

Oral Memoirs
of
Patrick Herman

An Interview Conducted by

Sarah Schneider

November 4, 2016

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories
(RICHERS) of Central Florida

University of Central Florida RICHERS of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Sarah Schneider

Transcriber: Geoffrey Cravero

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of RICHES of Central Florida, History Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES of Central Florida is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Patrick Herman is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 4, 2016.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Patrick Herman, a member of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview was conducted by Sarah Schneider at Herman's home in Orlando, Florida, on November 4th, 2016. Some of the topics covered include moving to Florida, joining the Orlando Gay Chorus, the Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) of Choruses Festival, the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub and its aftermath, the Orlando Gay Chorus's response to the Pulse tragedy, coping with the emotional repercussions of the tragedy, the community response to the Pulse tragedy, support from other gay choruses at the GALA festival, the significance of Latin night at Pulse, the long-term consequences of the Pulse tragedy, and gun control.

Patrick Herman

Oral History Memoir

Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Sarah Schneider

November 4, 2016

Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Moving to Florida

Schneider Today is Friday, November 14th, 2016. My name is Sarah Schneider and I am conducting an oral history interview with Patrick Herman of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview is being conducted at the interviewee's residence in Orlando, Florida. Thank you for being here and talking with us today.

Herman Um, you're welcome.

Schneider Um, can you please state your name for us?

Herman Um, um, my name is Patrick Herman. Um, and like you said, I—I, uh, sing for—with the, uh, Orlando Gay Chorus. And have been doing it for six years. And, um—and it's just a really great experience. Uh, it's probably one of the—yeah, I look forward to it every week. Just rehearsals and the shows. So, you know, it's really all about singing I think mostly. It's really why I joined. I think that's why most people joined. So...

Schneider And so can you tell us where you were born and how long you've lived in Orlando?

Herman Oh, uh. Well, um, I go way back. I'm, you know—this year I'll be 60. So, uh, I was born actually in, um [clears throat]—in Washington, D.C. You know? I was, uh, one of six—six children. You know? I have six si—siblings. But I was the third of the six. And—and we lived in, uh, you know, uh—in Washington, D.C. My dad was in the army. And so, uh, it was one of the many places we lived. Uh, because he was in the service, we traveled a lot. So—so before I, um—before I graduated from college, um, I had traveled, uh, to numerous places and lived in many states.

So, um, how I ended up in Orlando was, um, that I did have family in Florida. And when I graduated from, uh, Penn State¹, um, you know, I decided I would live—you know, move to where I had family in Florida, which was, uh, uh, near Tampa. Which—New Port Richey. So, um—so—and then, um, it wasn't—then I

¹ Pennsylvania State University

actually, uh—when I was there, I actually, uh, got a job and went back to school. And then got another degree. And ended up in, uh, Fort Lauderdale. And moved there for about twenty-some years. And then needed a change. So Orlando was the, you know—the ne—it was a—it had a job offer and I took it. So that was 12 years ago.

0:02:27

Joining the Orlando Gay Chorus

Schneider And, um, how long have you been part of the Orlando Gay Chorus?

Herman Um, well, I—I joined probably about six years ago. Um, you know, looking for something to do that I've done before. When I was in, uh, Fort Lauderdale, I was also in a chorus there, too. The Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus. And, um—and I enjoyed that a lot. You know? Something about, you know, being a part of a group and—and, um, singing, which, you know, i—I think, uh, that, you know, just that experience alone is, uh, an amazing, great experience for anybody.

You—and so when I moved here, you know, I—I, uh—I eventually looked up doing, uh, the chorus here as well. The only difference is—is this is a mixed chorus, where the one in Fort Lauderdale that I had experience with was, you know, an all-male chorus. So—but it's been great. Just, uh, getting to know all the people.

Schneider And can you tell us about one of your favorite—or some of your favorite productions or performances that you've done?

Herman Oh, um. Well, they do two shows a year. And, um, the chorus does like a spring show and they also do a Christmas show. And—and, um, hmm. You know, it's hard to say because usually it's—usually you just, uh, like it just because of the music that you're doing. You know? You start to find, you know, there's a lot of songs that you really enjoy doing.

So—when I first started doing it, I was—you know, I got a lot more involved and was actually, you know, in the front [inaudible] row of dancers, too. I said, "Well. Let me try that as well." And, uh, so it was sort of funny because, um, they, um—the direct—the—let me think—the person that was, uh, in charge of the dance troupe, um—the one that, uh, did most of the choreography, uh, would tell me that basically, uh, you know, when you c—when you're not as knowledgeable at dancing, they usually just put something in your hand and—and then—and so you're—so I found myself with something in my hand a lot [laughs]. But otherwise, um—so I did that for a while, but then I realized that, um—that it was just taking up a lot of my time. So I went back to just, you know—just singing and not pf—you know, dancing or anything like that.

But, um, yeah. There's been a lot of good shows actually. Um, I can't particularly

say one was better than the other. But it's really just the songs, you know, that I like.

0:05:02

Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses Festival

Schneider Um, and, uh, have you participated in the GALA² events?

Herman Oh, yeah. I've been in three of them. And, eh, from – if you've ever, uh, heard anybody talk about them, they'll tell you that they're really a life-changing experience. And – and, uh, when you go there, it – it's – it's like – it's like a celebration. It's really a festival. But – and it's not a competition or anything like that. It's really just like coming together with, uh, likeminded people that really enjoy, um, performing.

And, um – but, um, one of the most amazing things that I've found being in the GALA is just the accolades that you get. I mean, you – you know, here we perform in maybe f – in front of like, uh, uh, a[sic] audience of maybe 800 people. Five to 800 people. There you have full[sic] house, um, of 2,500 people. And – and they give you standing ovations every song. And just – it – it's just amazing. I mean you come out of, uh, the theater after a performance and you're – and you're met with r – you know, people lining up along the – you know, the hallways and the – and the passages out. Just applauding you all the way out. I – it – it – it's – it's quite unreal [*laughs*]. It's – it's – we have our own little world of, um – of people that just really appreciate what they do. You know? So – and when you're really good, then y – y – you know, the accolades are amazing. I mean – but just full houses, you know, the whole time. And – and s – it's like thousands of people. More than, uh, like whatever scene that they show here. You know? So – I can't even describe it. It's just great. You know? Just that whole experience.

So [*sighs*] yeah. It's always fun. I've done three and, um – over a period of time. And the last two have been in the same city. So that – that was fun 'cause I got to go back and see, um, people that, you know – that I knew from that city as well.

Schneider Mmhmm. And...

Herman So...

Schneider ...do you – are you comfortable sharing what city that was in?

Herman Um, well, with – the last, um, two GALAs have been in Colorado. Denver, Colorado. And, um, so tha – I just happened to have been dating somebody that – long distance that w – w – his hometown was in Denver. So I spent a lot of time in Denver seeing him. A – and so like half and half doing the show and

² Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses

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half's, you know, seeing my friend. So it was kind of nice.

Schneider And where was the other, um...

Herman Oh...

Schneider ...[inaudible] at?

Herman ...the other one was, um—it was when I was with, uh, uh, the Fort Lauderdale [Gay Men's] Chorus. Um, that was in Tampa[, Florida]. And that was my first. And—and so that's when I first got the taste of like having, um, you know, those accolades and the—and the large crowds of people that, you know—that fill theaters.

So it's just—I mean I—I think that was the amazing thing is—I mean is, you know, you're with a group of talented people here in Orlando. But can you imagine being in—in a place where the talent just comes from all over the world? I mean d—y—you—you see—uh, I—I get, you know—the one thing I find that—that's so amazing is that, you know, it's a—it's a whole bunch of people from all walks of life. You have men, women. You have s—you have all, um, you know, uh, genders. And, um, you have colors of, you know, all races and colors. And—and—and we're all—we all get along. And we all just, you know—just build on—I mean, um, the world could really learn from, you know—if everybody could just be a chorus, that would be amazing. You know?

So when you—when you see that and you see that—that old, young, men, women, all, you know—a—all just come together. Just—just without—it's like a—a peaceful time. And, I mean, I—I—that's I think why it's so amazing. You know? And that's why I—I even like the chorus here. And just doing the chorus here. You know? It's a group of people that comes with many different religions and all kinds of different backgrounds. But we, you know—we really enjoy just doing this whole performance for—for the people that we like and love in our families. So, uh, i—that's the experience that you really get from it I think.

0:09:52

Mass shooting at Pulse nightclub

Schneider Um, and so I'd like to talk about Pulse and, uh...

Herman Okay.

Schneider ...I was wondering, um, how you first heard about Pul—the Pulse shooting.

Herman Um, I was, um—you know, let me think about that one because, uh—what was I doing? I have—I think what it was is, um, I—I woke up and, you know—you know how people—you get on Facebook. That's kind of the first thing you do. Or you—y—you know, you—and—and that's where you start seeing

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what's – has happened in the last day or so. You know? I think that, you know, our social media is really like just y – you can just find out things that are happening in like d – not – you know, immediately. And so we live in a culture now where we have the technology to just hear about something that happened like the night before.

Uh, and so I think – think that's where I was. I think I was just like looking through Facebook and – and I saw that there had been some – something that hap – had happened. And, um, you know, so, uh – I just – I'm trying to remember like, you know, exactly what – what it was. I think it was pretty much Facebook if I recall. You know? Or my friend. My one friend that usually calls me or something if I haven't gotten on Facebook and maybe told me or something. I don't exactly remember.

Schneider And do you remember what your reaction was or what your thoughts were when you first heard?

Herman Um, well, you know, I think that a – at that time, when – when the news was coming out, we weren't quite sure, like, you know, the extent of, like, what had happened. Everybody was kind of like, you know, just, um, uh – just – just l – um, how would you put it? Um, just in the dark about, like, you know, uh, how many people wha – w – you know? What was involved. Who was in there. All we knew that what it was – was a shooting. We didn't know, like, who it was. You know? I think at that point in time I think I didn't n – stop looking at the news. And – and just watched the whole time.

I also have a roommate who's younger. He's about twenty-some years old. And i – and just to see him go through that. You know? That – because he's a, you know – he – he would be someone that would have gone to the Pulse. Um, I stopped really going out to clubs a long time ago. They – so this was pretty much a young person club. And so, um, he knew more people. He was more connected. And so I kind of lived like a little bit vicariously through his experience and what was going on. And, uh – and really just, um, you know, uh, uh – like I said, I wasn't – I didn't know people in the club, but I knew people that knew people. And – and in a small town like this, you kind of know – everybody's kind of connected. So you kind of feel for even your friends. You know? I mean we all had kind of a story to tell about like, um, who we knew and how – what they were going through pretty much.

Schneider Um, and so you mentioned you watched the news. Was there anything else in particular you did on that Sunday? Um, do you remember what – what you did the rest of the day?

Herman Mm. N – no. I don't even recall. I just know that we were just – you know, just trying to find out, you know, um, like, you know, if – how many people were – were sur – you know, were – were hurt. And if there – how many

survivors there were. And – and you really found yourself just getting totally involved in finding out. Like, I mean, I think I – I watched every news story that came out. And – and saw all the, um, you know, the – th – the interviews of the people talking about what they were going through. So I think that we were all kind of like just doing that at that point in time.

0:14:13

Orlando Gay Chorus's response to Pulse tragedy

Herman Um, the [Orlando Gay] Chorus hadn't really gotten involved in anything yet. But the – so we, you know – when we would go to rehearsals like the following Wednesday or something like that, then we, you know – then things would – we'd, you know – people would tell their stories of like who and what they, you know – they knew. But, um, I don't actually recall anything more than just looking and – and getting so involved with like every detail of like what was happening. You know? So...

Schneider So can you talk a little bit about the, um – the [Orlando Gay] Chorus's response to the shooting and what sort of happened with the Orlando Gay Chorus in the days and in the weeks following?

Herman Well, I mean, for me i – i – i – it seemed like, um, we were all – the chorus was kind of taking a new direction. You know? I mean, it had always been a chorus that did outreaches, I mean, you know, to the community at large. I mean we've always done that. We – you know? We've always performed at – at certain places. Like, um, you know, there's an elderly care facility that we've performed at. And we've done [Come Out With] Pride [Orlando] events and those kind of things. And – and we've done – and we've kind of geared ourselves towards – like just doing the national anthem. You know? We – when someone needed that in – i – you know, in their group or something.

Um, the outreaches hadn't been, you know – I mean, you know, we – now that we have a new director, we – we're starting to – and we had some other people that really get totally involved in outreaches. So, um – so the outreaches before the Pulse were just, you know – basically just, you know, like, "Yeah. We'll do a – we'll do your wedding ceremony or something like that. Or we'll – we'll do a song for, you know – for, uh – for the, uh – like if you want the – the, you know – the, um, national anthem or something.

But then after Pulse, um, we f – we found that the – they're – they start to do, uh, vigils. You know? And, um, I think that that's what – and – and I hadn't gone to any of the – the first ones. Mostly because they were kind of telling us, you know, that, um – that, uh, c – they – the city was sort of waiting for – for a time when they could have an organized one where they could have like, um, security there. And they were kind of concerned about, uh, you know, the s – community in general. And putting guys – you know, doing something like this, um, that wasn't like an official thing that they could s – you know, make sure that they

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had the manpower. 'Cause they – I think, uh, at this point they were sort of stressed out that the – the police department, you know – trying to, you know, look into, you know, what was happening with the, um – what – with the shooting. And if there was, uh, you know, anything else. Th – so they couldn't guarantee the safety of – of 'em.

But the – what ended up happening was the first vigil that was, um – was announced, um, ended up to[sic] become, uh, a huge one. And I – I kind of stayed away from 'em because we were all kind of concerned like that, you know, that – you know, that they wouldn't have the, uh, you know – the, uh, security in place. So – so I didn't really get involved with the first or[sic] one. But then, um – but when they did decide to have an official one, then – then I did that one. But, um – but the first one, you know, I – I watched from, you know, the – the videos afterwards. And it became like the – the – the one that they did at Dr. Phillips [Center for the Performing Arts] became – that became the – sort of the – the – the one that was representing our city all around the world.

Um, you know, uh, um, after that, then i – you know, uh, they – they started doing the memorial services and stuff, too. It wasn't that long after, you know, that. And that's when, um, we started to go and – and do these like small things at, um – for some of the people that were in there. Uh, I, uh – I was – I was feeling kind of, I mean, that – the whole thing about doing a memorial service is – is sort of – you feel almost displaced. Like i – it's a surreal feeling, you know, that – you know, that – and – and you're not quite sure – I mean, 'cause, you know, a chorus is really a – a group that's there to entertain. We were never, you know – we – that – to take on the role of – of being, uh, um, somebody that, uh, sh – that is comforting the community was certainly something I wasn't really prepared for.

So it – so after a while, um, it – I found that it's – it – that, um, it was kind of, um – it started to wear – weigh on me a little bit I think. Um, and – and the whole, you know, I mean, and – and I don't know. I just think that you've – you've found – I found myself, um – and I didn't – I – like I – that I couldn't find someone that I could communicate with on what was happening to me. You know? When we – you know, h – i – i – it – it sort of – you start to feel kind of a guilt or something.

Um, that – the reason I say that is because, um, you know, p – before the Pulse, you know, we – we were a small group that, you know, struggled to be known in the community. And then, uh – and then a lot of, uh, organizations started asking us to come to do something for them. You know? Um, and not necessarily of – of – of – of a vigil or – or memorial. But just something representing, you know, the LGB[T] community. And one of the – and that's when, um, we got one of the most amazing, um, uh, events that, you know, I thought I ever like really sang at – was, you know – I mean there – there are two that, eh, you – you did

ment – you did ask me what, you know, there – if there were a couple things that stand out, um, um, uh, being in the chorus. And the one, and this is – this i – was before the Pulse – was that the Dr. Phillips Center [for the Performing Arts] had asked us at – to perform songs for them. And it was a concert called “A Salute to the American Flag”. And to me, that was just – at that – that – that’s up there with the GALA Choruses. I mean, you know, to be – to represent, um, the – to be a part of the Dr. Phillips, um – I mean, uh, the, uh, Orlando Philharmonic [Orchestra], um – those are the ones that asked us to – to be part of this, uh, “Salute to the American Flag”.

So we did this concert at the Bob Carr [Theater]. And, uh – and we had like over like a hundred peop – of our chorus members there. And – and a – at – you know, what was really cool was after the reviews came out for this show, they – they actually said that we were like just an amazing group. I mean this was the reviews from the Sun [Orlando?] Sentinel saying that we sounded amazing. And they even thought that the – that the – the Orlando Philharmonic didn’t have the quality that – that they could’ve had. I think they criticized the way the director did some of the songs. But, you know – but our part was like amazing. So that was the one, uh, that, eh – show that just really stood out for me. I mean just...

And then, um – and the other performance was because of the Pulse and what had happened. And it was, um, that we got to sing halftime for the [Orlando City Soccer Club] soccer game. And so there was like – there’s 36,000 people, you know, at halftime listening to a couple songs we did. And we did this one beautiful rendition of, um – of, uh, Cyndi Lauper’s³ color – you know, “True Colors” song. Um, so I – I – I have to say, you know, I’m 60 years old and it’s take – it just – I, you know – that alone stands out as the most ama – one of the most amazing things that anybody that’s like gay could ever imagine is to be out and open in – in a na – on a national level. And just being able to – to be who you are and – and have just all these people just accepting you.

0:23:43

Coping with emotional repercussions of Pulse tragedy

Herman

And so after that – after I had done that – you know, right after we did that halftime show, you know, I – a – and then even just like s – standing there and having some beers and watching the game, it was just totally the most fun. But I got[sic] to tell you, I felt so – so guilty. And I couldn’t even explain why. It’s just, you know, here’s some – something that happened that – where – where some people lost their lives. And it took that much to – I mean just – I mean I shouldn’t, you know, i – i – can you imagine just the f – the guilt you feel? To have something so amazing, but the lo – but at the price of losing, uh, all these people.

³ Cynthia Ann Stephanie Lauper

And so [laughs], um, when that happened, I—you know, there wasn't anybody I could reach out to. I mean I had a friend that really—you know, one of my best friends, like I couldn't get him to understand, you know, why, you know, I was feeling this way. And, you know, like when you have something like that happen and you can't really have [sniffs]—and you don't have anybody to talk to. So—so I called my friend [laughs]. I have a good friend in the area that—and like I said, you know, a—and I told her what happened. You know? That a—all this. You know? Tha—these amazing things that happened. But y—you know I—'cause you know if you grow up 60 years, you never what di—e—experience—you're always like in the shadows. You never tell people like what your life is like. You know? This—this is what it's been for s—you know, all my life. And—and so when you're in groups like this, like the chorus or anything then—and you're like at festivals, you kind of have these great experiences. But I never would have thought that, you know—that, you know, been a—been able to sing at like the soccer games or stuff like that. That, you know—I mean that was so...

So I asked my friend, Marian[sp]—so Marian[sp], Joe[?] and—came over. And that's when we went over to one of the, um, candlelight vigils that—that they were holding downtown at the Pulse. And so it was nice to have my friends with me to—to just kind of get me through that—that part of the guilt I think. You know? I mean that's—that's kind of what it's been like. But then that's a long time ago, so I've kind of recovered [laughs]. So kind of like that. Anyway [sighs].

0:26:44

Community response to Pulse tragedy

Schneider And, um [sniffs], what have your thoughts been about—these are here if you want them—um, what have your thoughts been about the r—reactions of, um, the community to—to what's happened?

Herman Oh, I th—I think that the community in general has been incredible. I, um—not only the community, but the whole world. I mean, you knew, uh, th—um, when we were at the last GALA [Choruses Festival], um, it was really one of those GALAs that, um, was after the Pulse. So—so we were—they were kind of telling us i—in, you know—at the rehearsals that don't—"Be prepared because, you know, you're going to get a lot of, uh, uh, you know—y—you—the response you're going to get at GALA is going to be different than what you're used to s—being."

And so when you come f—from a community, you know, that—where something like this has happened, you know, um—like say for example, what happened in Paris⁴. You know? That sort of thing. You know? The—the world seems to really have come together. I mean and it—when we—what happened in Paris seems to be what was happening to us now. You know? The—the shooting at the nightclub. And then, you know, now—and then what—what we had to

⁴ November 2015 Paris attacks

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experience. You know? You, um – so like the chorus was kind of saying, “When you go to the GALA, you know, just be prepared that, you know – that, um, they – people – the community around you – and – and not only Orlando, but, you know, just every c – every community, um, is going to respond in some manner.”

I mean we – you know, on Facebook alone, you know, tha – there were so many re – positive responses from all over the world, you know, that, um – and we were still getting them even now. You know? I mean there are choruses that are – that are sending us, you know, like – like they’re – they’re having fundraisers and – and sending us, you know, um, uh, funds to help our chorus here. You know? Th – through the next show and all of that. But – and it’s – i – it’s all really re – as a result of the Pulse. I mean it’s just, you know, um, the – everything. The mayor’s [John Hugh “Buddy” Dyer] been great. And, you know, it’s just been just a – a – a – a real, uh, unity that’s – has happened, um, for – for us. And – and so I – I think the chorus is – us – a little part of that, too. You know? I think that we’re just kind of like a – a – a group that, you know, – that, um – that everybody’s kind of, uh, uh – how would I put it? Sharing their experiences with or something, which is kind of an outlet. You know? Kind of an outlet for them I suppose. I don’t know. But, uh. Yeah.

0:30:02

Support from other gay choruses at GALA festival

Schneider

Was it – was there anything else specific you noticed in the reaction of other people – other choruses at the GALA event?

Herman

Oh, yeah. I mean when – when we did go to the GALA, uh, they – it – it was, um – it was, uh – it was like a – when you’d go and see like a sho – y – we’d be part of a show, w – we were part of the, uh – the opening ceremonies show, where we kind of just, uh, came up onstage and sang like maybe the last song of – of a – of a – of a song that we were doing with, uh, you know, i – with the other groups. Um, we ended up getting these amazing standing ovation[sic], you know, that just lasted for th – the longest of times. I mean it was, uh, a – a – and when the director started t – talking about, you know, um, the events that occurred up until the time, you know, the – the – all the vigils that we were doing and the memorial services i – i – you know, it was, uh – everybody just kind of stood up. You know?

And then – and then, as even if we would walk through like the, eh – I don’t know if you’ve ever been to Colorado. The – there’s a m – a pedestrian mall, where all the theaters are on one side and there’s like, um – there’s a couple theaters on the other side. But – and then there’s like kind of a parking garage that’s – has some floors on it. Well, the – the – the Cor – the Colorado choruses had all got[sic] together and they just m – um, um, they sang a song, um, and – of, uh – and – and I’m trying to remember. I think it was “America the Beautiful” actually. And they – and then they draped, you know, banners over

the – the, um – the, uh, railings that showed that they were su – you know, in support of – of what had happened in Orlando. So they – they had their America – “Orlando Strong” banners hanging as they sang this “American the Beautiful” song. I mean, you know, there’s one thing about songs, it just brings everybody like together. It’s just – it’s just a moving experience. So that – that was just one of the many things.

And any – everywhere you went, you know, there was always – because we wore like little banners that said we were from Orlando. So everywhere you went like we – all throughout the event, you know, you’d get – you’d get just hugs and, you know – that they were think[sic] of you – think of you. And – and, you know, just – just well-wishes. You know? I [sighs] – yeah. It was k – quite an experience I have to say. But, um, yeah.

It’s hard to kind of go on with it, you know? I don’t know if anything like that happens, you’re like – you know, you want your life to go on. You wanted things to – to be settled and to go. But, um – but we s – we still, you know, w – I think we – we’ve changes as a group now. And we’re kind of a group that’s out there for people if they need something. You know? We’re – we’re not just like – we’re – we’ve become like sort of a support group for other groups in town or something. You know? It’s hard to explain. Um, you know?

So – and I don’t want to bring up politics, but they – they have a – they did ask a lot of us to, um, you know – if this is not a – an official outreach for the chorus, but they did ask a lot of us if they – if we wanted to sing for the, uh, president and – when he comes to town on Sunday. So there’s gonna be a bunch of us over there s – s – singing the national anthem. Not me. I didn’t get that email in time [laughs]. But, you know, I’m kind of so happy for my, you know – that my friends that are – had an opportunity to be part of the, uh, election, um, thing that’s happening. So if you get a chance, go over to – to Kissimmee[, Florida] and think the president’s gonna be there.⁵ And we’re gonna be singing the national anthem. I mean the, you know – some singers that I know. Not official. Um, oh gee. See, it’s just – just a volunteer thing. So – so that’s kind of exciting for them.

0:34:39

Significance of Latin night at Pulse

Schneider Um, do you have any thoughts about what Pulse as a place means to you? I don’t, um, know if it had any significance for you before or...

Herman Well...

Schneider ...does it now?

⁵ President Barack Obama visited Osceola County Stadium in Kissimmee, Florida, on November 6, 2016, in support of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s final push to win Florida.

Herman ...that's a good question. What Pulse, um – what Pulse, uh, mean to me – I mean I – you know I had – I – I had been there before. I mean probably w – like, uh, 10 years ago. I probably went there a few times. You know? And, um, it – it was really, uh, just a – a place to, you know, socialize. Um, you know, uh, the night that – of the tragedy though, I – ey – they, uh – I had heard that it was like Hispanic night, which meant that they would have been doing some like cool dancing. 'Cause I don't know if you've ever been to like, uh, a place where, uh – where h – you know, they, uh – you know, it's a kind of Spanish – Spanish – Hispanic music thing. They dance a lot differently than, uh – than regular disco clubs or whatever. 'Cause, I mean, I – I used to go to the places in Miami. You know? And, I mean, they're – they – they do salsas and, um, you know – I – I don't know all the – all the ty – types of dances that they do. But it's – it's quite fun. You know? Because it's – it's – it's like couple dancing in a way that, you know – that's more, you know, where you touch each other as opposed to just, uh, disco music, where you don't.

So that – I could imagine it would've been fun. And if I – actually, to tell you the truth, if I had known that it was like, uh, Hispanic night, I probably would've gone just for the dancing. If – if I could find someone to go with, you know, at the time. But – but, uh, no. I – it – for a long time, it hadn't been any place I would have gone because it's just, um – there was just a younger crowd. You know? So – though, I mean, I – I'm sure there were people my age there [*laughs*]. I'm just not a club person these days. So – but I'm – yeah [*laughs*].

0:36:56

Long-term consequences of Pulse tragedy

Schneider Um, so do you have any thoughts about what you might see as the long-term consequences of the Pulse shooting for – for this community or maybe even broader to the country?

Herman Well, like always – I always hope that, you know, these kind of things can make differences when it comes to like, you know, um, gun control. That sort of thing. That's really where I hope it goes more than anything. I mean – I mean we just – you know, as a s – as a country, we – I think we, you know – I mean there's a lot of – you know, being an election year, too, which, uh, makes a big difference – but, um, i – i – i – you know, i – i – there's all[sic] so much argument[sic] about like h – how and – how we use guns. And – and w – why they go into the wrong hands. And – and, you know, what can we do about it? You know? And I – and I know there – that – that, um – that there's a lot of disagreement on, you know, like how – how guns should be handled. You know? And – and especially assault rifles. I mean – I mean just that – just i – you know, i – anybody that's read what happened at the Pulse with – with – with these people that use these assault rifles – I mean these are very destructive. I mean they – they – the, uh, early responders didn't even know like if they could even get into the building. They didn't even know how many people were

actually in the building. You know? The amount of gunfire that goes off like during that time is incredible. And it—and not only that, but those guns are very destructive. And so, you know, when you're shot with like a—a—an assault rifle, you're—you have damage to you—to your body. More so than just, you know—just a gun that just, you know, shoots like a little—little—li—s—ho—you know, handgun.

A—and it just doesn't make any sense why—why our country, you know, w—what this love affair is with these assault rifles. And—and I know for a fact that—that, you know, there was a law not long ago that—tha—that kind of, eh, kept these kind of guns out of, uh—out of people's hands. But then, I—I guess, you know, like all—eh, some laws, they—they—they just have a certain period of time. And then they—they, you know, become null and void or something. You know? So I—I'm just hoping that—that, you know, we can as a society adhere—can just find ways—you know, you can get guns on the internet. You can get guns at gun shows. And you don't even need to have a background search. I mean that's what I'm kind of hoping. You know? It's—it's really about that. You know?

Um, you know, if you've read anything about the sh—the guy that—that was in the shooting, you know that he was somebody that just had like really issues. You know? Like more mental issues. So, um, I don't know. I mean I just—that's what I would like to see really.

0:40:20

Closing remarks

Schneider Um, so do you have any other reflections about the Pulse shooting or your experience as a member of the [Orlando] Gay Chorus that we haven't talked about or haven't covered?

Herman Um, gosh. We talk—covered quite a lot. Haven't we [*laughs*]? Uh, w—well, um, like I said, um, you know, uh, the Pulse was—was really a tr—a—a tragedy. And though I didn't really know anybody like, um, personally, I did know people who did know people. Um, and I just—you know, I just feel s—sorry for any community that ever would have to go through something like this. You know? Um, and the—th—and the reality is—is—is that, you know, un—until the world changes, you know, we're gonna have this sort of thing. It's gonna come and it's gonna happen occasionally. You know? Like different places around the world.

I mean this—this is nothing compared to what's happening overseas. So—but, uh—but—so that's why it's kind of nice to have like the chorus to have, you know—to put some positive part into your life. And so that's kind of, you know—I'm looking forward to the show. Come—it's—it's on December 10th [2016]. Um, a little—a little, uh, fu—uh, you know, uh, a little, uh, sales pitch there [*laughs*].

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and Stories of Central Florida*

University of Central Florida

So yeah. So we're really just—you know, what I think what it is is I think we're all just getting back to our lives now. You know? And so that's, um—you know, it's been a quite—quite a few months since it's happened. And—and, um, so it's nice to just kind of give back and, you know, look forward to—to being a part of that group again. And doing s—something that's more entertaining and fun and, uh—and positive. So I think that's really a part of it—i—is that re—you know, you had the tragedies—tragedies, but you also have a lot of things to look forward to. So I'm really looking forward to it. That—that sort of thing. So...

Schneider Alright. Is there anything else you wanted to share?

Herman Um, no. I think that's pretty [*laughs*]...

Schneider [*laughs*].

Herman ...mu—much it. Yeah. It's quite a[sic] ordeal [*laughs*].

Schneider [*laughs*].

Herman Um, no. You know? It's just this. I think, you know, like, um, yeah. I guess the one thing that I would like to say about, um, the chorus is i—it does, uh, benefit people that like, you know—you know, that we come together a lot. That I'm certainly gul—you know, happy that—that I have something that—you know, that—that is very community-oriented. I think that's really the, uh—one of the things that I really enjoy about it—is that it—is, uh—is that it puts me back into the community. Something that, you know—that—when you're working every day and you—and y—all your life is pretty much just work and—a—that's nice to have that outlet. Yeah. So. An—an—an—and I've done—an—I've had a lot of nice experiences. So—but...

Schneider Great. Well—well, thank you so much. Thanks for talking with us. We really appreciate it.

Herman Thank you. Thanks.

End of Interview