

Oral Memoirs
of
Richard Lamberty

An Interview Conducted by

Geoffrey Cravero

October 11, 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

Interviewer: Geoffrey Cravero

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.

Geoffrey Cravero graduated in the Spring of 2015 with a Master of Arts in History from the University of Central Florida and continued to work for RICHES, collecting and editing data on Central Florida History. Richard Lamberty is a member of the Orlando Gay Chorus, same-sex ballroom dancer, and software developer.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Richard Lamberty is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 11, 2016.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Richard Lamberty, a member of the Orlando Gay Chorus, same-sex ballroom dancer, and software developer. This interview was conducted by Geoffrey Cravero at the Center for Humanities and Digital Research at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, Florida, on October 11th, 2016. Some of the topics covered include a biographical summary, his educational history, discovering dance, his

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family history, his relationship with his father, same-sex ballroom dancing, the Orlando Gay Chorus, Orlando Cloggers, becoming a dance instructor, losing communication and physical skills from rheumatoid arthritis, world travels as a dance instructor, homosexuality in Japan, the end of his dance career, North American Same-Sex Partner Dance Association, the history of same-sex dancing, the kinesiology of dance, Dance Vision International Dancers Association (DVIDA) American Smooth Bronze Syllabus manual, reasons for joining the Orlando Gay Chorus, the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub and its aftermath, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) Festival, being a public figure and representing Orlando, violence against homosexuals, meeting a transsexual Muslim, the John F. Kennedy Space Center (KSC) vigil for victims of the Pulse massacre, homosexuality in the space and defense industry, turning tragedy into positive change, gun control reform, the community response to Pulse tragedy, the significance of the rainbow flag, the long-term consequences of the Pulse tragedy, and the rise of fundamentalism.

Richard Lamberty

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Geoffrey Cravero
October 11, 2016
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Cravero Alright. Let's see. This is Geoffrey Cravero, and I'm conducting an oral history with Richard Lamberty of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview is being conducted in the conference room of the Center for — of — Center for *[laughs]* Humanities and Digital Research at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida, on Tuesday, October 11th, 2016 *[clears throat]*.

Lamberty Which, by the way, happens to be National Coming Out Day.

Cravero National Coming Out Day. I saw the s — I saw the sign earlier. Excellent, good timing. So, uh, Mr. Lamberty, thank you for speaking with us today. If you would, let's start by having you state your name and telling us a little about where you're from.

Lamberty Richard Lamberty. L-A-M-B — as in boy — E-R-T-Y. Um, I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and we moved to Orlando when I was five. Um, we stayed here until I was 16, and then we briefly moved to Maryland, where I graduated high school, and then I came back to Orlando and attended Rollins [College], um, and then after Rollins, I actually came to UCF¹ for almost two years, during which time I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and they put me on a medication. Um, one of the side effects of that medication was I lost the ability to read, write, and speak, and so I was unable to complete my graduate degree at that time, um — ended[sic] up moving to New Mexico, where my parents had gone, and enrolled in the university out there to, uh, work in their computer science artificial intelligence department, which by the time I got there, was gone, and so there was not a single person left on campus that even knew that I existed, and there was no one to help me with paperwork or any of the transfers of credit or anything. It was start over.

Cravero *[laughs]*.

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Lamberty [laughs] Um, continued to work on the degree out there, but got hired to work on a NASA² project that I did for five years, and then moved to California, where I stayed for another 18 years, before coming back to Orlando in 2005, um, basically, to be closer to family, and so I have lived here in Orlando ever since.

Um, I started dancing—you were ask—gonna ask about the dancing thing—I started dancing when I was 10 years old, and I danced first with the Orlando Cloggers, which was a— a youth, square-dance clogging group that was sponsored by the City of Orlando, and from that I got involved in what’s called “round dancing,” which is kind of a hybrid between square dancing and ballroom dancing—ballroom dances and figures, but it’s cued in the same way that a square dance is called, and then directly involved in ballroom from that, and, uh—but because of the arthritis issues then it was like, *This is not gonna be what I do with my life*. I have to have something else to do, but as long as I’m able I can dance, and I’ve continued to do so for most of my life, um, and that’s taken me all over the world. In fact, I just got back from two weeks in Europe, where I was teaching for the 22nd year that I’ve been over there teaching at this event in Germany.

0:03:06

Family

Lamberty Um, you know, life in Orlando—mostly what my life about[sic] here is I’m taking care of my elderly mother. I am her primary caretaker, and, um, and then I do what work is available to me, in addition to that, and, you know, in my field if it can be, so designing software, computer systems and things, or doing people’s websites and such, but, um, mostly my life is about dealing with family, taking care of family.

Cravero And, uh, what d—what did your family do? It was your—did your mother work? Or...

Lamberty Uh, my father was an electrical engineer. Um, he had seven children. I’m the fifth of seven, and, uh, so my mother was basically a stay-at-home mom for a lot that, and then didn’t start really working until I was about 16, um, in Maryland, and then...

[phone rings]

Lamberty Go away.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty And don’t do that again.

² National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

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- Cravero** [laughs].
- Lamberty** I'll make that stop.
- Cravero** [laughs].
- Lamberty** I should've thought of that first.
- Cravero** Oh, that's alright.
- Lamberty** The only person who can make my phone ring now is my mother.
- Cravero** [laughs].
- Lamberty** [laughs]. Okay, um, my father was an electrical engineer. He did a wide variety of things for Swift[?] Martin Marietta [Corporation]. Well, actually, in Chicago, we moved down here for a job at Martin – which was before it was Lockheed Martin – and then, um, up to Maryland. Hated it. Cold weather. Not a[sic] interesting job for him. Came back to Florida at Harris Corporation, where they got involved with the satellite project, um, and then eventually ended up with TRW [Inc.] Space and Defense and retired from them. Um, I worked with TRW Space and Defense – was my first real job in my industry, and then, um, that – on the same project as my father, which was an extraordinary privilege. My father was brilliant and exceedingly humble, um, but just this brilliant man, and I had the privilege of spending five years working with him, and just, you know, being around that mind every day and seeing how he viewed the world, which was fascinating because growing up I didn't experience my parents quite that way. Um, I grew up in a household where debate was the normal form of communication [laughs].
- Cravero** [laughs].
- Lamberty** You know, and I never knew what my parents thought about anything, because if one of 'em would say something, the other one'd automatically take the opposite position, and so what did, you know – what did either of them actually believe about the world was almost impossible for me to determine, and, um, you know, in that time period, I actually got to learn about my father, and one of the things that I learned was that he wasn't ashamed of me, because growing up, he never spoke to me, um, and I – I didn't know why. It turned out he didn't speak to me because he was partially deaf and he couldn't hear me. So when my voice really changed then he could hear me, you know? Alone – the two of us, then he could hear me, and I walked into – he worked in a trailer in the desert, and I walked into his office one day for some reason, and on the wall was a framed poster of a dance exhibition that I had done when I was at Rollins, and I went home and I said to my mother, "Did you know that Dad has the poster from Rollins on the wall in – office?" And she said, "Oh, yes. Your father's very

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proud of you,” and up until that very moment, what I had assumed was that he was embarrassed about me because I was a dancer and, you know, not like his other sons, and that really – that wasn’t true. So, you know, that was just – it was remarkable, and, you know, in an era where being gay was not okay, you know, having the security clearance and being gay was not okay, um, it was a very hard thing to do, um, and, you know, my parents were very Catholic. Uh, you know, like “know the pope” kind of Catholic. Um, there’s a photograph of my mother with John Paul II – just the two of them. You know, so it was a, you know – that was not okay.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty And yet, there this poster was. It was an incredible experience.

0:07:24

Same-sex dancing and the Orlando Gay Chorus

Lamberty Um, but no. When I came back to Orlando, I continued to dance, and I had gotten involved with same-sex ballroom dancing. Uh, you know, two men dancing together, two women dancing together – which again, two women dancing together has always been socially acceptable; two men dancing together has not, and so, um – and I had a partner here in Orlando. We trained, we worked hard, we eventually won world titles together, and then he quit, and I didn’t have anything to do, so I had heard the [Orlando Gay] Chorus sing, and I thought, *I can try this. I don’t sing, but I can try this*, you know? I was in chorus in seventh and eighth grade, but, um, I didn’t get a good grade, and when I asked the teacher why she told me I didn’t have a good voice, and so I quit singing, and I never sang again. I mean I wouldn’t sing “Happy Birthday” to people for 35 years. So I joined the chorus and then, you know, started singing with them, and it was fun. It was – I didn’t have to be good. There were [laughs] zero expectations that I actually be good at anything. Not like work, not like dancing, you know – just show up, sing, gave a good time, and, you know, as it happens, apparently, I’ve gotten to the point where I’m okay as a singer, and, you know, had the – the privilege of being a part of the chorus now for six years, and it’s really – it is – it’s a lot of fun. Wonderful thing.

Cravero That’s fantastic. Um, so, uh, can you tell us a little more about how you got involved in, uh, ballroom and Latin dancing? Um, what sort of work, uh, did you do as a board member on the – I saw that you did...

Lamberty Oh.

Cravero The North American Same-Sex Partner Dance Association [NASSPDA]...

Lamberty You Googled me.

Cravero I Googled.

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Lamberty Yes.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty Okay, my parents were square dancers. They had taken a square dance class here in Orlando, and they had what was called “hoedown,” which was in the parking lot of the, uh, um, uh, Colonial Plaza Mall in where – what now would be the – I guess the Walgreens or the CVS is in that corner – that was parking. They put up a tent one day and they just had the square dance callers with a whole bunch of people, and people were dancing in the parking lot [door closes], and I saw the Orlando Cloggers perform, and that’s what I wanted to do. I wasn’t quite old enough yet. You had to be 10 and I wasn’t 10 yet, and so as soon as I turned 10, then I could start the classes, and it was amazing. It was run by the city. It was \$5 per family for the season – not \$5 a week, not \$5 a person. It was \$5 for the entire thing – for three of us to go and take the classes, and I loved it. I thought it was awesome. I loved the dancing, so, you know, I learned to clog, I learned to square dance, and then I learned the round dancing, which was like ballroom, and, um, we moved to Maryland when I was in high school, and I can dance, and I got a job at an independent ballroom dancing studio as a dance teacher at the age of 16. I – and this is 1975 – ’75 – ’76 – and I was making \$16 an hour, which is basically still what a – a beginning dance instructor makes – same – same thing – but I was making \$16 an hour teaching dance lessons, and I think the minimum wage was \$2.85 [laughs]. So it’s like, *Woo hoo*. I had money. It’s like I’m 16 years old, I’ve got this job that I can – that I love, and I have money. It was amazing and – and I loved the dancing.

0:11:06

Living with rheumatoid arthritis

Lamberty Um, when I developed [rheumatoid] arthritis and – you know, what they told me was I’d never walk again. I was 100 percent disabled, and that was while I was here at UCF. You know, the campus was not that big, as it is now, but I couldn’t walk across campus, and the medication had this profound effect on me. I – I couldn’t communicate, um, you know, I couldn’t write coherently, I couldn’t make sense of what I was reading, and I couldn’t – I could not talk intelligently, um, and fortunately, there was a professor here in the Computer Science Department who understood what was going on, and she advised me to, you know, get the medical records brought in and have my record expunged and sealed so that all of that failing grade stuff that showed up, because of that, would not show up on my transcript ever, and without that I would have simply just failed, uh, graduate school, and probably never been able to get back in, um, and then, you know, got enough better that I could move and get back into school and get a job that was, uh – that I loved, um, and tried to dance, you know, as best I could, and it wasn’t always easy physically.

I was – I was allergic to the non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, and so any of them that I would take would cause some kind of a very unpleasant neurological

side effect, so it was just better to be in pain. So basically, for 30 years—so I just lived in pain, and didn't tell anybody. You didn't talk about it. Um, you know, if it was a bad day, you just tried to dance with your partner not touching actually, you know? It's like you're s—and don't say. Don't s—never tell anybody why you can't do anything, you know? Um, yeah, it was really horrible, um, pretending, you know—pretending about a lot of things—pretending about being okay, pretending about not being gay, pretending about, you know, that my brain was working normally when it wasn't. Basically, life was a whole lot about pretending a lot of things, and very painful—physically, psychologically, emotionally painful experience to live that way all the time.

0:13:43

Changing attitudes towards homosexuality in Japan

Lamberty

But, yeah, I got, you know—I danced as much as I could, and slowly, slowly over time. Basically, most dancers peak in their late 20s or early 30. It's like, *Mm, yeah. Not until I was in my late-40s, [laughs]* you know, and, um, you know, d—did what teaching I could over the years. I mean, I've been traveling to Europe for over 20 years and teaching there, um, uh, various places around the United States, Canada, Japan. Uh, we did—a couple years ago, we did a three week tour in Japan—six different teaching events while we were there. It was just amazing—which in and of itself was fascinating because, you know, there's a large community of dancers in Japan, and they knew of me and they—they would—when they would come to the United States, there[sic] was[sic] always be at the events that I was at, um, and they brought people over all the time to teach, and I asked—was a big, big international convention that I was teaching at—there was a huge group of Japanese there, and I got invited to the room party with the Japanese—was the only white person at this party, and, um, so I asked, you know—it's like, you know, "When will I get invited to Japan?" And this—there was this discussion. This rapid discussion in Japanese, and the woman who spoke English best took me into the—the bathroom in the connected hotel rooms and closed the door and said to me, "We cannot invite you." I was like, "Well, why?" And she goes, "Because whoever invites you would have to accept your shame." I was like, "Oh."

So when I got contacted a couple years ago about coming over, there was an American woman living in Japan—I didn't know her history, but she was an American woman living in Japan with the dancing—and so I wrote to her and said, "I'd love to come, but, you know, you need to know," and she said to me, you know, "It's not how it is now." Things changed. Things changed because finally, the Japanese government had to acknowledge that there were people in Japan dying of AIDS,³ and so everything changed when they acknowledged that—that these are Japanese people; therefore, they're Japanese, and the laws changed, and the way that people behaved changed, and now it was just not a problem, and this was like, you know, social change on this huge scale in a

³ Acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

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couple of years, you know? Things that we have been fighting for in this country for 20 or 30 years and still don't have – that they could achieve because, as a society, it's more important that you're Japanese than it is that you're gay, you know? So she arranged this trip, we went, we had this amazing time, and it didn't matter at all, you know? It didn't matter at all. It matters more here than it does there. Um, you know, I mean I'm – and I still – I love dancing. Although at this point, I'm probably done. I don't have a partner anymore.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty And if I can't dance on a regular basis then I lose the ability to dance, which anybody would. Any skill that you've developed, if you don't use it, you lose it. It's, you know – especially physical skills, but in my case, it's not just that. Dancing's what's kept me well. Um, if I don't move, I can't move, and I've tried other things. I've, you know, gone to gyms, I've done swimming, I've done all kinds of things. The only thing that's been really effective is the dancing that I do, and so basically, you know, 47 years of dancing and I don't have a partner. If I don't have a partner, I can't dance. If I can't dance, I don't know how long it is that I can walk. That's the equation. I mean, you know, we talked – I – walking over here from the parking garage was an ordeal, and that's been, you know – it's four – four months that I haven't danced regularly. Going to Germany and having to dance all day, every day, you know? It's like the first day was just horrible, and after that it was like, *Oh, dancing. My body is happy.*

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty "It's fine." Yeah, so I get distracted easily. It's okay [laughs].

Cravero Oh [laughs].

Lamberty [laughs] I'm chatty.

0:18:05 **History of same-sex dancing**

Cravero Um, I was gonna – I have a question following up on that – is, um, what kind of – did you face any sort of challenges, um, early on, um, in a same-sex partner dance organization? Like what did you...

Lamberty Oh, you were – asked about NASSPDA.⁴ That was not the first.

Cravero Mmhmm.

Lamberty Um, the first organization kind of disappeared. It[?] was the United States same-sex dance, uh, organization that I was one of the founders of. I was also a – a – an

⁴ North American Same-Sex Partner Dance Association.

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honorary founding member of the European same-sex dance organization,⁵ and then, at the same time that those two were formed, there was a world organization that was formed that I was on the committee that help form it, write the bylaws, was an officer of, and then there was a dispute about, you know: was that the right way to do this? Did it happen too fast? All that. So that organization shut down. The North American one disappeared, and a couple years later, the, um – or the U.S. one disappeared. Then the – they decided to do – try again, and we created the North American Same-Sex Partner Dance Association – NASSPDA – and I was, again, one of the founders, uh – original co – co-president with a woman, um, Barbara Zoloth, was one – one of my students for many years, and, um, you know, then – actually, I was the first honorary member of the organization when I went off the board. They voted me in, and, uh, you know – so I – I’ve been involved in the history of same-sex dancing in the United States since essentially its beginning.

Um, I ran the first, uh – well, not the first. The first same-sex dance competition was a long time ago in New York – the first one we know of – but it was a one-time thing, and then nothing happened for years and years, but I put one together with, uh, my partner that[sic] I went to the Gay Games in 1998 with – Tom Slater – and a woman – a straight woman that[sic] was helping us – Ava Kaye – and, um, then the three of us decided this was important, and we put together, um, it was – I think it was “March Madness” – might have been the first one. It was either “March Madness” or “April Follies,” and then, the next one, you know – we did series of them that – that I ran with the two of them for many years, starting around 2000 – 2001 – and then, when I moved away, I ran the next year remotely, you know, went back for it, but it was too much. So I turned it over to this organization – a non-profit in the [San Francisco] Bay area that has run it ever since, and so it’s the longest-running same-sex, uh, dance competition in North America, and longer than many of the ones in Europe, um, and, uh, so there’s the – you know, very small community of people involved in that in this country. We don’t have a history of partner dancing in this country in the way they do in Europe and other places in the world, but there are people that are[sic] really love it. It’s this wonderful thing to do. It’s social, it’s engaging, it challenges the mind and the body, um, it’s great exercise in a gentle way, um, and it’s fun. It’s just a tremendous amount of fun.

Um, competing in the same-sex world is so different than the mainstream world. The mainstream world is very cutthroat, and the same-sex world is, you know, the – the – the people who’ve been to mainstream competition that come to one of the same-sex events is like, “What? It’s like, “You s – you act like you like each other. You know, this isn’t like a competition. It’s like a party. It’s a celebration,” and that’s exactly what it feels like. We are celebrating something that we can’t have. I mean there were rules against same-sex couples competing, uh, in regular competitions. Some of that has changed now, but there were rules against it. You

⁵ European Same-Sex Dancing Association (ESSDA).

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weren't allowed, you know, a—and it's not just that you, you know, could if you wanted to. Y—you weren't allowed, and while I wasn't directly involved in a lot of the politics in the mainstream world to do that, um, I was behind the people who were, you know? I wasn't—they hated me in the mainstream world of ballroom dancing from day one because I was an out[-of-the-closet] gay man doing ballroom dancing, and there were none. It was like, "Y—you can't do that." I got told when I was trying to compete as an amateur, and then as a professional, "Sh—y—you can't be 'out.' You ca—you have to stop talking about this. You can't bring a boyfriend." I was like, "Yeah. No, I don't—I y—I don't need you to dance. I don't do this for a living. You can't make me," and so—oh, they did not like me [*laughs*]. I mean I—when I was still trying to be an amateur, there were actually lawsuits filed against me. Try to keep me from dancing—trying to, you know, declare me "not an amateur." I was—I had a sports lawyer. It was—I mean, I f—finally quit. I was spending about \$5,000 a year defending my amateur status with the lawyer. It was like, *This is ridiculous*. This thing's already so expensive. I was spending \$20-25,000 a year dancing, and on top of that, I've got to spend lawyers' fees? Nobody else has to do this. So I just—I gave up. I let them m—make me go pro, and then, you know, dance in Europe more than the United States, because in Europe nobody knows who I am. They don't care. Then you get judged on the dancing.

Uh, you know—you know, this thing that I'm passionate about. I just love doing it. I love teaching, I love dancing, you know? The, um—the next world championships for same-sex dancing is gonna be in Miami in August of 2017 at the, uh—the World Outgames, and I won't be dancing, you know? I've—I've danced at every Gay Game since 1998. I'm the only one. The Gay Games in 1998 was the first time they had dancing, and my partner and I took third. We danced in Sydney[, Australia], and then, let's see—it was, uh, Amsterdam[, Netherlands], Sydney[, Australia], I wanna say Chicago[, Illinois], Cologne[, Germany], Cleveland[, Ohio]. The next one's Paris[, France] in '18, and, uh—and then the Outgames. We danced in Montreal[, Canada] for the first one. We didn't go to the next ones, and then, um—and then it'll be Miami. I don't have a partner. I don't get to dance. It's like a four-hour drive from where I live, and I won't be dancing. It's just so miserable. I don't have a partner, and it's something—you can't do it alone, you know, and it's really—you know, it's hard to reflect on—the 47 years is coming to an end, and I don't have a say in that. It's just gonna happen.

0:25:04

Dance Vision International Dancers Association (DVIDA) and the kinesiology of dance

Cravero It's tough [*sighs*]. Um, well, let me see. I—I—you already discussed, uh—I saw that you had to—you overcame rheumatoid arthritis, actually, in a profile I was reading online. Um...

Lamberty Oh, was it the one in *The Orlando Sentinel*?

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- Cravero** I think it was, yeah.
- Lamberty** Yeah.
- Cravero** [laughs].
- Lamberty** With a picture of me and the dog.
- Cravero** That's right.
- Lamberty** Yeah.
- Cravero** Then that was the one.
- Lamberty** [laughs].
- Cravero** Um, oh...
- Lamberty** You'll see.
- Cravero** I also saw there that you did, um—you were a technical consultant on the rewrite of a DVIDA⁶ American Smooth Bronze Syllabus manual. Could...
- Lamberty** Oh, yeah, DVIDA.
- Cravero** Could you explain what that is and describe the work you did on that?
- Lamberty** Um, DVIDA is, uh, oh, Dance Vision—D—Dance Vision International—DVIDA—of—Dance Vision International is the company. DA—o I don't remember what it stands for. A friend of mine, um, Diane Jarmolow, that I used to coach and have known forever, um, she got—she contacted me about helping with the manual, which was very nice. It was great. It was really lovely to be asked, but I'm very technical. People know that I have this profound very deep understanding of dancing, which happened while I lived in New Mexico. Um, I couldn't dance much. It was, you know, a 60-mile drive to the closest dance studio, which I would do. There[?] was a—a woman there that did some dancing that I could do, but we were only allowed to dance after the studio closed at night, 'cause the owner didn't want people seeing us because we didn't fit the profile—she was the teacher there, and he was afraid that we would scare people off, you know? It's like wrong level, wrong kind of dancing for what the studio was about, and so two weeknights a week, I would drive to El Paso[, Texas], be there at 10 o'clock at night, and dance 'til midnight, and drive home and have to be at work at seven in the morning.

⁶ Dance Vision International Dancers Association.

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Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty Um, but, um, while I was there, I met this woman who did ballet, and her husband – fiancé was a PhD kinesiologist at New Mexico State University and he wanted a project, but, you know, at the time – this was when they were doing a lot of things with, you know, analyzing on video tape athletic performance, ‘cause they were looking at, you know, runners on treadmills or swimmers in float tanks or cyclists on stationary bicycles, and seeing, you know, how do you optimize the human body in motion – and he didn’t want to do any of that stuff. So what I did was taught his w – his fiancé how to ballroom dance while he analyzed what we were doing, which, basically, no one had ever done before. No one had ever looked at the – the – the actual human body while it was dancing in this way, and n – not just one body, but two – how two bodies worked together, and he did this analysis of it with – with knowing nothing about dancing. So all of the language of dancing that had been used for 80-90 years to teach it had nothing to do with what he wrote about...

Cravero Right.

Lamberty Or what he analyzed. So not, “Here’s what somebody has always said about what we’re doing,” but, “This is what the bodies are doing,” and I – so he wrote about that and then I got all that information, and then I had that, so I could write about dancing in – in the dance world, and I wrote papers that would get published about here’s why the feet do what they do, here’s the way that your hold actually works in the frame – you know, not what Patrick Swayze says about it in *Dirty Dancing*...

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty But what’s actually going on, and that kind of revolutionized the way that dancing was looked at all over the world, and my – my work got spread all over, um, and so because of that I became well-known for this level of technical understanding, and when Diane needed help with the new manuals they were writing, then I got an email. It’s like, “You willing?” It’s like [claps hands] yes.” [laughs].

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty “I’ve been waiting for this.”

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty “Fix the stuff that’s wrong.”

Cravero [laughs].

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Lamberty And so, yeah. I worked on those manuals, and, in fact, my former partner is now working on the new set. He's up in, uh, Indiana, and he was actually just down here for three days to talk to me about it, 'cause he's actually – he's now the consultant for the next set of stuff that's being done, um, but yeah, I got a credit in the – in the – in the book and everything, and it's like "technical consultant," and it was all this weird stuff. What's the difference between "brush to" and "brush toward"? What's the difference between a "brush" and a "collect"? You know, it's like how to – what's the difference between "side and slightly forward" and "forward and slightly side," and it's like all this really technical stuff, which I'm well-suited to because I love language, you know, from my own issues with language – couldn't speak for a long time. I love language. I'm a mathematician. So, you know, my – I had a double major at Rollins – mathematics and English – and the dancing is mathematical. The partner dancing is a – is a mathematical construct actually, and then I had all this understanding of what was going on because of this analysis that had been done by this PhD kinesiologist. It's like, you know – it's perfect. Love it.

Cravero So cool.

Lamberty Yeah.

0:30:13 **Joining the Orlando Gay Chorus**

Cravero [laughs] So, um, could you tell us, uh – so you joined the, uh, [Orlando] Gay Chorus. You talked a little bit about how you got involved. Um, do you have a favorite production that you did that you can recall?

Lamberty Um, no [laughs].

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty It's – it's funny. I don't have a sticky memory for lyrics. Lyrics are so hard for me to learn – that they don't stick in my brain very well, and, uh, so, you know, people will say, "Oh, we sang this five years ago," and I'm going, "Really? I was here then. Did we? I don't remember," um, but I – I love singing with the chorus. I – I have no interest in doing any of the solo stuff or anything like that. I have zero – I love singing with the chorus, and we do two major concerts a year – the spring and the holiday. Um, I like the spring concerts, but I tend to love the holiday stuff because the music is different, you know? The – the Christmas stuff, the holiday stuff in general – it's just got this wonderful character, and, uh, learning – learning about music. I mean, I always had to know something about music because of the dancing. I played piano for several years and I – it was the first thing – I didn't understand at the time, but it hurt. It got to the point where it hurt, and so I quit, and then I was a great believer in *I'm young and healthy. Park across campus and walk*, and, uh, at Rollins, I was in the math program. The math courses were on the fourth floor of the [Archibald Granville] Bush Science

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Center. I always took the stairs. I got to the point where I couldn't climb the stairs. So I didn't know what was going on, um, but, you know, how did I get involved with the chorus? My partner quit, and I thought, *Well, I won't be dancing. I need something to do that's interesting, that will challenge my mind, that will be fun, that will get me out in the world,* 'cause I don't have a regular job. I don't meet people. I don't, you know, have people at work. I don't go out to lunch. I don't meet people. *So I'll join the chorus. It'll be fun,* and it has been. It's really lovely, um, but—and I was afraid to sing, 'cause I hadn't—I'd been told I didn't sing well. Well, they didn't care, you know?

Now, it's a little different. The—the chorus actually is[sic] improved dramatically from then. Well, you know, the work of Jim Brown—here at UCF—was our director at the time that I joined, and he did great work with the chorus, and now we have a new director, who's very, very choral. Very, you know—the sound is gonna be the sound kind of thing, and, uh, I don't know that I could get in now. You know, if I had—if I tried to join now, I doubt that they would take me. Now, I'm okay. I mean I've learned, but, you know, between the two of them, I learned a lot. Understanding a music that's fundamentally different. I love that. I love learning, and then being with the group and doing.

So, you know, particular thing that we sing that I like the best? No, no. I mean, every concert there's something that I end up really loving, which is usually a surprise. It's not the thing that I think at first that I'm gonna like, and, you know, something that's not my favorite, you know—sing it anyway, um, and most of the stuff is like, *Oh, this is fun or not,* you know? Some things are more fun to sing. Some things—just the sound of them. We did, um, in the last concert before we went to Denver for GALA⁷—one of the things we sang was a song for—“A Prayer for Children,” and it's an old s—piece. It was written, um, I think about Croatia during the [Croatian] War [of Independence] there, and it's gorgeous. It's hard, but it's so beautiful. Um, when I first joined it was like I had to be surrounded by other people singing my part, and so it was—you know, it's like, *Mm.* I can't stand next to somebody who's doing anything different than me. I don't sing that well, and now, normally, where I get placed is standing next to the altos. I sing bass—I sing low bass. So it's like bass, baritone—we usually sing the same thing, but not always—and then the altos, and so I'm standing next to an alto and the—in the front, and I can hear the rest of the chorus, and it's so beautiful sometimes. I mean, there's pieces that we do—the fun stuff I love. It's great and fun to sing, but the s—I love the things that the sound of them is—it's amazing to experience, and that's what I've always looked for in the dance music, you know—the sound of the music that I choose for my own choreography is what I'm interested in, but, you know, chorus is great.

It's—it's always been interesting to belong, you know? There's—like any other human endeavor and organization, there's groups that form and factions, and

⁷ Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses.

the politics of it and all that. It's normal. I'm used to that, but at the heart of it, there's this thing that we're doing something that matters as a group. Um, when the chorus was formed 26 years ago, you know, the – the small group of people that did that, they were risking, you know, employment. You know, to be associated with a gay group publicly like that, many of them could have been fired for it. Um, it was a brave thing to do then, um, and y – you know, it's not like that n – now. We belong. It's okay in Orlando.

0:36:00

Mass shooting at Pulse nightclub

Lamberty

But, you know, this summer's been kind of insane. We had had our concert, and the – the weekend of the shooting at Pulse there were several things going on. Um, every year right around that time there is the Orange Blossom [Dance] Festival, which is a big country western dance competition, and I always try to go. Um, well, at least one night, go by, dance and visit with people, 'cause I know a lot of people, and if like – convention friends – you see them once a year, and – 'cause I don't go to the other stuff, and I'm not a country western dancer, but some of these people do other things. Some of them are involved in the same-sex ballroom, um, and it's often my birthday, 'cause my birthday's June 11th, and so, normally what would happen is I would go on the Saturday. It's the better night. If you go Friday, people don't stay up that late 'cause a lot of them have to get up in the morning and compete – dance with their students or dance in some way, and Saturday's better. A lot of the competition is over. The stuff on Sunday is different, and so, you know, go there, dance all evening. Around midnight or so, get a group of people and we'll go out. Go someplace where there is music, um, and – music that you can dance to – partner dance to, and that has, in fact, been Pulse in the past, eh, when it matched up. Latin Night – if it was going on – e could go there and dance. That'd be great.

Um, this year, I went on Friday because Saturday night we had one of our, uh, non-outreach – there's another word – I – I forget this word every time I go to do it, uh – cabaret. We have three cabaret performances a year. One of them's at the Parliament House. It's called "Uncut." It's the raunchy one, and then we have the – the, um – the h – February Valentine's Day one. That's the love one, and then, the – we have the summer one, and this year, it was early in the summer. It's often later, and, um – and it happened to be on that Saturday, and since it was my birthday weekend – I wasn't singing. I – it was like, *I'll go*, and they had these VIP's tickets with the reception and the dinner and then the thing, and it's like, *I'll go to that*. So I had the ticket and I went. It was wonderful, had great time, and then it was done and nobody wanted to really go out, and I did not want to drive all the way out to this hotel and see what's going on because it was late. Any other year, I would have been at the hotel with the dancers and we would have been going to Pulse and arriving about 12:30 and staying until they closed or later – make them stay open and play music. So I would have had, you know, 25-30 people from out of town, who just love to dance, be there with me, and I just, you know – when – *I'm tired. I think I'll go home*. That was the decision.

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So Sunday morning, I wake up. I look at my phone and I—there's all these text messages. "Are you okay?" "Are you okay?" And I'm thinking, *It was one singer. Yes, I know we sing at The Plaza [Live], you know, People know we sing at The Plaza. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine,* and then I get into the shower and turn on the radio [laughs]. It was like, *Turn off the shower, go back to the phone.* It's like, "Oh, my God. I—I had no idea," you know—listening to the news. I was like, *Wow, you know, nut for being tired, I would have been there. I would[?], uh—bringing people.*

So I don't—I'm not a Facebook person really, but I looked to see, and I saw that there was gonna be a special Mass. The, um—there's a gay, Catholic group in Orlando, and the priest who runs that, uh, used to sing in the chorus with us, and so I take my mother to Mass every Sunday—very Catholic—in Winter Park—St. Margaret Mary [Catholic Church]—very affluent—and, you know—and after Mass and I was waiting to see would[sic] they say anything, and they—and they did. Um, it wasn't hugely specific, but it was, you know—they acknowledged what had happened, and the violence. Not that it was a gay attack or anything, but—but at least they acknowledged it at Mass, and we left immediately from there and went to the—to the place, which is a bar, you know? St. Matthew's [Tavern at the Orlando Beer Garden]. Is—it used to be I wanna say Revolution—on Mills[Avenue]...

Cravero Right.

Lamberty Next to the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community] Center [of Central Florida]. Alright, that's where they have Mass, and so we went, and, you know, we s—we went to Mass there, and, you know, at some point in the afternoon, there was a message that came out about—we had been invited to sing at, um, Joy MCC,⁸ and I was like, "Absolutely, I'll be there." It was massive. When[?] you show up and there's all these cameras, and they have relegated them to this corner in the back, and there's[sic] way too many people, and there's some seating reserved in the front for the chorus, and there's not enough. There's so many of us that showed up, and I felt terrible. I had to sit, 'cause I—I couldn't stand. My hip hurt, my knee hurt. I couldn't—I couldn't stand for the whole thing. I had to take a chair away from somebody else, you know, but—and then, it came time to sing. So we lined up in the front and, um, we had "True Colors" and, um, "You'll Never Walk Alone," and we sang, and, um, by the time I got home, you know, I looked at Facebook and there was a video that had been posted. It was CBS News, and the CBS newsman thought he was so clever. He had gotten the camera spot that was right in the center aisle, and so when we went to do "True Colors," of course, that's where the conductor stood, and right in front of him was the soloist, Caitlyn[sp], and so he had a completely blocked view [laughs] of the soloist. He couldn't get her face—couldn't get her face, but there's the camera and there am I.

⁸ Joy Metropolitan Community Church.

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Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty And out of this like two and a half minute video, about 60 seconds of it is on my face, and this got posted on Facebook, and re-p – tagged, and posted and posted, and by the time I got home, I had messaged from 11 countries, and it was overwhelming. I mean, you know – we didn't know a lot yet. We didn't even know really how many people were dead yet. I didn't know whether or not I knew anybody. I did – nobody well, no close friends, but it's a small community. You know – you don't know what to do. You know what there was to do? Sing. As it happens, I don't have a day job. So when we get asked to go and sing and – I can say, "Yes." I can show up at one o'clock at UCF across town for something, or drive out to the [Orange County] Convention Center at crack of dawn and not worry about being late to work, or – I could show up. That's what I could do, and it was fascinating to see.

Lamberty We had the Sunday night there and then Monday night at Dr. Phillips [Center for the Performing Arts] on the lawn, which was not supposed to be what it was, but turned into this thing, and – and it just started happening, and we had GALA [Choruses Festival] coming. We knew – and that was gonna change. Everything was gonna change. So we got invited to the – to sing at the formal thing at Dr. Phillips on the 28th.⁹ I was flying out. I was going early. I have an ex-boyfriend that lives in Denver[, Colorado], and four years ago, I got to visit with him. This year, I was going to do the same. Go early, spend some time with him, meet the husband – you know, of 11 years that I had never met, um – and so I wasn't – I wasn't at the first concert at Dr. Phillips inside, um, and I had a few days. I mean, there had been so many things. I think Carol said that between June 20th – the 12th and the 28th, there were 20 outreach things that we did, and I lost count how many I did. You know, some of them were just the ensemble things and s – one or two people, but – but, you know, 20 things that the chorus was involved in, and I had like at least nine that I did in those few days, and I got to Denver, and I had time away from all of it, you know? It was no longer in the news every day, and not what everybody's talking about. Just time – and, uh, people talk about processing. It was like, *Oh, this is what that means*. Time to really think – to – to stop and feel, and then GALA would come, and I knew – I knew what it was gonna be like. I mean, GALA's crazy anyway, and it was gonna be different. We were gonna, you know – kind of like, if you're gonna be a part of this, you accept an obligation about certain things.

0:48:08

Achievements in computer science

Lamberty I'm used to – I'm used to being a public figure. Mm – I'm a – I'm well-known in the world of dancing. In the world of same-sex dancing, I'm the grandfather. I'm known. Um, I was well-known in my work in California. I mean, we didn't talk about it, but I've – I've done things that people don't understand, you know? I

⁹ Of June.

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worked on – when you type on the computer and it offers you the corrected spelling¹⁰ or look ahead,¹¹ I developed that for the very first system that ever had it – was the – the satellite control system that I did for NASA in the [19]80s. That didn't become available for a very, very long time. I developed that. The very first clickable interface to purchase – “online shopping” is what we call it now – I developed that. The – the idea that you can get credit by filling out an online form, that was revolutionary. I did that. I designed that. Um, then when you go to an ATM¹² and you put in your money or your check, and it just reads it and tells you – instead of putting that in an envelope and writing on the envelope, and a person has to open it and count it. I did that – not – not for ATMs. Didn't fit in an ATM when I did it.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty But that technology was something I developed. That's what I worked on. I've done all these things with computers that have transformed the world as we know it, and that are now a part of everybody's existence in the Western world, and how we just interact all the time, and my name is not on any of it. I have no patents. I'm not famous for any of it, but the people who were there, they all knew, you know? I walked into a room of computer nerds in the Bay area. Everybody knew who I was. I was the guy that had won a congressional award for software. There wasn't anybody else that had done that and never has been, you know? I was the guy that walked up to Steve Jobs and told him he was wrong.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty [laughs] He was not happy with me.

0:50:36 **2016 GALA Choruses Festival, abuse against the LGTBQ+ community**

Lamberty Um, and I – I know what it's like to be public, and what the chorus was facing was – we were gonna be the face of Orlando – the face of Pulse at this huge thing. When somebody comes walking up and they have to say something to you, or they have to express how they feel, the obligation is listen. Let them. Let them feel what they feel. Let them share what they have to say. Because at that point, it's no longer about us. People need the space to be able to express, to – to grieve, to process, and we were gonna be their outlet for doing that.

James [A. Rode] was not exactly the kind of director that was used to talking a lot, especially in a performance. The first time he was involved with a performance of the chorus, we sang. He probably said six words to the audience. Not his thing. We were in the waiting area backstage and he spoke to us. We had

¹⁰ Spell check.

¹¹ Typeahead.

¹² Automatic teller machine.

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this set of songs, carefully chosen—changed from what it was supposed to be. I mean, we had—our—our set for GALA was celebratory when we started. Had to change—the message had to change, and some of the music was not music that people wanted to necessarily be singing, um, but it told a story, and he talked to us. “We have an obligation. Find a connection to that music. Relay the message that we’re bringing. It’s hard,” you know, “There’s suffering, there’s pain, and there’s hope. It’s up to us. Create hope, create love.” Like it was beautiful.

So we all walk onstage and we start to sing, as we [inaudible] the ovation, and, you know, you just have to stand there and take it. I used to teach people, “You just gotta stand there and take it.” I made my staff learn to be acknowledged. It’s not easy holding up. It’s not easy, and what did we do? Well, we have to live in Orlando and sing [*sniffles*]. [inaudible] cause is[?] [inaudible], and then, James read his statement to the audience. None of us had a clue what it said, and then—I mean—oh, God. The man’s eloquent, you know? He’s a schoolteacher, he’s educated, he knows how to write. It was good. It was devastating. It was like—and then, “Let’s sing.” It was like, *Oh, no. You’ve gotta be kidding*. It’s like—like—I—but, you know, at that point, it didn’t matter. We could’ve stood there and flapped our arms like birds and nobody would’ve cared, and so—but we tried. I mean, by the second verse—it was “You’ll Never Walk Alone”—by the second verse, we—we could maybe sort of sing, and the walkout into that crowd of people.

I remember being in Washington, D.C., you know, mid-[19]90s in like the second March on Washington [for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation]. Being on the subway when I lived in the Bay area—you know, one of gay centrals—it’s like, “No.” You know when you ride on BART,¹³ you’re not safe. Doesn’t matter that it’s San Francisco[, California], you know? You—y—y—there’s a way of being circumspect, and I’m—I spent my whole childhood being abused because I was different. I didn’t understand that “different” meant “gay,” but they did. I went[?], you know—I—it was a normal part of my experience to be physically attacked on a regular basis. Thrown into lockers, you know, punched and hit—and that was just normal, and n—there was[sic] no adults who really cared. My mother asked me the other day it was like, “Where—wa—was I affectionate as a mother?” And I said, “Not to me,” And she was shocked—just shocked. It’s like, “I’m the wrong one to ask.” I didn’t let anyone touch me. From—from the day—first day of first grade—new school, you know, didn’t know anybody, new city—and the first thing that happened to me was to be attacked. Yeah, I didn’t let people touch me. Dancing was my way of touch. Other than that, no one touched me, you know? Not hug people, barely would shake hands. Not allowed to touch, and you walk out to this—wanting to hug you. I’m not good at hugging. You have to let people, and I had scheduled my

¹³ Bay Area Rapid Transit.

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flights that I would actually not stay to the very end. I was so grateful. I couldn't take it anymore [sniffs].

At GALA, they have "coffee concerts" in the morning. They, um – a longer time slot to do something with. A very small, Canadian group had one of 'em. It was very crowded. I managed to get a seat. It was marvelous. It was funny. Almost every one of the choruses added something in to acknowledge. you know, It was very – uh, um, I don't want to seem callous, but it was like, you know, one more – "Thanks," you know, [laughs] but – and the Canadians change theirs – program too a little bit, but what was fascinating to me was they had this woman in a hijab singing with them [sniffs]. She was fascinating. Soaring soprano voice, phenomenally animated – just, you know, capture everyone's eye when she was onstage, and they – they sang a song in, um, not Farsi, but, um, Arabic, because of her, and, you know, it's normal, you know? People are leaving the stage and you line the hallways and everybody comes in. Everybody [inaudible]. So I just waited. I waited. I waited.

We had – we had, uh, you know – people had ribbons that we had made and stickers and the Pulse logos and there was like [inaudible], and I wanted to talk to this woman, and everybody wanted to talk to this woman. She had friends there – all this – and I waited, and finally. Finally, there was a camera crew following her around, and I just waited until she was kind of done and all settled down, and she saw me in the shirt – the shirt, and she looked at me and I looked at her, and I put out my hand and it had one of the Pulse stickers in it, and I said to her, "I want you to have this," and it was extraordinary. Here's this woman, who turns out isn't a woman. She's – she's a transsexual in process, who is a convert to Islam, who decided to be Orthodox, found an organization in Canada that would accept her for who she is, you know? Coming to America to a major city after a shooting that's related to, you know, an Islamic fundamentalist supposedly – not really, but that's the perception – and as we stood there, we talked – I don't know – 20 minutes. It was amazing, and, you know, the stories that she had to tell. Just m – this is – this is what bravery looks like. I was like, "Let's get the picture," you know? I don't do pictures. I always forget, but I have my picture with her. You know, put it on Facebook. It's mine.

1:01:01

Singing at John F. Kennedy Space Center and gun control

Lamberty

There were – there's been a lot of things. Um, one of the outreaches was at, um, [John F.] Kennedy Space Center, and not many people could go. It was like, workday, Tuesday, all day, have to be able to get on base. Not everybody would pass the minimal clearance requirements, um, but I could go, and, um, I was like, *Oh, this'll be interesting, you know? I wonder in anybody will know my project,* and that was – it was – and, you know, when I worked with TRW Space and Defense, being gay was not a good thing, um, and when we show up it's gonna be this auditorium full of people, who – 'cause they have an organization now. It's like NASA has an organization for gay people. Different world, and – and, yes, you

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know – people know the project that I worked on. It’s still a meaningful thing. People actually, you know, there were people who know my father’s name. It was amazing, and that was hard. That was – for me, that was the hardest one to sing there.

Lamberty There’s still – I just – we just went Sunday to the movie theater, ‘cause Tony Romero – I don’t know what his last name is – invited the chorus and a few other people, ‘cause Ellen [DeGeneres] gave him a showing of *Finding Dory*, which I did not see, and it’s like, *Okay, this is lovely. Get to go* – it’s changing. We get to reflect differently. We get to look to a future. The obligation to create something meaningful is on those who survive, who are after. It’s like funerals aren’t for the dead. They’re for the living. We’re living. We get to choose what this means. We get to choose what happens. I want – I want there to be a difference. I want the world to wake up and know, and I don’t want it to be because it was a gay club in Orlando, but something has to do it.

You know, you take the populations of Great Britain, and Australia, Denmark, and Sweden, and, you know, several other countries combined – is less than the population of the United States, and we have, you know, up 50 times the murder rate that they do. It’s not just because we’re stupid; it’s because they have gun laws that are meaningful and we don’t. You know, Australia had a mass shooting¹⁴ and they changed their world. It was sane. We’re insane. We’re living in an insane society. I want sanity. I’m tired of it costing lives.

I don’t look forward to my birthday next year, ‘cause it’s gonna be, you know, the weekend of the one-year anniversary. I don’t want there to be a one-year anniversary. There will be. I’ll be there. I wish I didn’t have to. It’s so preventable. We have to be responsible for what happens next. I have to be responsible for what happens next.

1:06:37

Community response to Pulse tragedy

Cravero [*clears throat*]. Well, I guess, what sort of, uh – what would you hope the long-term consequences will be for the Orlando gay community, and really just for the city – the larger city or the – just maybe even society from this?

Lamberty You know, [*sighs*] it was interesting. Um, after this, it’s like you’re driving around town and there’s rainbow lights everywhere, and like, you know, it was August. W – my brother was in town for the weekend or the day with this wife. They live in Melbourne[, Florida], and we were gonna go to brunch up in Longwood. Driving and getting off at the exit in I[nterstate] 4, it was raining, and it’s – and below it is the banner – “Orlando Untied” – with the rainbow flag. I was looking at it, it’s like [*inaudible*]. I took a picture out of the window of the car, and we got to the restaurant and, you know, had this wonderful brunch, and

¹⁴ Port Arthur massacre.

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leaving the restaurant, they have one of those chalkboard things, you know – two-sided, and on the front side g – walking in is all the specials, and on the back side was the “Orlando Strong” – “Orlando United,” but, you know, I don’t – where was I? Longwood somewhere. Casselberry, and there is the CVS [Pharmacy] with the electronic sign out front that cycles through its set of stuff. One of which was “Orland Strong.” I was like – I think it would be beautiful if what would just happen is that we could be the “City of Rainbows.” W – let’s, you know, that – somehow [laughs] the gay community got the rainbow flag. It’s like, *Wow, that was smart* [laughs].

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty I don’t know if they were actually planning that far in advance, but it was like, *Wow, we co-opted the rainbow* [laughs].

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty It’s like, *That’s awesome*. It’s like “The City Beautiful.” It’s like “The City of Rainbows.” *Wow, I would – I would love for all of these city buildings and – and banks and everything else just like keep putting up rainbows. They’re beautiful. We can create all the meaning we want from them. They’re beautiful. That would be a wonderful thing to have happen.*

1:09:11

How the Orlando Gay Chorus can influence political and social change

Lamberty Um, I would – I want gun control that makes sense. I don’t know that we’re gonna get it. I don’t know how we’re gonna get it, because we – our society is literally insane, but I would like that to be an outcome.

I would like that, you know – we have this political season that we’re dealing with. We’re dealing with the rise of fundamentalism. People don’t understand what that means. Fundamentalism is a particular thing in philosophy. It’s – it’s not just an extreme point of view – that’s orthodoxy. It’s not just that “I’m right and you’re wrong.” It is: “I’m right, you’re wrong,” and the existence of other ideas, other beliefs cannot be tolerated, and must be suppressed or eliminated by whatever means necessary. That’s fundamentalism. We’ve seen it in religions – not just Islam. I mean, you know, American Christianity is full of its fundamentalism. “You will believe the way that I say it’s supposed to be or” – and when, you – political fundamentalism – “I’ll get what I want in this bill or this bill will never happen.” There is no such thing as compromise in fundamentalism. Nationalism is a form of fundamentalism. Brexit is fundamentalism. The rise of these nationalistic parties in Europe – that’s fundamentalism. You know, even the idea that the news doesn’t tell us the facts. They tell us how we’re supposed to feel about what happens. No, you don’t get to tell me how to feel, but somehow that’s become part of news. No, but that’s

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representative[sic] of fundamentalism. It's, "You don't get to have your opinion." There is "the opinion" and that's it.

As long as that's true, we're not gonna see gun control. We're not gonna see a society where it's truly safe to be gay. We've made huge progress, but that doesn't change the way that people think, or believe—believe is worse. Belief takes no foundation. There's—doesn't have to be proved, and anything that stands in the way of it can be discounted.

We sing, you know—you know, we talk about the—what is our purpose? We're gonna change hearts and minds from musical excellence. The opportunity that's been presented to the Orlando Gay Chorus because of this horrific thing is phenomenal. We get an audience that we would never have had, and we get to stand up, and we get to sing, and we get to do it as a gay group, and people get to hear good music, good singing, and it has a message, and we're gay. I—you know, I talked to the leadership in the chorus and said, "Don't be afraid. It's—you're not—there's nothing wrong—there's nothing wrong with capitalizing on this moment." We've said for a long time that we want to stand up and mean something. The opportunity's been handed to us. The mistake would be to not take it. Say, "Yes." Do these things. Put the message out there, and do it for the right reasons.

I said to Tony the other day—the business manager—"You know, there are a lot of survivors in a lot of ways. Most of them can't—can't stand up and talk to the world. It's not a part of who they are," but he can, and I remember eighth grade. There was this thing happening, you know—one of the kids in school—and I went home and I complained to my mother about it, and she said, "Who did you talk to?" I was like, "No one. Not me," You know, and she's, "Well, you know? You should." I was like, "Why?" It's like, "Well, because you can." So the next day, I marched myself into the principal's office and complained on behalf of somebody who couldn't. Those who can need to. Tony can stand up and talk to the world about his experience, and maybe change the world's thinking—little bit by little bit by doing that. he should. He's not opportunistic. He has a message that needs to be heard, and he's capable of delivering it, and he can do that on behalf of victims everywhere. He should. The chorus has an opportunity. We should. We can. It's not opportunistic. Yes, does it move our agenda forward—the agenda we've had f—long before this happened? Absolutely, but it's still the right thing to do, and it's for the right reasons, and that's what we should do. We should keep saying "yes" to the opportunities that arise, and over time—it's already happening—that they're—they're not about that anymore. We got to sing with the Second Harvest Food Bank [of Central Florida], because I go to their dinners, and I know the organizer there, and she likes me.

Cravero

[laughs].

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Lamberty And after this happened, she said to me, “You sing with the Gay Chorus.” I was like, “Yes, I do.” “I wanna talk to you about it.” I was like, “Not the right one to talk to, but, boy, can I get you in touch with the person who is,” and we got to do this amazing event for an audience who we would otherwise never touch. Changed the perception of a lot of things.

We got to sing the national anthem¹⁵ at the First Responders’ Breakfast. This is not a group of people who are gonna just suddenly say, “Oh, gosh. We need to have the Orlando Gay Chorus come and sing.” We’re gonna sing for the AFL-CIO.¹⁶ It’s like Jimmy Hoffa’s¹⁷ union.¹⁸

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty We’re gonna sing for them. The gay chorus in Orlando is gonna sing for Jimmy Hoffa’s union.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty That was not gonna happen before, and now, it is. So, you know, what’s gonna come of this? I hope that. I hope lots of things like that. I hope a dialogue, in music for us, that lets people have a different experience of what “gay” means, and then, maybe the world really can change.

1:17:07 **Closing remarks**

Cravero Thank you so much for sharing that with us today, Richard. I really appreciate it. Is there anything else you’d like to add? I mean I— that was a great— that was a great place to end, I think.

Lamberty No, you don’t— you don’t want to get me started on Lucy.¹⁹ It’s okay.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty [laughs] Read the blog.²⁰

Cravero We can always do a second interview.

Lamberty [laughs].

Cravero [laughs].

¹⁵ The Star-Spangled Banner.

¹⁶ American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

¹⁷ Born James Riddle Hoffa.

¹⁸ Correction: Jimmy Hoffa was the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

¹⁹ Lamberty’s now-deceased dog.

²⁰ <http://rexl.org/>.

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Lamberty Read – read the blog on Lucy.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty Did you find my blog?

Cravero I did.

Lamberty Yeah.

Cravero I did.

Lamberty Yeah.

Cravero Well, that’s an interview for another time.

Lamberty Oh, yeah.

Cravero [laughs].

Lamberty This – thank you. You know, it’s like – this’ll go into an archive, and – and who knows? Maybe some researcher a hundred years from now will look at it, but probably, other than that, nothing.

Cravero Aw.

Lamberty That’s okay.

Cravero It’s fantastic. Well, this is, uh – this has been Geoffrey Cravero with Richard Lamberty in the conference room of the Center for Digital Humanities and Research at UCF in Orlando, Florida, on Tuesday, October 11th, 2016.

End of Interview