

Oral Memoirs
of
Scott A. Peterson

An Interview Conducted by

Sarah Schneider

October 23, 2016

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

University of Central Florida RICHEs 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 Scott Peterson is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 23, 2016.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Scott Peterson, a member of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview was conducted by Sarah Schneider at the Orlando Public Library in Orlando, Florida, on October 23rd, 2016. Some of the topics covered include an introduction, joining the Orlando Gay Chorus, his favorite productions, the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub and its aftermath, the Orlando Gay Chorus's response to the Pulse tragedy, the community response to the tragedy, the significance of Pulse before and after the mass shooting, the role of social media in the aftermath of the tragedy, the long-term consequences of the tragedy, and the significance of the Orlando Gay Chorus.

Scott Peterson

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Sarah Schneider
October 23, 2016
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

- Schneider** Stop. Take a break. Let us know. That's fine. Um, do you have any questions or anything before we start?
- Peterson** Not off hand.
- Schneider** Okay.
- Peterson** Yeah.
- Schneider** Yeah. Uh, so I'll sort of introduce it and then—and then I'll start asking you questions. Oh. And also I won't be responding. So my job is just to listen, hear your experience and I'll just...
- Peterson** And listen to me...
- Schneider** ...ask questions.
- Peterson** ...yammer on.
- Schneider** But I won't be saying, "Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah." 'Cause that can get a [*laughs*]—get annoying when you're listening to the interview later. So...
- Peterson** Okay.
- Schneider** I'm really interested but I just won't respond. So yeah.
- Peterson** Sounds fair.
- Schneider** Yeah. All set?
- Peterson** Yeah. We're good.
- Schneider** Okay.

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Peterson Alright.

Schneider Today is Sunday, October 23rd, 2016. My name is Sarah Schneider and I am conducting an oral history interview with Scott Peterson of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview is being conducted at the Orlando Public Library in Orlando, Florida.

Thank you for being here.

Peterson It's my pleasure.

Schneider And can you start off by stating your name for us?

Peterson Scott Peterson.

Schneider Thank you.

Peterson That's right.

Schneider And, um— so could you tell me where you were born and how long you've been in Orlando?

Peterson I was born in Des Moines, Iowa. And finished all my schooling in Iowa. Graduated college from the University of Northern Iowa and then immediately moved to Orlando because my sister was living here. And I didn't have any other plans [*laughs*]. So...

0:01:17

Joining the Orlando Gay Chorus and favorite productions

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

Peterson Uh. Well, let's see. Oh, and then I—I moved here in '85 to Orlando. And I joined the chorus in Christmas of '99— was the first performance that I sang with.

Schneider Um, and what brought you to the chorus?

Peterson I had had my first relationship and it had ended a couple years prior to that. And, uh, was finally starting to want to be more social again. And— and I knew somebody who sang in the chorus. And I'd been to a couple of performances, but not really very many over the years. I hadn't really been aware of it. I knew that it existed, but that's it.

So I went ahead and joined with my friend. And then just completely was taken in by the whole community and the sense of being able to sing, which I've always enjoyed since I was a kid. Although I don't have any formal training in singing. Um, I did take one course one summer during college. But, um— so, uh, I don't know. It was fun. And there were people that were fun and welcoming.

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And people to socialize with. So kind of initially, and probably my first motivation, was just to be social. And to be around a lot of other folks that were gay, which was kind of a treat at that point. Rather than just going to the gay bars.

So, uh, it was beautiful. And it was a good cause. And it was all about music, which as I said, I've always enjoyed that. Then, thankfully, they were pretty welcoming. I don't know how – I cannot officially read music but can follow very well. And you can kind of intuitively build, you know, a sense of following the notes and such. So I'm blessed enough to have some natural ability to do that. And to memorize music and – and it started there. So...

Schneider Mmhmm. And what have been some of your favorite productions or events you've done over the years with them?

Peterson [*sighs*] Oh. Favorite things. Well, the GALA¹ Festivals that they go to every four years are very memorable. Um, I didn't go to one that happened the very first – or that following year after I joined. I was just a little green and not prepared to – to take a week off and invest the money that it takes to go on a trip to wherever the festivals are.

Um, but, uh, been to four of them now. The first one I went to was in Montreal[, Québec, Canada], which was fun 'cause that was the first time I'd actually been out of the country. So it was just overwhelming and very empowering to be at a place where there are all these people that are committed to making music and to the whole putting ourselves out there to – to kind of help bring about change ultimately. Very intricate – very slowly sometimes. But ultimately, if you just keep at it things do change. So that's what I felt.

So to be surrounded in that festival with all these people singing for each other – [inaudible]. I mean there's a little bit of competition in a way just because people are naturally that way. But it's not a completion. It's just a festival of celebration. And celebrate all the choruses and all their efforts no matter how big they are or small.

So, uh, it was very emotional. And it was very empowering. And kind to – all those experiences, and being with the chorus – I was thinking about that before I came today. It's like, *What has it done for me s – on a personal level?* Uh, and I was reflecting on that is to – growing up when I grew up, 'cause I'm 57. 57 now. I was born in '59. So my high school years were the '70s. I graduated high school in '77. And at that point in time, being gay and in the Midwest, it was, you know. Des Moines's a pretty good city. Pretty multicultural in some respects. But still it was pretty conservative. And it was in the '70s. And I didn't know any other gay people. And, uh, you feel pretty isolated. And at first you don't even know how

¹ Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses

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to i—how to identify yourself that way. ‘Cause that was kind of—you didn’t have anything—there was nothing on television really to help you compare or contrast or to identify with. It was just knowing that you had a little different sense of people. And what you were attracted to as far as people. And not knowing what to do with that. And, of course, all the natural guilt that we’re always subjected to with society.

And so that would have colored[?] my whole experience about myself and who I was. And about my sexuality. And then college kind of helped me explore a little bit to at least realize what I was about that way. And then, uh, you know, you muddle through. You get through college. And you find employment. And start your career. And then—but joining the chorus was the first time that I routinely was exposed to a large number of gay people, where you start to have some senses like, *Well, this is – it’s just – it’s – there’s diversity like crazy. Just as there is in the – in the straight population or the population of what you don’t even know what people are.* And then to be in a gay population on a routine basis like that kind of helped me increasingly feel okay I guess about my sexuality. Even though I felt pretty blessed. My parents weren’t really—they weren’t shocked. Um, they were pretty—my parents had actually had parties and in—invited, uh, at least a couple of gay couples to ‘em over the years. But that was it. That was my only exposure. At least I had that much, thankfully. I was actually pretty grateful to—to them that they were open-minded enough to at least have that come into my awareness as a kid so I had some idea of where I might possibly go with my relationships.

But—but the chorus has been, as I said, s—it’s such a[sic] empowering experience. Growthful[sic]. Yeah. You know?

Schneider Mm. And so you mentioned that you went to the GALA Chorus [Festival] in Montreal and ...

Peterson Montreal...

Schneider ...um, [inaudible]...

Peterson ...and then we had one in Miami[, Florida] four years later. And then now we’ve had two in Denver[, Colorado], which was really fun. I think the next one—next one is in Minneapolis[, Minnesota] in another four years.

So, uh, they’re all very different. And—and to be immersed not only in your local community, but then to see such a massive community when you go to a GALA Festival. It’s like the hotels are full and the people out and about. And everybody’s being very prideful. And sh—displaying whatever. Whatever their lives are about with some sense of freedom to just express yourself and whatever it is. It’s—it’s a very beautiful thing. So...

0:08:14 **Mass shooting at Pulse nightclub and its aftermath**

Schneider Mm. And so, um, how did you hear about the Pulse shooting when you were...

Peterson I, uh...

Schneider ...in Orlando?

Peterson ...well – well, it was Sunday. I don't remember what I was doing anymore. I picked it up on the radio I guess. I listen to a lot of public radio. It's kind of my go-to. And then the information started coming in. And it was, um – it's one of those things you just, um – I guess it's what you routinely hear with people who go through some kind of horrific event. You don't really realize what's going on right away. Or how it's impacting you right away. A certain amount of you just kind of goes into shock.

And then there were also – first thing is you're, you know, so concerned about, *Was there anybody that I was close to that could have been there?* It's not a club that I frequented. I'd been a couple of times years ago. But, uh, I know a diverse group of people. And some are younger. Would tend to possibly have been there. And – and, uh – and you go through those – that time of trying to identify. And Facebook had this, uh, check-in feature that they put out, which was really nice. 'Cause you could immediately go and find the people with that. But there was one particular person that I had in mind that it was like really concerned. I mean he wasn't checking in. And it's like – and so I had some of that sense of not knowing for a while. But that all worked out okay. But, certainly, I have friends of friends who either were pa – died or dramatically injured. So a lot of people were affected.

0:10:01 **Orlando Gay Chorus's response to Pulse tragedy**

Peterson Um, and then it was interesting how the chorus was in that position. We were asked to come help right away as far as memorials or – there was one – I don't know if it was that – it was Monday night I think. At Joy MCC². I don't – I can't remember the timing anymore. But one, very quickly, the – the – the MCC Church had a big memorial. Gathering people. And they asked the chorus to come and we were there. And then they just started coming more and more frequently. You know? A couple two or three times a week. Sometimes it became – suddenly these outreach experiences – what we called them is outreaches. When we perform outside of our regular big events – were happening routinely. And it was, um, kind of a journey. Kind of cathartic in a way 'cause it was forcing us to re-experience our emotional reaction to what was happening. Kind of over and over again. So it probably helped speed up the process of recovering. Maybe. I don't know. [inaudible]. It was pretty

² Joy Metropolitan Community Church

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overwhelming, those first few days.

I had kind of in a way – thankfully was, uh, due to leave town for a week to go spend time with my family. So went to a few outreaches and then I was pulled away to do that. And I kind of was glad because I felt like I needed a – it was so intense, the experience here, that it felt good to be pulled away and to go and kind of recover privately for a while. And then to – came back and – and involved in a lot of the outreaches as much as I can. Again since then. So...

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson ...uh, Pulse kind of changed the whole trajectory of the chorus's activity level.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson Yeah.

Schneider And so can you say more about what – what the experience was like at the visual – at the vigils, um...

Peterson Uh, the vigils...

Schneider ...what was that like?

Peterson Uh, just very sorrowful. Um, especially the first time. There's just a lot of tears. And realizing how you're impacted and not even understanding when I haven't personally lost someone that was integral to my life, and yet as a community, it felt so close to home. It felt very personal emotionally. Um, so I – that was – I kind of lost track of my – what was your question again?

Schneider Um, what was – what was it like being at the vigil? What was the atmosphere like? Um...

Peterson Oh. So that – yeah. So to – again, that cathartic [inaudible] – to even realize that you're that hurt. You're going through these expressions of caring and recognizing what's happened to people. And what's happened to our community. And – and the lives of those people who were impacted very, uh, personally. Um, being put into your awareness over and over again. With the ringing of the bells for instance. The most – other than that first night when we sang at Joy MCC Church, which was poignant. And the place was just full of people. It was very intense. And there were many pastors of many different faiths who were up at the front. And everybody trying to find their way to identify what's happened. And – and to comfort. And to – to recognize the people that have lost their lives initially. It just – that emotional experience kept ebbing and flowing as far as how intense it would feel.

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But, uh, the most memorable thing was the, um – the sea of people that showed up for the – the memorial vigil that was, um, at the Dr. Phillips Center [for the Performing Arts] in that large yard out in front that backs up to the City Hall. And we showed up kind of early like we always do to try and get organized. And we're usually preoccupied with where we – where are we gonna be? How many of us are gonna be here? What music are we gonna sing? Who's gonna direct? It's just logistics issues. And then we're doing a lot of waiting. And then, finally, we go up onstage. And we've got everything prepared. We know what we're gonna do. And you look out and the sun is starting to go down. And so the – the atmosphere ultimately became candles. And just a sea of people. And – and, uh, the ringing of the bells at the church next door. It, um – uh, very memorable.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson Never ever in – in life I can't imagine things much more poignant.

Schneider Mm.

Peterson Um, that was – yeah. Well, that's what I remember.

Schneider Mmhmm. Um, and you said that the vigils continued over time.

Peterson Lots of small...

Schneider [inaudible].

Peterson ...events. Um – uh, there have been – first responders had a breakfast. I know that some of us went and sang – I think they sang a song and – off – or national anthem maybe to start their event. So a lot of different groups that would never have thought to reach out to the chorus for – to help make their event. To help add to the ceremony. We've been doing that routinely now. So, uh, first responders. Um, the different pride events around Central Florida. We just did Volusia [County] this weekend. And we did, uh, one over in Melbourne[, Florida], uh, perhaps three – I think three weeks ago. Um, we have others that are coming up that had just – like two or three a week. It's slowed down a little but now, but there still are – we're frequently thought of and asked if we can come and support and sing a couple songs or, uh – Volusia we just did a 30, 40-minute set for them to help celebrate pride. Um, so that's been frequent.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson We used to do – I would say the chorus would do probably 10 or a dozen outreaches maybe over a span of a year before that. Normally we have two major performances. Um, one for the holiday and one in the spring. Um, which are

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full-on, you know, performances at the, uh, Plaza Theater³. And then we also offer three, uh – what do they call them? Cabarets. Through the year. Um, one was[sic] just happened this Friday. Thursday? Thursday. Friday? Well, anyway, it just happened. And it was Friday. And *Uncut*'s a little racy. So that happens at the Parliament House, which is an appropriate setting to have racy kind of [laughs] – a racy show. And then the other one – one is called *Love Is*, which is sweet and comes[?] around Valentine's Day, which is the anniversary of the chorus. Valentine's Day. And then the other one I'm trying to [inaudible] continue off the top of my head right at the moment with the other ensemble or the outreach [inaudible]. Um, whatever it is that they're called.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson But we've been doing that for a long time. So have five performances that are kind of built into our schedule here.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson Aside from that.

Schneider And what were some of the songs and their content of the – of what you sang? Um, and was that typical or different for...

Peterson For the vigils?

Schneider ...the vigils? Yeah.

Peterson Uh, thankfully we had just finished a – a performance that – this spring that had a few songs that kind of lent to the subject matter of what would feel appropriate to sing. Uh, "True Colors" is one that kind of became a signature so to speak to the event. Uh, we sang that at the – the [Joy] MCC Church that first night. And they've done it many, many times since then. Um, it just works.

There were quite a few songs. Uh, I'm not really the best to tell you as far as pulling times off the top of my head. But, um, "You'll Never Walk Alone" has been used a lot. "True Colors". Um, I don't know. I can almost see the titles. But – and, uh, we had – we were preparing to go to Denver for the latest GALA Festival [door closes] right at the same time that Pulse happened. We'd already put together a different song format when we're preparing to learn songs to go to GALA this last, um, June. June or July. And then – July. And then changed and actually used music that had been from our just previous concert that we already pretty much knew. And pretty much sculpted the theme of the musical we presented to be appropriate to the tragedy at Pulse when we went to GALA.

³ The Plaza Live

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So that was a very interesting experience. Going to GALA right after that. Being with the larger gay community from across the country, uh, was extremely moving. Uh, the other choruses were very, uh, acknowledging of what our chorus had done. And how we were – had responded to the community’s need. And also, what had probably – I assume they were sensing would have affected us personally, being so close to the tragedy. Um, it was a very, uh – when you’re kind of hurt and you want to be with family. Or, you know, when you kind of want to retreat. It felt something like that on a – but on this global scale with so many people. It was so, uh, uplifting and heartwarming to realize that you could kind of let yourself down and – and repeatedly break into tears occasionally. Just because you’re remembering or you’re realizing how much you’ve been holding attention from what had happened. And trying to be there and be strong for the community. And yet, you have your own needs. Your own personal adjustment that you’re still going through. So they were – they were beautiful. All the choruses.

And – and especially during our performance when we were sculpting it to recognize what had happened at Pulse. And we had some visuals that went with the music. And it became a whole – that whole theater was just full of people emotionally responding and singing with us at one particular song. Um, I wish I could tell you which it was off the top of my head. But the whole place is trying to sing. And – and crying through it at the same time, which the chorus was even suffering a little bit on trying to keep ourselves together. It was such a memorable – everyone holding hands through this massive – it’s a big, huge theater that – where we were. It’s just really emotional.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson And helpful. Beautiful at the same time. It was hard. So...

Schneider Mm.

Peterson Yeah. But that’s been life.

0:21:34 **Community response to Pulse tragedy**

Schneider Mmhmm. Yeah. I was wondering what your thoughts have been about the reaction either of the other gay choruses or of the local communities or...

Peterson Local community?

Schneider ...everything. I’m curious what – yeah.

Peterson Um, I’m really surprised...

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Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson ...honestly. And proud of Orlando. And how it's – it seemed to step up to and recognize and embrace. I mean at – this tragedy certainly affected everybody in the local vicinity more personally because it was so close to home. But to have the sense that they were embracing the gay community and the Latin gay community. And just trying to comfort is how it felt. It felt like they were really ready to step up and – and try and protect and comfort.

Schneider Mm.

Peterson Especially those subsets of our – subsets of our community that may have felt it more personally. Um, and I still see some of that. And it's still – it's changed my concept of Orlando. As far as the culture, I always felt that it was a – it's a nice place. I've enjoyed living here. But it always seems for newcomers – I always hear that it's kind of hard to make friends. It's hard to meet people. It's hard to find a community to connect with. Um, and that seems much in contrast with what I saw happen after Pulse. And how the whole city seemed to react and want to – to mourn together and to recognize together. And to – and to support the people that were hurt personally as much as possible, too. It's been very beautiful.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson I really am proud and surprised at how – to the degree which this – that everybody stepped up [*sighs*].

Schneider Yeah. Did you, um, experience feedback as part of the gay chorus from [inaudible] – um, did you hear from people outside the local community? Um, I know you mentioned being at GALA. But was there anything else that you heard from other communities after Pulse happened?

Peterson Well, of course, my family. My family's across the coun – my sister's in Asheville[, North Carolina]. And, um, my parents live with my brother and his family – step-sister are all back in the Des Moines area still. Um, so you know that sense, it's kind of like when a hurricane happens or some other horrific thing, it's like family calls to check in. Friends from far away will call to check in to make sure you're alright. And there was some of that, too. You could tell that the whole country on different – to whatever degree that they would recognize what was happening here. It was very personal crisis for the people that are nearby. Anyway, I – I saw them and quite a bit.

And the news. I tend to listen to public radio, as I said. So public radio tends to be a little bit more socially maybe sensitive. Maybe minded. And so I did hear stories about things around the country. And people having vigils around the

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country. And it was nice to—to...

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson ...feel supported that way.

0:25:21 **Significance of Pulse before and after tragedy**

Schneider Um, what are your thoughts about—do you have—you mentioned you'd been to Pulse, but it maybe wasn't a central place for you. But what sort of—what did you think of it then? And what, if anything, does it mean to you or represent to you now?

Peterson That's a—well, initially it became one of those places where you have to make a choice. Are you prepared to drive by, of course, for the first couple of months. They were—I think it was a couple of months before I decided to travel down Orange Avenue. Um, and I was kind of glad it wasn't as—I was glad I finally did it. It wasn't as awful as I thought. And then, uh, I don't know. I just—it wasn't a real personal club for me. Like I said, I was thought it was more for a younger [inaudible]—uh, age group generally. It's a generalization.

But, um, the memorial of—that's been built there with people responding—I've seen many people like taking vigils to go and experience some sense of being closer to the people that were hurt and were killed. Uh, they're still real present. I mean just the other night we went to the vigil that, um—it was a[sic] art experience. They were trying to do healing with art. And created this big banner. And, uh, put it up on the side of the wall. And this was the first time apparently that they've allowed public inside the fencing that was put up as a perimeter to protect the—the building and—and the investigation that was going on initially.

So it—it was interesting. It kind of felt like an opportunity for—or a time for the community to start taking back a little bit. It's like to—a place that nobody seemed welcome inside of anymore. It was like a forbidden kind of sense about it. And now it feels like that's starting to be chipped away at. And that I guess I can—apparently, I understand that they may reestablish a cl—the club there. Or...

Schneider Mm.

Peterson ...I think that that's the plan. I don't really pay attention to this ultimately. But—or that there may be a memorial. Or I don't know what they're going to do. But, um—but I think that was like—it was an experience, again, where eventually it will be taken back. And every bill—everybody will have access to that. What was apparently a really central place for a community to meet. For all the folks that were frequent—frequently went there.

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But, um, it was kind of nice. I'm glad that they had that event. That started making [inaudible]. But hard to imagine actually walking in there. But everything will change. And everything does eventually heal. No matter what the trauma you experience in your life. Every – time always makes things okay again. All the time – or at least livable. So I can see them having a club again.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson [inaudible].

0:28:44 **Role of social media in aftermath of tragedy**

Schneider Mmhmm. Um, and did – did social media play any role in your experience of the aftermath of the shooting? I mean you mentioned the checking in.

Peterson The checking in.

Schneider [inaudible].

Peterson And then really moving was seeing the mosaics. People were creating mosaics of the people whose lives were lost immediately. Um, which was beautiful in a way because it made it more personal. You can see someone's face. And you can – it helps – it helps me sense that I had an emotional connection to the people that died. And I actually – although I'll never have known them, but it just – something about seeing human faces, and it – it helped. It helped make it more real and made the emotions seem to make sense.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson So that was really dramatic. Facebook really made that possible. Um, a much quicker way. You know, all the expressions of love. And all the outreaches that the chorus would do. There's always pictures taken. And posting so you can identify that you were there. And kind of helps create a, um – a – a record. Like a personal record, too. Just, you know – you can save posts. And now I have something that can ultimately go back and when I want to remember what that journey was like and what it felt like at different points of time after that happened. Um, it's a very beautiful thing that we have that. To – to personally archive events that happened to us to easy[sic].

0:30:29 **Long-term consequences of Pulse tragedy**

Schneider Mm. Um, so what do you hope that the long-term consequences of the Pulse shooting will be for the Orlando gay community, um, and for the larger city as a whole?

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Peterson Or even the country I...

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson ... hope. I—I thought of this fairly early on, too. It's like it seems so almost—I don't know. I almost feel a little bit of, um—a little bit of guilt on some level of wanting to see a silver lining when people's lives were taken. Where people's lives were so dramatically altered and hurt. Um, but I kind of felt that or sensed it that that potential existed kind of early on. It's like such an awful thing to see the way the country was reacting, and in particular the way Orlando was reacting, was very heartwarming. Very encouraging. Um, to further what has been such a long struggle as people have put themselves out there.

And many people have died over time as a result of a focused assault on gay people. But, uh, I've seen a lot change in my lifetime in that respect. Even to the point of gay marriage now being legal, which when I was a kid—when I was a teenager, never would have dreamt of such a thing ever. Not in my—from that vantage point, seeing what it was like to be gay. And that it was such a closeted thing. And—and, uh—and that people could get hurt. That—to think it could come to the point where finally the majority of people recognize and stand up and were willing to protect rights of gay people, too.

Um, so it kind of seems like we've come through so much already. And then to have such an awful event. And then to witness, because so much has already been done socially, where people are getting to the point where they seem to understand a little bit, that just like anybody else—that gay people have—need to be protected and cared for just like any other subjects in our country. Um, it kind of—it seems like there's some beautiful, divine plan. That ultimately, society is growing. Society is getting better towards—towards everybody's benefit. That I think the more inclusive we are, the more able to empathize with and care for people that are—have different experiences than what we have. That ultimately, we're all better off. That that's a much stronger place to be. Which is kind of somewhat helpful because the other influences across the world don't seem like we're going that way. There's so much hate. And the terrorism. And all the misunderstanding. People don't understand each other. And people get all confused about what other people's motivations are. So much destruction happens, but this is kind of a case of—we're seeing something getting better. That maybe for the human race in general that there's some—that there's better hope that we can continue to be better at taking care of each other.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson So just a nice piece of evidence that there is hope.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson Yeah.

0:34:32 **Significance of Orlando Gay Chorus**

Schneider Um, do you have any other reflections about the Pulse shooting or being a member of the gay chorus? Or anything else that – that you'd like to talk about?

Peterson Um, the Pulse shooting? No. The gay chorus is, uh – it's kind of interesting 'cause I'm becoming one of the older members in the chorus now [*laughs*]. Um, 'cause when I joined, let's see – '99 I would have been – I was 41? Yeah. 40. I was 40 when I joined the chorus, which is – well, it's still relatively – and I'm still relatively young. But – but a lot of time has gone on. And we have younger people now that are part of the chorus. We've always been really good at having a pretty diverse, uh, age group. Like we have some folks that have been in their eighties. I think we had a member that was 80 plus. And we've had some that were actually minors still. And, um, a parent would join the chorus as a support person. And then the minor child was singing with the chorus. We've had that happen more than once.

So, uh, it's interesting to see the young people and – that get to experience – especially young gay people because of that community we have. And to see how their lives are so much different than what my life was like going through those times of [*inaudible*]. Um, it's nice. It's a – it's something that's alive. It's a community that continues to grow. It has generations. It's, um – it's – it's very much like a big family in a way. It's still – and some of the relationships are actually in some ways more important than some folks develop than maybe the relationships that they currently have with their family members. 'Cause there are still people that suffer from not having support. Or – or have relationships that are severely damaged with their biological family. Hopefully a lot less than it used to be. But that does certainly still happen. Even with the young folks. So in that respect, also, the chorus becomes more than just a – it becomes friendships. And it becomes people you rely on. And people that will be there when crises happen. And we kind of take care of each other. And respect[?] us[?]. So it's interesting how the chorus is more than just a singing group. And more than just a, uh, social advancement movement. That it's also a huge community of people. And it's kind of nice. That's how I feel about the chorus.

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson [*laughs*].

Schneider Is there anything else you wanted to share or talk about?

Peterson [sighs] No. Not off the top of my head [laughs].

Schneider Mmhmm.

Peterson Yeah.

Schneider Well, thank you so much. We really appreciate that you were willing to do an interview.

Peterson Thanks for all of the effort to – this is a beautiful thing...

Schneider Yeah.

Peterson ... that you're doing. How many interviews do you think you're having?

Schneider Um [sighs]. Maybe about 30. I'm – I'm not positive.

Peterson Oh. It's...

Schneider But I know a good number...

Peterson ...yeah.

Schneider ...at least. Yeah. Yeah.

Peterson Hm. That's a good third, approximately...

Schneider Yeah.

Peterson ...of the chorus. That's great.

Schneider Yeah. Thank you so much.

Peterson Thank you.

End of Interview