would say the vast majority of those early people just came back because they didn't have sympathetic family members and they knew that, they had heard about the AIDS Coalition and we had services available that we could take care of somebody that came back and make the connections with the health industry to get them what they needed.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 69:19

I also wanted to ask about, when ACCESS was doing its educational work and outreach work specifically into black and Hispanic communities, where were you going to do that work?

D

David Hays 69:33

Most of that was done through the AIDS Coalition and they went into black churches, they went into agencies that deal with minority populations and educated the people who were the educators in those situations. Those of us in ACCESS were also given the double educational purpose of educating the general community on what it meant to be LGBTQ. And so we were not only, we had—if we went in to do an educational program or put on a panel discussion, we had to clarify before then, what was our purpose here? Is it to talk

about gay issues or to talk about AIDS issues, because we're not going to combine the two. And if it was more for AIDS issues, we'd call in some other people, clients from the AIDS Coalition and put on a panel. If it was gay and lesbian issues, which happened—some of the more progressive churches, their adult Sunday school classes wanted a presentation either on AIDS or on local gay community. We did a lot of panel discussions at University of Northern Iowa. Sex studies classes, sociology, social work majors, all those classes wanted to have a panel, a diverse panel of people, and we would find at least one or two lesbian and gay man, hopefully we would find them college age as well as those of us who are older and out in the community. We always made sure to have a parent of somebody who is LGBT. If we were lucky enough, we would have a transgender person, but we didn't come across that very often. We had a couple people who performed as drag queens and they did their thing. We had a, one couple who was a bisexual—she was bisexual—and they were married, she was married to a straight man. They would get on those panel discussions, but that really derailed the whole LGBT discussion, because it became more of a debate about having an open marriage and what it meant for a bisexual person to not have all their needs met by, you know, just, it went-

E

Elliot Wesselborg 71:56

The classic conundrum—people just can't resist.

D

David Hays 72:00

I know, so we would end up not talking about—you know, the rest of us who were LGBT would sit there and not talk about anything, because the couple ended up getting all the questions. But it was a fun time, because those of us who did this, we would do it sometimes twice a week throughout the entire semester, it was just over and over and over again. Luckily, I was working at UNI at the time and was able to go away from the office for an hour to do one of these classes, and you get back without causing too much trouble. But it was a fun time because we got to know the pattern of the questions and we would have stock answers ready to go as soon as they start asking the really stupid questions like how did you know you were gay? And we could turn it around and, assuming that you're straight—how did you know you were straight? Or, you know, comparing it to being left-handed, that being a natural instinct, and why should we have conversion to make you a right-handed person instead of your natural way of being a left hand? You know, we just, we learned to educate ourselves to have an answer that would be accepted by whoever, understood by whoever was asking the question. So that, it was a fun diversion from all the other heavy stuff that was going on. But we did burn out on that too and I think, very quickly, it ended up being just the UNI students doing their own panels; those of us in the community just kind of stopped doing it.



Elliot Wesselborg 73:42

What relationship, if any, did the gay and lesbian communities have to trans communities at that time?



David Hays 73:50

You know, I've thought about this a lot because, things today, you know, the openness of trans people today is very unusual in the long history of the timeline. And it was very, very rare for us to come across anybody who was involved in the gay community—I use that term as, you know, the umbrella. There just, there weren't any trans people that we knew of that were involved. It was very rare to have anybody and they did not want to be put into that label of fitting into the gay community; they wanted to pass and be on their own and be respected for the gender that they were presenting. And so, you know, there wasn't a whole lot of, I don't really know how to put it, there wasn't a lot of interaction at all. And I don't know if—I don't think it was the lack of people who were, are trans in the area. There were, we knew about them, but they didn't become an active part of the of the gay community until much later on. And more recently especially, I do have a couple of friends who are drag queens—one went on to be Miss International, living in Chicago and Milwaukee. And she has made a huge name for herself internationally and performs in gay bars and was on the Phil Donahue [Show], she was on Oprah, she was on RuPaul's [Drag Race]. You know, she has done all the TV things and she is—you know, you would never know that she is trans, other than the fact she performs at gay bars. But she's under contract to perform as a transgender person without having the surgery. So she's wanted to have the surgery for years but, under contract, she would lose her job if she did. Which is horrible, but-



Elliot Wesselborg 75:58

Ugh, what a choice to make.



David Hays 76:01

Yeah.



Elliot Wesselborg 76:05

You said that you got—that you knew, though, that there were trans people in the area. Can you speak a little bit more about that?

D

David Hays 76:12

Going clear back to the Inn Touch days in the mid 70s, there was a John Deere foundry worker who started showing up at the bar. And when he was there as a man, as the John Deere worker, we were horrified just to look at him because he was always dirty. He had, he was a white man with an afro, but he worked around molten metal and metal shavings and they were in his hair and they rusted, so he had this red powder that came out of his hair. And always dressed in horrible, dirty clothes and ripped and very poor, you could tell. And two or three different times I can remember, he would show up in drag on a weekend night. And people would look at him and they would laugh and make fun of him, you know, what the hell are you trying to do, you're not going to be a drag queen and perform, are ya? And he just kind of disappeared into the woodwork. And flash forward a few more years and I ran into him again, and he was presenting then as a woman and had a gender-neutral name. And then she got a job working in the same place, same office, I did at UNI, and presented as a woman, but still was legally a man. And that created a lot of conflict with the women employees when she was using the only restroom for women and they didn't like that idea. So there was a lot of work to be done there, but—she ended up taking a third shift job, which you didn't have to deal with anybody there. And evidently had a lot of mental issues and was not well. She was not allowed to have the surgery because of these mental issues, I think, and ended up trying to do the job herself one night and ended up in the hospital and did survive that experience and then left town shortly after that. I never did hear from her again, but, through her I did meet a couple of other trans women who were in the area who were older, they just had never been involved in the community. So we didn't know they'd even been here. They were just kind of quietly, you know, doing their thing in the shadows. They didn't want to draw attention to themselves.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 78:46

Yeah, certainly understandable.

D

David Hays 78:48

More recently there was a trans woman—I picked up on it right away, nobody else figured it out, but she was very pretty. And in the, I mentioned that I'd become an alcoholic and I joined the 12 step programs, and that's been part of my recovery. And in recent years there was a trans woman who was part of one of those groups. And she was horrified when the local gay community started doing the first modern gay pride events—we call it Pride Fest, Cedar Valley Pride Fest. First one was in 2012, I believe. And part of the fun of that is one of the streets that gets blocked off, they have a drag race, where at the starting point, you run down half a block, you put on a pair of high heels, you run back,

you put on a dress, you run back, you put on a wig, and then see who wins. And gays, straights, women, men, anybody can do that. And this trans woman, as soon as she heard about that, just wrote the most awful letter to the editor ripping it apart saying we were mocking her.

D

David Hays 80:10

And it had nothing to do with mocking trans people; it was, you know, the tradition of drag queens and having fun doing a drag race. And boy, she just would not let that go. And it was just a horrible thing to have to experience that she didn't feel welcome in her own community of peers. She also has some pretty radical political ideas that didn't fit in with what's commonly accepted with the LGBT community too—very conservative, Bible-based person, so she kind of put herself into a position of not being too happy in a lot of places, so.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 80:50

Um, can we fast forward then to 2000 when you said everyone's kind of burned out and things have disappeared. What happens from there in terms of community formation?

D

David Hays 81:02

There was virtually nothing resembling a community left. You know, those 80 people that I had known that were, you know, most of my generation and the generation that was immediately behind me. A lot of the people that were in their 30s, 40s and 50s, died in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area during that era. And the younger people who were coming in had no interest in doing the social things that we had been doing earlier. It took a while for somebody else to reopen another gay bar and they pretty much had to start over again rebuilding the idea of community. And that didn't take off like it used to, there was still no social organizations, no bars—or no activities to do outside of the bar life. We asked, one of the things we had tried to do with ACCESS and some of the other organizations back in the early 90s was to develop recreational groups. We had bowling night and we had, you know, people who liked to play softball, we had a women's softball team and a men's baseball team. And we were doing a lot of non-bar activities and those just simply died with the rest of the organizations. And to this day, none of that stuff exists. It's still just a one bar town with no sense of community outside of that bar, other than an annual AIDS fundraiser and the organization that sponsors it. And that's pretty much the only social activities that are around here other than a handful of private parties—I don't know if they even exist. Since I don't drink I haven't been associated with much of that scene anymore; I don't go to the gay bars at all. In fact, when I met you was the first time I had

been in the Kings and Queens bar which had been open for many years at this point. For those of us who have stopped drinking, and those of us who have aged out of the gay scene, I have become that old troll that I used to see sitting in the Inn Touch sitting at the bar by himself that nobody wanted to talk to. So that's no fun, so I'm just gonna stay home. And, yeah, I got my own little core circle of friends and I've got my new community that I'm open, I'm openly gay in the recovery community, hoping that I can make it a better place for younger LGBT people getting into recovery. Because I know there's still a huge problem of drug and alcohol abuse within the gay community as a whole and I see very few of them in recovery in 12 step programs. So hopefully I can kind of break the ice for that and I've got a new purpose now.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 83:54

What was, kind of, entering those recovery spaces like for you as a gay person?

D

David Hays 84:00

I did not want to reveal that I was gay for a long time. I'm thinking probably two years before I finally had the courage to say something to somebody, even though I had been out in the newspapers and on TV interviews through the AIDS crisis and gay education stuff. I felt very awkward and out of place in 12 step recovery meetings, not seeing anybody else like me in the groups. So I was quiet and I—there are about 50 or 60 meetings in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area and I started trying all of them. And right away, I knew where I would not fit in. I would be in the parking lot where a bunch of people were having cigarettes and smoking before their meeting or after their meeting and I would hear fag jokes. Or I would hear the little things that my radar would pick up so, okay, this isn't cool. During meetings, sometimes I would hear people talk about how fun it used to be to go into the Inn Touch and beat the fags. And I'm sitting there thinking, wait a minute, I was one of those people—you were one of those in the parking lot that were kicking the shit out of me while I was down on the ground. And everybody in the room was laughing about it, thinking it was the funniest story they'd heard. I just got up and walked out. And I've never been back to those meetings. And new people as I see them coming in, I know that they're part of the LGBT community. I say, okay, here are the meetings that I have found that are safe and accepting and I'm open in all of them and it's a great experience, it's very positive. Others, you're taking your chances, you might hear things that are gonna piss you off, don't leave because of that—come to these other meetings.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 85:55

Do you think it's changed significantly in the time since you started going, or?

D

David Hays 86:03

It hasn't changed at all in the ones that I go to on a regular basis. The others that had a problem—even as late as last year, I heard a horrible thing. A man stood up and started telling a story about how he couldn't wait to move out of the little town he was in because he had two fags living next door. And he went over and was harassing them and doing things and everybody in the room was just laughing at what was going on. Immediately, I just got up and walked out and made a statement by my walking out. But very few people in the room realized what was going on or why I was leaving. So yeah, there's a lot of work to be done, yes.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 86:51

Um, what am I going to ask—I know you might not have an answer to this, but is your sense still that there are, there is a significant younger gay population in Waterloo and the surrounding areas?

D

David Hays 87:10

The most amazing thing that I've experienced since Cedar Valley Pride Fest has started up. It has grown to be huge, it may be the second largest event in the state for LGBT people behind Des Moines. I think we've now surpassed Iowa City and Cedar Rapids in size of the event. And so we've got two to three blocks that are just informational booths that are set up, and merchandise booths, all kinds of things. Churches have tables with information on welcoming. And the most amazing thing for me is to see several local high schools who have gay-straight alliances and see how open these young kids, these teenagers can be and feel to be—they have no idea of what they've come from and how horrible things used to be. But they are free and they are being themselves and to me that is just an amazing experience. It's overwhelming sometimes for me. The very first Cedar Valley Pride Fest, like I said, I believe it was 2012, I'll have to check that for sure—yes, 2012 was when they organized. And the very first one I stood on a street corner in downtown Waterloo on West Fourth Street right in front of where the Gaslight Lounge had been in the 1970s where I had also been attacked—I was attacked twice, one was in front of that bar. Right across the street is the current bar, the Kings and Queens Club, and up and down the street rainbow flags and balloons and some people in drag, some people in leather, some people walking their kids, people with strollers. It was just overwhelming to be in that same spot where 30 years ago I had been assaulted and now I was, we were all free to be who wanted to be. And I just stood there and bawled. They're just amazing. It

still gets me.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 89:30

Yeah. Wow. I have a couple more, sort of, miscellaneous questions and then we can go to your own research that you've done.

**D** David Hays 89:40

Sure.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 89:41

Um, was there much of a leather scene or any kind of kink scene in the bars in the 70s?

**D** David Hays 89:49

There are a handful of people. I don't know if they, that they still go out into the bar wearing their leather, but there were some people that would come in wearing their leather harnesses—mostly man, I don't think I've seen any women that did. And it was, they weren't considered freaks, they weren't considered part of a group, they were just there doing their own thing. It wasn't a scene, I mean, there is a bigger scene for those that are doing drag. Both male drag and female drag—that's been another newer development, having drag kings, you know, trans men doing drag or just people doing, you know, women doing male drag as entertainment purpose. That's become a big thing lately and that never or rarely existed, you know, 20, 30 years ago.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 90:55

Was that—I'm sorry, go ahead.

**D** David Hays 90:58

I just gonna say that, you know, in a community this small, we really don't have cliques and groups like that, that specialize in one thing or another. We're small enough that you're gonna see a little bit of everything and we got one bar and that's it so we're all gonna be together in the same place. It's not like going to Minneapolis or, even to some extent, Des Moines, where you can go to a leather bar, or a country western bar, or you know, a specialty bar of any kind. We've got just one in a small town like this, and we're all going to be there together.

E Elliot Wesselborg 91:33  
What was the drag scene like from what you remember from the 70s?

D David Hays 91:39  
Drag, you said?

E Elliot Wesselborg 91:41  
Yeah.

D David Hays 91:44  
It was—what I remember, compared to what it is today, it was nothing at all. There wasn't a whole lot of perfectionism in the drag, in the first drag that I remember seeing in the 1970s. There were some that did an outstanding job and lip synced very well, some actually used their own voices in singing and performing. Some were very acrobatic, and others, it was horrible, but they wanted to do their thing so we'd all give them applause and give them some tips. We went through a phase though, in about the Dutch Mill and Logan's era, so probably the mid 80s right before AIDS hit, we had a couple of drag queens here that were exceptional. And one of them was a black woman we called Miss Chris, who did a lot of the black disco era starlets and did them absolutely perfectly. And the makeup, it was just so realistic, it was just amazing. And the performances were just over the top. And a couple other people came in out of the theater department at UNI, and did routines with sets and backup dancers and a chorus and hydraulic lifts-

E Elliot Wesselborg 93:16  
Oh my god.

D David Hays 93:17  
Doing amazing things, so. And most of those shows that I recall, whoever was emceeing had a way of, a real campy sense of humor that brought everything together. And it wasn't putting people down, but it was bringing people together and having fun and it was really a campy, high camp routine. More recently from what I have seen, it's more of a professional-looking imitation of women performers; it's lost some of that campiness of the earlier days. That's just my observation.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 94:01

Yeah. I also wanted to talk a little bit more about the police. Like, I know the police were called on you guys sometimes—did you ever call the police if things happened?

D

David Hays 94:17

The only time I've had to call the police, there have been a couple of times where my home has been vandalized or my car \_\_\_\_ (?) is parked at home. My car was vandalized several times parked in gay bar parking lots and I never reported that. I didn't want my name to be published in the paper. We're calling the police to that address that everybody would know that was a gay bar's address. So I just put up with it and didn't report that. But years later, I had some teenage boys in the neighborhood who had figured out that I was gay, long before I even put a gay pride flag on my house or on my car bumper sticker, and they started throwing eggs at my house or window peaking, trying to catch me in the act with one of my friends that I was dating at the time. And woke up one day with the eggs all over the house and my flower beds all cut down and I called the police on them then and I said, "I think I know where it's coming from." They could never, without proof they could never do anything. I think they did go talk to the mother of one of the boys at one point. And it didn't die off until those boys got older and moved out of the neighborhood. But to this day, yeah, I fly my pride flag on the house and I've got my bumper sticker with the rainbow on it and have not had any trouble in recent years whatsoever; all my neighbors know hey, he's the guy with all the flowers and the pride flag. And I actually did—the woman that bought the house next door to me, a couple of years ago when she saw my pride flag, painted on her front windows 'celebrate diversity' and had a couple of other sayings that she wrote on her house. It was just a really cool sign of neighborhood support. And I know that a couple of old timers when I first moved into this house, that, they were of the World War II generation and I thought, oh, this isn't gonna be good, but they accepted me. And I heard from the mother of one of my gay friends who lives in the neighborhood, she says, "yeah, you wouldn't believe that the old couple lives behind you, they came over to me one day and says, 'you know, that guy over there is gay and he shakes hands just like everybody else does.'" She was shocked by that. So I've done my own little neighborhood education too.

D

David Hays 96:44

But yeah, I've had no contact at all with the police. I know that the police in this area seem to be very friendly, they're very gay friendly. Cedar Valley Pride Fest, there's always at least a couple of people on patrol walking through the festival grounds and they get as much attention as everybody else does—everybody loves a man or woman in uniform. And they've got kind of used to that. But maybe the, maybe whoever's in charge of

scheduling puts those that they know are going to be gay friendly in that situation and not the ones that are going to have a problem.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 97:19  
That would be the smart move to do.

**D** David Hays 97:21  
I would think so.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 97:22  
Okay, um, so yeah, onto your own research. How did you get into doing all this historical work?

**D** David Hays 97:32  
Um, I've been kind of interested in history all my life. My father's mother was a—kept track of all the family genealogy. And I picked up that bug from her and I started doing my own genealogy research. And a few years later, after I lost my job due to my drinking and I had a lot of extra time on my hands before I could find something to occupy myself, I got into history research.

**D** David Hays 98:00  
And there's an absolute black hole of information about local gay history. Nothing has ever been recorded because we were trying to protect each other and ourselves. And I have written a few articles for ACCESSline, the state newspaper, looking at some of those things. There have been two gay murders in Waterloo over the years, that we know of. The raids that I talked about in 1960, there was a similar gay purge at UNI in 1965 and I've tried to find more information about these. And I spent time going through library, newspaper archives and microfilm files and interviewing people and there was just—some of those topics it was just very hard to find any information. So the last maybe 15 years, I spent much of my time doing that research and talking to those people. I was able through a mutual friend to discover somebody who had lived in Waterloo in the 1950s and 60s and went to those private parties, and found out about the gay purge of 1960 right before it happened, and was able to escape the state and went to California. And I have interviewed him and found out what things were like before the gay bars opened up. And so I've started documenting as much as I could. And you know, the gay community has

always been based around the bar, since the first one, the Inn Touch, opened in 1975. So I found a great resource that the city of Waterloo has, where the city council meetings are documented now going back into the 1960s. And I knew generally about when each of those bars opened up, and I was able to find when they got their liquor licenses approved and when they opened. During the ACCESS years, all of that was documented in ACCESSline—hey, there's a new bar opening up or geez, we just lost a bar—so that was pretty much documented. But the era before ACCESSline and the era since ACCESSline died, I've had to go through the city council meeting and document when and I knew where each bar was located. And I did the same thing with all the organizations; virtually all of the organizations we have had came out of the era of ACCESSline so those were all pretty well documented. So it's just a matter of putting down timelines and doing a little research. I did find another lack of research that was involving UNI. While we in the community had our community, they have their own little separate, isolated community on campus and none of that was ever recorded. So I did a lot of research on that and found that the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City, within one year, the University of Iowa in Iowa City had its first Gay Liberation Front—first one in the country that was approved by the college. And they helped try to start one at UNI, then called the State Teachers College, the following year in 1972. It only lasted for about a semester and then the following year there's another attempt. There were a couple of different organizations that tried and they never really took off until the late 1970s, [untelligible] '77 when the local MCC church got its start, and they helped develop a support group at UNI, which has developed into the current student group over the years. But I've been able to go back into the newspaper archives of the campus paper and find little tidbits here and there about some of that history.

D

David Hays 102:00

And then I found out—I knew about the “gay purge” on campus from a friend who was in college at that time and saw it happening. It wasn't documented anywhere. And I couldn't figure out why until I started reading some of the newspaper articles in the campus paper from that era and they were talking about censorship. And what I discovered in letters to the editor, that the—the College Eye was the newspaper's name at that time before it became UNI, after it became UNI it was called the Northern Iowan. And in those archives, I found that they did try to do news coverage of the gay purge happening on campus. People who were suspected of being gay were given letters, told they had to leave campus immediately or they would be turned over to local authorities for legal processing. And that included faculty members as well as students, but it was never documented and written down anywhere, so there was no record except for these letters to the editor that kept referring back to this gay purge happening. And I found out that an administrator on campus censored the newspaper and would not allow it to be printed

and local media did not pick up on it. So it was very much undercover. One of the administrators had been hiring students to go to private parties where they knew there would be gay people and bring back a list of names of all those who were in attendance. And those were the people that got letters. So I've been working with the fairly new Gay-Lesbian Resource Center on the UNI campus; this is now called Gender and Sexuality Equality Services—I can't remember the exact name but it's been neutralized a little bit from Gay-Lesbian Resource Center. I guess some students feel, felt uncomfortable going to a Gay-Lesbian Resource Center.

D

David Hays 104:03

So, anyway, I've done some some work with them trying to get some of this documented. And we were planning an event last fall during October, which is LGBT history month and they wanted for the first time do something openly on campus about history. So they knew I was doing a lot of research and I sat in with the vice president and several faculty members and the leaders of the Resource Center. And they said, "you know, we had somebody—an alumni—who sent us a letter recently saying his brother was forced to leave campus and they think it's because he was gay." And my radar picked up immediately, says, "wait a minute, what year was that?" And we looked him up and it was 1965. And I says, "oh my gosh, that was one of the first people then that got the letter during the purge—1965 to 67." So last October, in addition to having all these history related events, we were able to bring back this guy from California to talk about his personal experiences being forced to leave campus because he was gay. And the sad thing was, he had no idea what had been taking place here. All he knew was he got this letter that he had to leave, he didn't know it was part of a massive distribution. You know, a lot of people left; we still don't know how many were forced to leave.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 105:30

Do you have any estimates or ideas of-?

D

David Hays 105:32

We have no clues at all how many actually left. A lot of the people have since died, because those people will be in their eighties now who were on campus in the mid, early to mid 60s—seventies and eighties. So yeah, and a lot of those did not survive the AIDS crisis and those that did are pretty feeble now and they are well established and really don't want to go back and revisit those days because they were horrifying. They were traumatic to those that went through it. So yeah, we may never know the extent of that purge. I've talked with the administrators at UNI, and they don't have any way of going back through

files and tracing. Now they wouldn't be listed as alumni because they were forced to leave before they graduated and admissions doesn't have complete records of that era. And the documents that this administrator had where he was collecting names, those were all destroyed. Evidently, this whole thing came to a conclusion in 1967, when one of the students whose name happened to get on that list was taking grad classes and he happened to be a state legislator. And when he got back to Des Moines, he says, "hey, here's what's happening at the college in Cedar Falls," and immediately that action stopped. He put a halt to it immediately, which was pretty amazing, but it was all swept under the carpet. And it's another of those things if I don't do something to help document it, it may never be recorded in history. So that's kept me energized to keep looking for stories of people. That's why I think it's important doing an archive like this, we are recording my memories, because there are memories of people lived before me that are lost forever. And important things that shaped our current day, you know, we need to know about those.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 107:39

And, I mean, we really appreciate anyone who sat down with us because it really, yeah, this is, it's for us now, but it's also for the future.

**D** David Hays 107:47

Right.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 107:48

Do you have any idea what happened in 1965 to start this whole thing?

**D** David Hays 107:56

From what I can pick up, I said earlier, that there's this case out of Sioux City that the book was written about. A little boy was abducted and murdered; they assumed it was a gay man. At that time in, I believe it was 1958—let me get my notes here—there had been a law already on the Iowa books as early as 1925 that allowed the state of Iowa to sterilize any man or woman who was a threat to society, which included homosexuals or bisexuals. There was also a law written that allowed people to be sent to local mental health institutes—the MHI network that was around the state—and they were doing electroshock conversion therapies. Other places in the country were doing lobotomies. I don't, I've not found any record that any of that took place in Iowa. Iowa was hiring doctors that were not qualified to do brain surgery; they could do electroshock but not

brain surgery.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 109:10

Ugh, small blessing maybe?

D

David Hays 109:12

Yeah. So when this case in Sioux City happened, there was another law that was passed in 1955 and they called it the Sexual Psychopath Law. And that would allow any county attorney and judge to send a person to the state mental hospital or preventative detention without any crime being committed or any trial. If you were suspected of being gay, they could take you off the streets and lock you up. And that was tested in the state supreme court and was upheld several times. And so, in Sioux City, since this had happened there in 1955, in 1958, the local police chief decided that he would do roundups of all the known gay men as a preventative measure to put them out of harm's way for the general population. And he did purges. In 1955, they rounded up 35 gay and bisexual men, with 29 of them being set to asylums for conversion therapy. And there were another 29 in 1958. Well, in Waterloo in 1960, the local sheriff—I haven't found out if he was up for reelection at that time or not, but a good way to make a good name for himself was to do a round up here, because they got great press coverage when Sioux City did this. These are the only two cities in the state that did this on a massive basis that I could find out. There were one or two arrested in Council Bluffs, one or two in Des Moines, but nothing on a massive scale like [what] happened in Sioux City, and then in 1960 in Waterloo. And within about six weeks, we have 25 men who were arrested in Waterloo. Many others heard about this happening, and were able to escape. And I was able to interview one of those who escaped and now lives in Long Beach, California. And I hope you get a chance to talk to him because he's a great storyteller and talks about life before this purge happened. And the local newspaper published all of the names and addresses of these men and, some of them, where they worked. Some of them were lawyers, some were car dealers, you know, just a cross section, and it horrified people that they have been living amongst us. And so that happened and it just seemed to be a "hot flash"—it happened in 1960 and then it stopped. And one of the things that I have found out, my new friend who moved to Long Beach, California, who had left the state, he said he did come back to visit his mother at one point a few years after this. And he encountered that very same sheriff on the street and that Sheriff approached him. And my friend Bob said, oh, crap, what's going to happen now? And the poli-, and the sheriff says, "okay, I know you escaped from this, I know that you're gay—how do we bring the gays back to Waterloo?"



David Hays 112:39

And he says, "what?" And, evidently, the gays were notorious for being the big spenders in town; every year they bought new cars, they bought expensive clothing. And local retailers had complained that they lost business when all the gays left town. So he says, "what would it take to bring the gays back?" And he—all Bob could do is just laugh at it.



Elliot Wesselborg 113:03

That's wild. Wow.



David Hays 113:05

I know! So, you know, it gets down to, money was the reason it all stopped because the businesses lost their big source of income when the gays left. And then it wasn't until years later—uh, I'm looking at my notes here—1977 is when Iowa re-did its complete rewrite of the Criminal Code and they removed all sodomy and sterilization laws, all that old stuff that would still have dated back to Victorian days in 1890s when Iowa was a territory. All of that was removed from the books.



David Hays 113:49

And in 1992, Iowa did pass a hate crimes law that included sexual orientation, but not gender identity. And there were a couple of US Supreme Court cases that upheld the sodomy laws in those states that did still have them. 2007, Iowa rewrote its civil rights law, and for the first time included sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing and public accommodations. At that time, Iowa was in the forefront. And it had taken many, many legislative sessions for us to get that passed. It was tried and failed many years; it would pass in the House one year and fail on the Senate. And then vice versa the next term. And one of the governors threatened to veto if it did pass, so it just, it took a long time. So in 2007, the state finally did that. It was interesting because the Waterloo Cedar [City?] Council, after the state law changed, they still debated whether or not to change the city code to rewrite discrimination laws to include gender identity and sexual orientation. But they finally did agree to do that. The Cedar Falls Council did not do that; it's still on the books. So that was amazing. I did, in some of my research find that in 1994, the Waterloo Council did remove an old law that had been on the books for decades that outlawed cross-dressing. So all those drag queens that I knew from 1970s, 80s and even up into the mid 90s were illegal if they were out on the street in drag.

E Elliot Wesselborg 115:38  
Did anyone ever get sanctioned for that, that you know of?

D David Hays 115:43  
I have no idea what brought the discussion even up to change that, other than that maybe, you know, there was a whole bunch of news articles about strange laws, like laws against horseless carriages and things like that, that were just so outdated. And somebody must have come across this law saying that drag was illegal, so they took care of it. Because I guess in earlier days, it could have included just women wearing men's pants-

E Elliot Wesselborg 116:11  
Yeah.

D David Hays 116:12  
-were considered drag,

E Elliot Wesselborg 116:13  
Do you know whether anyone was actually, like, arrested because of that, or?

D David Hays 116:16  
I don't have any clue that anybody in Waterloo ever was arrested. I'm guessing it probably would have made news, and it'd be in the paper—that would be another research project to get into. [Unintelligible] that it happened in other states and other cities around the country. That was part of the Stonewall riots; people just said, okay, we're not putting up with these police raids and arresting drag queens and everything else that's going on.

E Elliot Wesselborg 116:22  
I also wanted to ask, so most of those people that ended up on that sheriff's list, were most of them able to leave the state or leave the county, or were there people that ended up in institutions?

D David Hays 117:00

There were some that ended up in institutions. And one of my friends who goes back to the Inn Touch days—one of the few of us that's my age that lived through the AIDS crisis—at that time, he was on staff as a tech at MHI. And he was in charge of helping do those electroshock treatments on gay men that he knew from the bar. And he says, "there were a lot of us who were gay that worked at MHI in Independence, Iowa, and we couldn't do anything about it; we couldn't say anything, we were helpless, we had to go through it." And I remember seeing some of those people that were victimized by that in the bar later and their whole personality had been removed. The attempt was to remove memory, so that they could come out and act straight, and it didn't work. It just, it was horrible to watch their personalities, their sense of humor was gone. Some of their memories were gone, but not all. So yeah, I just kind of distracted myself with that little story-line. But what was the original question there?



Elliot Wesselborg 117:01

No, I think this is fine; we can go down this road too.



David Hays 118:14

Some of the other men that were named in those newspaper articles, you know those 25, my friend Bob who escaped, I showed him those clippings. He had never seen them up until about two years ago. I emailed him the clippings and he was horrified to see which of his friends had been arrested. Many of them took plea deals and reduced the charges from suspected sodomy or some other crime against nature, down to just some kind of public misdemeanor charge, so they could be bonded out and released if they promised to leave town or leave the state. And most of them did leave the state. There were a few that ended up doing some jail time, but yeah, the vast majority fled.



Elliot Wesselborg 119:04

The people that were, like, electroshock treated—do you know how long that went on for, how long that they were committed to those-?



David Hays 119:12

I don't know about—I've since found out that the MHI also used electroshock treatment. Some of the information was in that Neil Miller book 'Sex Crime Panic' because he goes into a lot of talk about what MHIs across the state were doing at that time. And some of it was for people who had anger issues and gotten violent. Some of it was for alcoholics, that was thought to be a cure. So that—long after the conversion treatment for gay people, it

was still being used for other mental issues. You know, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association considered homosexuality to be a mental illness for many, many years, until that was changed in the 1970s. So the only treatment available was drug therapy and electroshock, or in some bigger cities, lobotomies. So it was horrifying that that would take place but it did. And I do know that electroshock therapy is still being done for people who have chronic depression and anxiety issues. I've got a friend in recovery, who had one of those treatments, or a series of those treatments, and again, his personality changed greatly and he lost much of his sense of humor and his personality. His charm is just removed. You know, it's sad to see and he still has depression and anxiety—didn't work.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 120:46

Do you have time right now, do you think, to talk a little bit about the party scene, like the pre-bar party scene and, like, house parties?

D

David Hays 120:54

I really don't know much about them since I wasn't there before the bars open. That would be a great question for some of my friends who, I do have contacts so I can pass along for-

E

Elliot Wesselborg 121:08

Okay.

D

David Hays 121:09

But I do know from—one of the great things about me be open and out, the Cedar Valley Pride Fest has invited me now to do presentations on gay history, the local history at Pride Fest. And so I've gotten an opportunity to do some of this stuff. And some of those original people, there's a handful of them still left in this area, and they have become a little more vocal about some of that history. And it was suggested to me that maybe I should start a private facebook page where we can talk about some of these things and put down our memories. And so I did that about a year ago, almost to this day, a year ago. And I had two or three of those friends turn over 15 scrapbooks with thousands of photos, many of them going back to the 1960s. So I have been able to scan and post some of those photos seeing some of those parties and there were parties—men and women, black and white, Hispanic, all walks of people. Sometimes they were doing costume parties with elaborate themes, sometimes it was a drag party where they had [unintelligible] performances,

sometimes it was just getting together to have a meal and make it a potluck or do a picnic. And not unlike parties we would do today, except for it was all kept very private, very secret, and it was underground. You know, they didn't let anybody in their families or friends know about it—except for the one I mentioned earlier, Boz, who is the old guy that kind of took newcomers under his umbrella. He was part of that scene and he was very open in his retail work where he worked and he would have co-workers come to some of these underground parties, so you see pictures of people with name tags on their chests. And I guess the gay community didn't know who some of these people were and the straight people didn't know who any of the gays were, so it was kind of a meet and greet with two different worlds coming together in the underground. And everybody loved it, I guess, from what the pictures reveal.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 123:29

Do you know who planned those parties or orchestrated them?

D

David Hays 123:33

Just whoever wanted to put together. There was one couple, one of the partners is still alive and lives in Waterloo, his partner died a few years ago, they've been together for about 40 years at that point. And they, when they moved to town in 1969, they started opening or having a lot of parties in their basement, and Boz held a lot of parties in his basement. And there were a few other places that would would open their homes, but mostly it was at those two homes that they had all their parties, and they just kept their basements decorated. They would have Christmas lights and decorations and all kinds of things and just loved it. That was the party room. They had bars set up, wet bars in their basement.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 124:20

Do you know, like, did they collect kind of covers from, like, cover fees from people or how did they fund that?

D

David Hays 124:28

I don't think they did. But I think whenever they needed to buy booze, that people probably pitched, that's my guess. And I don't think that at any of the drag parties, I don't think they tipped drags or performances or anything like we think of in a gay bar. But you know, they just, they put together, whatever they needed, people provided.



Elliot Wesselborg 124:50

And do you know how many people showed up to those usually?



David Hays 124:53

The pictures that I've seen of some of those, couple of them were as big as maybe 20, 25 people in some of these small basements. Maybe there were more, I don't know. But yeah, there was quite a crowd for a basement party for some of these houses. And they would come in from all over, soon as someone find out someone was gay, they get invited to a party. That's how some of these farmers met, I'm sure.



Elliot Wesselborg 125:17

Yeah. What other things have come out of that Facebook group, like interesting discoveries or anything?



David Hays 125:27

Well, we've been able to connect with people from, right now, all over the world. There's been a couple people have moved out of the country years ago, who have found that Facebook page, says, "oh my gosh, I was at that party" or "I know him." And so we've been able to reconnect with people that we thought were lost a long time ago. And some of those photos, we don't have names for who was in the photo. And every once in a while someone will pop in that's new to the group, says "oh, I know him, that was so and so." We start putting things together and realizing that, you know, it was a much bigger community than we ever thought it was. But no dramatic, Earth-changing things have come out of that other than a lot of memories.



Elliot Wesselborg 126:12

Yeah.



David Hays 126:12

And people are able to share a lot of things. There's one man that lives in the Iowa City area who was active back in the 60s and 70s and helped start that early attempt at UNI and he's provided a lot of history too. And hopefully we'll get some of his things documented; he's actually got some artifacts that he's donating to various archives around the state. And he's provided some background information on some of the photos

that I've been able to post.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 126:45

Um, I wanted to ask, do you think there's anything unique about gay communities in Iowa?

D

David Hays 126:55

Unique? I don't—I think it's the whole Midwest, predominantly rural setting where, if there is a gay community in a small city like Waterloo or Cedar Rapids or Sioux City, we're pretty tight-knit group. And we, everybody pretty much knows a lot of people in that community and we're not as well known in the general community—there's a bond. Some of my friends who left town, left the state and didn't want to deal with the persecution, the discrimination, the tension, and found themselves in gay ghettos in big cities, don't experience some of the same things that we've experienced here. And that tight sense of community seems to be lacking in those big cities where they don't even know each other. Because they're all just kind of open and accepted and, but they've never really communicated and connected like we still do in smaller towns across the Midwest. I would assume that's the way it is across the country in smaller communities really—we call them one bar towns for the gay community. But even cities like Des Moines where you have maybe a handful of bars at any one time that are open, there's still that sense of a small, tight-knit community compared to the big metro areas like Chicago or the Twin Cities.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 128:26

Yeah. I also wanted to ask, just, like, given our current context of COVID-19, what's that look like for you?

D

David Hays 128:38

Well, for me, it hasn't changed much at all.

E

Elliot Wesselborg 128:40

Okay. [both laugh]

D

David Hays 128:42

I mean, in this area, there's one gay bar and I don't go to it because I'm in recovery for my alcoholism, and there's no reason to go in a gay bar, besides I aged out a long time ago.

And yeah, I'm one of the old trolls now that I used to make fun of when I was in the bar and young. So, I, I'm kind of removed from most aspects of the gay community-

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 129:07  
-but just-

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 129:07  
-other than,

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 129:08  
Yeah, just generally how, what does that look like? Because we also want to, that's the, I don't know, well, certainly a thing on everyone's mind.

**D** David Hays 129:15  
The bars were closed for a long time because of the COVID crisis and they have reopened. They are supposed to be socially distancing and wearing masks and I doubt that that's taking place. I mean, I just, I see what's happening in the college towns of Ames, Iowa City and Cedar Falls where the bars are flooded with people and there is no contact avoidance at all.

**E** Elliot Wesselborg 129:43  
Yeah, I know there's also, like, a lot of COVID cases connected to the meatpacking plants in Waterloo—has that also impacted your area?

**D** David Hays 130:00  
I, yeah, the local meatpacking plant, Tyson Pork Producers, had a major outbreak, I think there's 27 thou- or 2700 employees, and 1700 of them tested positive. And the only really connection to the bigger community that I can see out of that is it most of those people had families at home, the families also got sick. Some of that has extended into employees at restaurants and nursing homes, many of whom employ gay people. So I don't know if any of my gay and lesbian friends have gotten sick or been exposed—I'm sure they've all been exposed to some extent. But I guess that's part of the scary thing about what's happening now with bars reopening, is that people aren't being cautious and careful and we're about to see another surge come out of that.

E Elliot Wesselborg 130:55  
Definitely.

D David Hays 130:56  
And I see a lot of similarities to the way things were early in the AIDS crisis when that virus started coming around and we had to educate people on how to be safe, and how to protect themselves, and how to get people to start using that protection. You know, it's much easier to wear a mask than it is to make somebody put on a condom, or use a dental dam, but it's the same struggle to educate people and get them actually to do what they're supposed to be doing. So I see a lot of similarities and a lot of the same stigma and fear.

E Elliot Wesselborg 131:36  
Yeah and once people get it in their mind they're not going to do a thing, good luck convincing them otherwise.

D David Hays 131:43  
Right.

E Elliot Wesselborg 131:45  
I've kind of, I've gone through most of my questions that I wanted to ask, so is there anything else that you want to touch on before we call it a day, or?

D David Hays 131:54  
We were able to cover so much more than I even thought we would be able to cover. I got some of my history research in as well as my personal memories.

E Elliot Wesselborg 132:03  
Yeah. I think we did good.



David Hays 132:06

Yeah.



Elliot Wesselborg 132:07

Okay, so any last words or shall we?



David Hays 132:12

I think that pretty well covers everything.



Elliot Wesselborg 132:15

Okay. Then I want to thank you so much again for doing this. It's been amazing listening to both your experiences and what you've been able to uncover and yeah, I really appreciate it.



Elliot Wesselborg 132:26

Well, thanks for your great preparation for this and the good questions. Just, you make it a fun interview.



Elliot Wesselborg 132:33

I'm glad!