

Beth Kahman Oral History

Narrated by John Nelson

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Transcribed by Amy Baltin

Abstract: Beth Kahman talks about her life, growing up, and her coming out as a lesbian. Beth Kahman also discusses her career, and her relationships.

Beth Kahman. Born 1963 [John Nelson] [JN]; [Beth Kahman] [BK]

[00:01] [JN] This is John Nelson the date is the 7th of October, 2014. I'm in the GLBT Center in Denver, Colorado, here with Elizabeth Ann Kahman, and we're doing an interview. So, Elizabeth you told me to call you Beth... Beth please tell us about you, your birth date, where you were born, and tell us a little bit about your family and your siblings, parents and so forth.

[BK] Ok yeah, thanks for calling me Beth. I was born in Granite Falls, Minnesota in 1963, March 4th, so I'm a Pisces. I like to say March 4th and go forward. My family, I have my mother and father, we came from a family of twelve siblings; eight boys and four girls. As they say it's cheaper by the dozen, and I actually am the youngest of all those siblings.

[JN] Can you name your siblings?

[BK] I certainly can, I usually start at the top, because that's how I learn, so it's Carl, Patty, Eric, Andy, John, Paul, Kevin, Katy, Karen, Phillip, Jim, and me Beth.

[JN] And your parents' names?

[BK] My dad's name was John Edward Kahman, he usually went by Jack because they only call horses Jack, actually he went by John, they only call horses Jack was his joke, and he's of German decent and a little bit of Irish. My mom, her name was Della Mey Meldahl, so she was Norwegian...

[JN] Where were, they born?

[BK] My mom was born in Duluth, Minnesota, and my dad was born in Kansas City Missouri.

[JN] Now with regard to your numerous siblings, how old was Carl, the oldest when you were born?

[BK] I believe Carl was thirteen or fourteen, I say give or take.

[JN] What was your relationship with your siblings, let's just say which ones did you relate to the most?

[BK] Ok, well it varied so I'll start at the beginning, when I grew up we had our own baseball team and I was very good at sports and in fact I was better at sports than my brother Jim and my brother Phil. They were closest to me in age, but as siblings do a lot of times we would fight; however, we would play baseball and football and basketball and tennis. So, we were really into sports especially growing up in a small town there wasn't a lot to do, other than outside activities that kind of thing. As we grew older, in the teen years of course we didn't get along, but my older siblings like my sister Katy and Karen, and Phillip- excuse me not Phillip, but John. I was closest to them growing up and I think part of that was my dad died in 1973 when I was ten, so sometimes they say in birth orders when you lose a parent some of the other siblings' sort of kicked into gear to help raise the family.

[05:25] [JN] With so many children in the family, the question would come up, were you raised in any religion?

[BK] Yes, I should have said that right off the bat. Since I have the same biological mother and the same biological father. My mom was Lutheran actually, but she converted when she married my dad. We were Catholic.

[JN] How religious was your family, as far as attending mass every week, and whatever other Catholics do during the week?

[BK] Well, a lot of my stories are passed on, with respect to the oral history, so what I remember my family talking about, and part of this was before I was born, my mom and dad, we raising the kids in Kansas City, Missouri, and at one point they lived in a convent. So, my parents were very, religious. All my siblings with the exception of myself and my two youngest brothers, Jim and Phil, we went to parochial. My oldest siblings went to Catholic school, the younger siblings went to public school.

[JN] Why was that?

[BK] One reason was when we moved to Bird Island, one of the reasons why we moved to Bird Island in Minnesota was they had a huge Catholic contingency. I guess, for lack of a better word, membership. But there was only a thousand people that lived-in Bird Island so eventually as the years went on, the Catholic school shut down, so then all the kids, all my siblings had to go to the public school.

[JN] When did you move to Bird Island?

[BK] I believe we moved in 19- let's see, I was born in 1963, 1963. Shortly after I was born, I was born in a small town in Granite Falls, Minnesota. Then we moved to Bird Island.

[JN] Was there any difficulty between your siblings growing up, and you obviously, and the parts you remember, and the non-Catholic Lutherans living in the area?

[BK] Not so much, if I understand your question- or are you saying that there- were Lutherans, there were Catholics, there were Methodists in this particular small town. Yes, we were identifiable as Catholic and we did go to church, we weren't really connected to the church as much by the time that I started to grow up. Does that answer your question?

[JN] I guess so, I'm going to ask some follow up here.

[BK] Please do.

[JN] What I was kind of wondering was- I understand that between schools, if you had sports teams, there'd be some rivalry... But outside of school, were- you said you were identifiable as Catholics, did the Lutherans or Methodists, or anybody else, did they pick on or harass the Catholics in your family?

[BK] I would say no, because the Catholics actually- if you were Catholic, maybe I didn't explain this very well, and this was one thing I didn't like being raised the Catholic people were number one if you had to classify, the Lutherans were number two, the Methodists were number three.

[10:02][JN] In population?

[BK] In population, exactly.

[JN] So, in Bird Island the Catholics were numerous?

[BK] They were more numerous, more vocal, and if anyone did the picking on, it was more the Catholics.

[JN] Did you ever engage in that, picking on?

[BK] I tried not to.

[JN] Does that mean you did, but you tried not to?

[BK] It means I didn't... In growing up from I very young age, to pick on somebody because of religion, or to pick on somebody because of who they were or the color of their skin which in a small town was predominantly white, but it was ingrained in our family is to try to teach people the way you want to be treated, with respect and dignity.

[JN] You also said the Catholics were identifiable, how were they identifiable?

[BK] Identifiable, meaning that here was the public-school right on Eighth and Cherry, and then Kiddie Korner was the Catholic school, so when I mean identifiable in school for example on Wednesdays some of us had to go to classes at the Catholic school, then we would come back. That's how we were identifiable.

[JN] Because for you, you were going to a public school.

[BK] Exactly, we were going to a public school, but we still had religion classes at Catholic school, for a few years, before eventually, the Catholic school just died. But the Catholic church was still there.

[JN] Let's move on just a little bit.

[BK] Sure.

[JN] When you graduated from school- where did you attend high school?

[BK] I attended high school at Bird Island Lake Lillian High School. I graduated in 1981. At that time, for example, my older siblings graduated from Bird Island High School, but because it was farming towns and dwindling population Bird Island was the town we lived in, but Lake Lillian was a town ten miles away. So, that's why it was Bird Island Lake Lillian.

[JN] Ok, and I should have thought of this earlier, but how do you spell Bird for Bird Island because there's two different spellings possible.

[BK] Yeah, it would be B-I-R-D I-S-L-A-N-D.

[JN] Ok, and Lake Lillian?

[BK] Is L-A-K-E, Lillian like the woman's name, L-I-L-L-I-A-N.

[JN] Ok. While you were in high school, what was your favorite classes, or subjects whatever you want to look at it.

[BK] Yeah, I would say my favorite two- I had two favorites, one was English, and the other was Physical Education. In growing up, I would be considered a tomboy, I was very good at athletics, and I was probably the most gifted athletically. So, in growing up in that small town, what was great in having as

many siblings as I had, is we'd have our own flag football team, we would have a baseball team right in our house. So, the Kahman clan would come over, and other people from the neighborhood and we would play football outside when the weather was twenty below, and that kind of thing, and go ice skating, but I excelled specifically with basketball, volleyball, tennis, and softball.

[JN] Ok, so those would be your favorite sports?

[BK] Yeah, those would be my favorite sports in growing up I would say.

[JN] Did you play those in school as well, like on the school teams?

[BK] Yes, I did, the interesting thing, again because it was such a small team, or a town, from first grade I played peewee baseball and things like that, but we didn't have girl's teams. Of course, I had to play on the boy's team, and so that kind of happened though out my growing up years. I was so good that, like for example my brother Jim, who wasn't as good as me, he and I would play doubles in tennis for example. So, when we would go to a town, or if we would have a meet, he and I, but more particularly he would get teased because he was playing with a girl. So, he got called sissy, and various names, but the interesting thing was we sort of were in a position of power because we would end up in tennis, have a match and we would win, all the time and so during the tennis match some of those sneers and those jeers that he was getting and I was getting it fell to the wayside because we were able to dominate on the course.

[16:19] [JN] Did any of that teasing ever bother him into his adult life? Maybe I should say affect him into his adult life?

[BK] I don't think so, and here's the reason why, he was involved in a number of sports and he recognized that he wasn't as good. The other thing was he was very short and kind of stocky, so he never made it into sports, what he did do was he became the towel boy, he became the manager and things like that. So, when he went to college in Mankato State, in Minnesota, he ended up with an athletic degree- athletic... I can't remember what it's called... It wasn't a scholarship, but it was his major and so then he became the Minnesota Twins athletic trainer, for their farm team starting out, and then for their triple A, double A, and then he did make it to the majors. He had a pretty good self-esteem about it. I always tease him that I always wanted to become a professional tennis player, and I never was able to achieve that, so he was able to achieve the pro's, certainly.

[JN] ...Do you have a favorite teacher in high school, or teachers?

[BK] I did, I had a favorite teacher, named Mr. Hughes, can't remember what his first name was. That would have been in sixth grade.

[JN] Why was he your favorite?

[BK] I think he was my favorite for two reasons, one he was a good English teacher, and two he was one of the coaches for the basketball team. He just had a good sense of humor, at that age in sixth grade, your kind of are coming out of that stage where we're so innocent and so gullible and things like that.

[JN] Was he your first male teacher?

[BK] He was the first male teacher, yeah. Then farther into middle school, there was I can't remember her name but she taught social studies, and I like her in retrospect for two reasons, one I think she was a

lesbian, and again in retrospect and looking back I sort of identified with her, and she taught social studies and I was also interested in languages and other places, other than just Bird Island Minnesota.

[JN] Were you sure she was a lesbian? I mean was she out and open?

[BK] Certainly she was not out and open. She lived alone, but I don't know for sure, because that was back in the day- when we would get teased if we wore green on Thursday. We would be called queer or gay, or- I'm trying to think of some of the other derogatory terms, but I think in terms of what that meant for me, I am an out lesbian now, but growing up it was very confusing and you did not want to be gay or lesbian. Even though, in retrospect I feel that I was born gay, and I'm very comfortable with that now, but certainly growing up I was very...

[20:45] [JN] Since you brought it up, your orientation, how far back in your life do you clearly recall feeling- your personally feeling different from other girls?

[BK] How far back did I feel different from other girls? I think, at nine, ten, eleven, I mentioned I was very good at volleyball and basketball. The PE teacher Miss Fenske, was her name I think it was F-E-N-S-K-E, which I don't think she was a lesbian, but I think there were- I identified the strong female teachers and Miss Cunningham was my basketball teacher, so I remember ten, eleven, twelve, I don't know if I was attracted to them per say. But coming from this Catholic family and being so innocent, and not having any experiences when I was younger. I didn't have any coming out experiences until I was twenty-seven. I think that growing up, all I would hear in my family, as any kid would be is, ok Beth, do you like any boys, or my mom would make sure, are you sure honey you don't want to wear a dress? I feel like, no I don't want to wear a dress, how am I going to wear a dress if I'm playing all these sports? So, there were all these social cues that were like, you will go to hell, especially with the religion if you choose that lifestyle. There really was no choice, but I do remember in growing up there was a boy named Bill and he was very effeminate and he got beat up, everyone teased him endlessly and ironically, as an adult I live in Colorado and I've lived here since '97, and I ran into him, he's a hairstylist and we got together and we were able to talk about the good times, but also talk about how horribly treated he was. One might say, well why wasn't I treated badly, I think the reason I was not treated badly in any way was, number one I was a very strong athletic person, and number two I mean- how many siblings did I have, for God's sake, we had the largest contingency so there was safety in numbers, and if people picked on me, my brother Kevin would come in or my brother Paul, or my brother Phil. So, it is kind of a fascinating experience.

[JN] Still in your high school times, how with your parents and everything, coming of age, maturation, puberty, and all that, did you ever have any discussions with your mother... about the changes your body was going through, what you could expect, or was that mostly through your female siblings, if any?

[25:07] [BK] ...Actually I don't understand the question can you word it a different way?

[JN] Yeah, did any of your family members talk to you about sex and puberty?

[BK] Good question. No and the reason was we had though lessons in school. I remember it was either in fifth or sixth grade, when we were maturing, when the boys got to go out and play sports, but the girls had to stay in and in our PE/ Health class we would watch these films that would say, you're going to get your period, and things like that. But again, a lot of it was from the heterosexual standpoint, so did my siblings talk about that, I mean they were normal siblings, but they were straight. They were

talking about how cool it was that they were dating. In my sister, Karen's case she was very popular and always had a boyfriend. Did my mom talk about it? Not as much, but what was there to know, but in high school I never dated at all. I know that concerned my mom, and me, I mean I did feel different, I didn't quite understand what that difference was until much later. But did I feel attraction to, in terms of people that I played with on the boys and the girls, I was much more- I had an affinity to the girls, I could relate to them more than to the boys, if that make sense.

[JN] Yes, it doesn't surprise me at all. So, you graduated from high school in?

[BK] In 1981.

[JN] In 1981, and where- or what did you do then?

[BK] Well I sort of followed in my brother Jim's footsteps for the first semester of college, so I went to Mankato State, Minnesota...

[JN] What school was there?

[BK] I was quite lost, quite honestly. I didn't know where I should go to school, I was just following in my family's footsteps, which kind of has been a pattern, especially being the youngest. I would just be like, ok well Jim's doing this I guess I'll go there. I tried to get on the basketball team and I was on the basketball team, but it was a miserable experience for me to go to Mankato, so eventually I ended up in Minneapolis, which was a much better fit for me, going to the big city. I actually ended up going to a community college called Normandale Community College... That was in Minneapolis or Bloomington Minnesota. If anybody's familiar with the dark comedy of Fargo, they actually talk about Normandale Community College. The reason I went and really excelled at Normandale was number one, it was a smaller school than Mankato, and so I was a standout athlete in tennis and basketball at Normandale, and I was taking a tour of their school and I was in the women's locker room and I saw some advertisements about basketball so sure enough this loud, gregarious red haired gal who ended up being the basketball coach, came in and said, hi my name is Suley David, what are you doing? I said, I go to school in Mankato, but I'm looking, I'm transferring here, and she said well that would be great. So, what happened was, and I didn't mean to say her name, I think maybe I shouldn't have said the name, but at any rate, she had a basement that was available for rent and she said I only charge five hundred dollars, I usually have it if there's somebody on the basketball that needs a place to stay, but your welcome if that works out. Sure enough, that worked out, and I rented from her basement, and again I was probably eighteen or nineteen, I know that when I went to Mankato, I took a women's class and I knew that the women teacher was a lesbian back in the day we would call it a radical lesbian feminist. So, that was my first experience of knowing a lesbian.

[31:00] Back to Normandale college, the basketball coach had a "roommate" and the roommate had a son, and so they all lived upstairs and I lived in their basement, but I knew that there were only two bedrooms upstairs, so I was a little bit confused. I didn't know if they were roommates or lovers or partners. Then as I got to know them better, what I noticed was they would give me a hug at the end of the day, but I never saw them ever hug each other. One day I went with the basketball coach, I said, let's just go for a walk, we went for a walk and I said you know, I notice when I come in I give you a hug and you give me a hug and this other person gives me a hug, and I hug them back but I've never seen the two of you hug, is there a reason for that. I could tell that she- it was one of those things where it

was a powerful question and I don't think she knew how to answer it. So, she did tell me, but we knew back in the day she could have lost her job for that possibly, luckily, she didn't and this was a pretty liberal college, but on the basketball team it was sort of that secret, and of course the people would wonder and really know deep down in retrospect, but I always thought that was sad that they couldn't share that life. They were a very important part in my life and this women's son who was twelve I felt like he was my ninth brother.

[JN] So, having gained this personal knowledge of these ladies and their relationship, and you said it made you sad that they couldn't be out in the open, but how else did it make you feel about you?

[BK] I think that it was a pinnacle part in my life, in that here are role models, so to speak. To me that's what was natural, that's what I saw, thinking in my head, that is totally ok. I remember thinking, lets live and say live, or whatever the saying is, why judge other people. There were some other people on the basketball team that were lesbians who became friends of mine, and I have this exposure. Then what was interesting was my family, again my being the youngest, my older siblings were used to taking care of me and one of my brothers, he lived in Minneapolis, he was kind of concerned he said, Beth why don't you live with- his wife and their kids. I said, well why would I want to do that, what's wrong with this. I think it was that whole homophobic sort of thing, is that, oh my God Beth moves to the big city and she's going to turn into a lesbian. Well, I didn't turn into a lesbian, I was born a lesbian, but I was able to finally express it actually not in college, it wasn't until after college when I came out.

[JN] When did you decide, and you kept it a secret, that I am a lesbian?

[35:01] [BK] I didn't keep it a secret I feel like it was this developmental thing all along and then when I moved to Japan in 1989 through 1991, I was twenty-six at the time and I got wind of a job over in Japan, and having that experience, I worked for the Japanese government and I was a spy but I can't really- no I'm just kidding, that's just a joke! I did work for the Japanese government, but it was the educational system, and so for the second time in my life I felt different because I was the only person in a sea of twenty thousand Japanese people, who had the same hair color, who had the same eye color and it was myself and this Australian woman in this town in Japan. So, I felt different and that experience of feeling different but also being ok, and actually in the Japanese educational system, you're almost like a rock star over there. I would have kids walking up to me when I would go to the grocery store and buy things, and they would just stare at the color of my eyes, and they would stare at how tall I was. I wasn't that tall, but by Japanese standards I was. I lived in Japan for two years and then I moved back to Minnesota, and then shortly afterwards I was at a trade show in Japan and that's where I came out. I'll explain that a little bit, in Minnesota I worked at Nordic Track Company, I was in telephone sales and I was very good at it, so that would have been 1988. So, then I hear about this job in Japan and I end up getting the job in Japan, so I'm there teaching English throughout the whole community, or country really, and then when I moved back to Minnesota I moved back to a house full of lesbians that were lesbians I became friends with, but they were older than me. So, I didn't know what to do, I knew I could speak fluent Japanese and I thought I'd go back to Nordic Track Company, which was located in Chaska, Minnesota. It became a very- in the two years that I was gone that company grew immensely, and so I ended up being the number one sales manager at Chaska, Minnesota Nordic Track.... And so, here I am I go back to my homeland, so to speak, but I'm a fish out of water now because I've lived in another country for two years, I'm fluent in the language. I'd never taken any Japanese, but I was good at languages. So, I go and they are trying to break- they meaning Nordic Track is trying to break into the Pacific Rim. So, the

boss of Nordic Track calls me in and says, we want you to go back to Japan to this trade show. Sure enough, I go back to Japan with a man from Nordic Track who wasn't Japanese, he was Koran, and spoke very little Japanese, and one other guy, a young guy that spoke Chinese, and then me, being fluent in Japanese. So, the three of us go back to Japan, we go to this trade show and we're setting things up to show our Nordic Track ski machines, and there was a woman that kept coming around. She was very quiet, she was from Scotland, but she was in the next booth and she asked if I wanted to go out for dinner or go have a drink, and I said, well I know this good sushi place but I invited all these people, how about if we all go? And she said well no I don't know many people, I'm kind of shy. I thought ok that's fine, and she said, well can I come around later after you guys go for dinner. I said sure that's fine, so I don't know if you've been to Japan but the hotels are very small, it's like one bed and its one little dresser and a little TV, and a bathroom, that's all it is. Very small. So, I go out and have sushi with everybody and go have a nice dinner, I come back to my room and I'm exhausted from everything and I hear this knock and it was this gal, who by the way she wore a dress so for some reason I thought- I just assumed she was straight. She was very effeminate.

[40:50] [JN] I'm sorry. That leads me to ask, at this point in your life, did you assume that all lesbian women wore pants?

[BK] Part of me did, maybe not all. I think I had certain notions of what a lesbian was, and what a straight woman was. I didn't even know what a bi woman was. So, my experience was they had more masculine characteristics, or wore pants, didn't wear dresses, or make up.

[JN] You at this particular point in time and at the trade show, were you wearing a dress as part of your presentation, or were you in pants?

[BK] No, I was in Nordic Track wear, so I was in khaki pants and a polo shirt.

[JN] What about in your free time?

[BK] In my free time I wore jeans, I didn't even own a dress at that time.

[JN] Ok, going back then, this woman knocks on the door, she's wearing a dress, continue please.

[BK] In her hand she has coke in one hand and some liquor in the other hand, and said do you mind if I come in. I said, no, you can come in. I'm sitting on my bed, because there is no chair, there's only a bed and she sitting on the bed, and we have a drink and she starts talking about her boss who's a man who she doesn't like. She discloses that she is attracted to women, and I said, that's cool in Minnesota I live with a whole house full of women, particularly lesbian women, and so she looked at me directly in the eye and said, you mean you're not a lesbian? And I said, will you excuse me a minute and so I walked into the bathroom and I looked into the mirror and at that moment I said wow, I have been asking this question my entire life. Am I gay, am I a lesbian. Here's an opportunity that may help me figure out if I am or if I'm not in my own head. And so, I went back out and said, I don't know the answer to that question, and she said well, would you like to find out. I said ok, and so for the next three days we had spent as much time as we could together and the way I describe that is, up until that time my life was black and white, it was just really black and white, but after that it felt like oh my God now my life is in color, this is who I am. This was like a celebration. So, at the end of the trip I go back to my house full of lesbians and I say, hey guess what you guys, I don't know if you're going to believe this but I think I'm gay or lesbian. Their response, they started clapping and their like wow the lights are on, finally, we did

know all along. So, I was twenty -seven at that time and so I go back to Minnesota, and ironically my brother Jim the athletic trainer and the Minnesota Twins guy, he is getting married in a couple of weeks and so it was very interesting because when I came out, when I finally knew and then I started dating women I wanted to make sure that this wasn't my roommate or this was my college person. I did not want that, and so having that experience of coming out certainly not everybody was open to the idea, but at that point the most important person was my mom, who was still living at the time, and my sister Patsy, and when I came out to Patsy, she knew right away. I said, Patsy how did you know, and she said, Beth because- she and her husband lived in Australia, and she said, Beth when you were little you would sing the song by Helen Reddy, I am woman hear me roar, and there was another thing that Patsy said. I really loved kids and I knew my whole life, and people told me, Beth you should go into education, you're good with kids, and so sure enough I must have made some declaration, I said you know what, I think I'll have kids, but I don't think I'll ever get married. So, those were those little cues, that somehow somebody picked up on and I didn't really pick up on it until later. In the coming out process, it was a little bit challenging, so what I did was, the people I was closest to I would tell them face to face, so when I told my mom, her first response was, oh honey are you sure? Maybe this is just a phase you're going through, and I said, mom wait a second look at you, you're the mother of twelve kids, your straight, because her other response was I don't know, they really aren't gay people are they. I said, they are and your daughter is one of them. It her a while to come around but I was in a ten-year relationship, and so my partner and I would go out and visit my mom and different things like that. So, after being in a ten-year relationship this was not certainly a phase I was going through. Most people, the people I wasn't close to, like my brother who was quite homophobic I wrote him a letter and said this is it, and that's how it is. For the most part, once I claimed it for myself, then they embraced me and my ex-partner of ten years.

[47:46] [JN] The brother you wrote the letter to, was Jim?

[BK] I wrote a couple of letters, I think I wrote a letter to Carl who lived in Canada at that time, I wrote one to Kevin and he's the one that I wasn't so close to. They responded, my brother Carl once he received the letter he said Beth I love you, I don't care who you are. It didn't matter to them.

[JN] But Jim?

[BK] But my brother Jim was getting married, it was a little bit more changeling to him but he embraced me as well as my sister-in-law.

[JN] Who was the brother that was homophobic?

[BK] My brother Kevin.

[JN] And he was...

[BK] He was kind of in the middle of the group.

[JN] And how did he ultimately take it?

[BK] He seemed to be fine with it afterwards, but again it was a process, it did take a couple of years?

[JN] ...We're back from our break, and we're talking about Beth's coming out experience. Now we're going to segway back to where we deviated at her college experiences. So, Beth, thinking back to your

college days, besides playing basketball, what other classes in college did you take, perhaps other than your major, that you enjoyed or did not like?

[BK] I meant to say, it took me six years to get a four-year degree, and as I mentioned Mankato State and Normandale College, I finished up a degree in- a bachelor of general studies when I lived in St. Louis, this would have been 1987. I got a summer part time job teaching tennis at this Jewish Community Center, and that summer, that job turned into a three-year job, and they helped me finish my degree. So, I worked in a fitness center and I was the tennis coordinator. Once I finished with that particular degree later on in my life, I went back to get a post-baccalaureate in English as a Second Language because I loved languages at that point. That would have been in St. Paul, I went to Hamlin University and got what's called a post-baccalaureate degree. Back then they called it ESL, English as a Second Language, nowadays they call it English Language Learning.

[51:20] [JN] Tell us about how you became romantically involved, and what it led to.

[BK] That's a good question, when I was talking before about when I came out in Japan and then I came back and started dating, I had dated a friend of mine's best friend and it ended up being a three-month relationship, but it was very intense, but we were not very compatible at all. Part of it was I was just coming out and this- Alex, was her name, she had been out for a long time and she was studying to get her degree and one reason that we split up was she was really radical, radical lesbian feminist to the point where we wouldn't even listen to the radio, and one of my favorite singers was Jackson Brown, and again I grew up with eight brothers I loved men, I just didn't love them in a sexual way. So, after that I dated kind of casually. And then I met my partner of ten years. We met through a mutual friend and this would have been in Minneapolis, and Minneapolis has a chain of lakes and so we went for breakfast and we went on a canoe trip and I met Brenda there, and she was looking for a roommate and I was looking to get closer to the lakes. So, we exchanged numbers and I went and looked at her apartment, I liked it and I moved in, but I knew when I met her when we were canoeing I just there was just something about her that I was attracted to. Her personality, and the way she looked, and things like that. I didn't know if it was mutual or anything, so anyway, I move in and we're roommates for five days and one day we decided to go listen to music and I just said to her, you know I don't think this is going to work out and here's the reason why it's not going to work out, I can't be your roommate anymore because I'm attracted to you. She just looked at me and said, oh no, it is going to work out I'm attracted to you too. From that moment on we were together for ten years straight. So, my family lived in Minneapolis, so that would have been 1992 so we were together in Minneapolis from 1992 to 1997 and in '97 we moved here to Colorado, partly because Brenda's family lived in Pueblo, Colorado and she grew up here.

[54:49] I loved coming to Colorado because the climate was great, in Minnesota it was just so bitterly cold and no mountains and so Colorado reminded me of living in Japan because they have beautiful mountains and kind of the same weather. We moved to Colorado in '97 at the time I was finishing up my post-baccalaureate in English as a Second Language and so we moved to Golden and since I had gone to school I didn't realize- I went to school to work just with the population of English as a second language. I didn't know that the degree that I got meant when I moved to Colorado I could be a kindergarten teacher all the way through to a senior high teacher. So, I had worked as a teacher one year in '99 I worked at East Elementary School at a magnet school for kids that were learning both English and Spanish. What was kind of noteworthy about that was, my family knew that I lived in

Colorado, but in '99 of course I lived ten minutes away from Columbine and so when- Columbine High School and the massacre there, I remember driving back out to Golden and many of my siblings and of course my mom had called because they were worried. They just knew that I lived in Colorado and that I taught in Littleton, well I taught in Littleton, but I didn't teach in Columbine... I stopped teaching in Littleton and in '99 I got a job in Northwest Denver at Readington Elementary School and I taught there for five years.

[JN] Ok, if you're willing to talk about it, how did you and your partner separate? Why did you separate and was it on friendly terms?

[BK] Yes it was on friendly terms, I remember when we split up or we were talking about splitting up, the realtor- by then we had bought a condo out in Golden and our realtor was, she couldn't believe- many people couldn't believe that we were splitting, because we were very compatible, we were a very loving couple, but a couple of things happened, one was in February of 2002, I was teaching in Denver and I got hit by a drunk driver and ended up in the ER, and I was diagnosed with a close head injury, now they call it a traumatic brain injury and PTSD and a wrist injury, so that particular was very difficult and challenging, but about a year before hand we started just sort of drifting and I never wanted to be college roommates. A year before I said I want to split up, but we stayed together for a year and then in the summer of 2002, then I moved into Denver and Brenda ended up with the condo and I started a new life in Denver.

[JN] Any regrets?

[BK] No, no regrets, we just talked a couple of months ago.

[JN] Right at the current time throughout the nation there's a big issue concerning gay marriage, gay rights, and so how would you describe yourself as far as radical feminist type issues?

[59:50] [BK] I don't think I'm radical that's not something I've been described as I certainly have believed and- here's what's interesting, I never considered Brenda as my wife, that term and I'm fifty-one so I don't know. I always liked the term partner, I know some people would think, it gets confusing because you have business partner, but I just like the term life partner, partner. Nowadays it's kind of interesting the thing I don't like is, I don't like the term same-sex marriage, and your right it's a very politically charged thing. In some ways, I'm a stickler on verbiage but I remember when the topic was civil union. I don't think I'm very radical let's say I'm single now, I am in the dating field, if I was in a serious relationship and a woman said let's get married, I think I would want to get married if I knew that this was going to be a monogamous, life time sort of thing, because that's what I'm comfortable with.

[JN] I was noticing on your bio the written bio that you gave us, that there was something in there about LGBT causes. Are you still active in anything like that?

[BK] I'm in a story telling group here at the GLBT Center, and since I'm on disability and I have been on disability since 2005 because of the car collision, I don't teach anymore, I have been getting more actively involved and the Center- I'm a recovering alcoholic and the Center offers AA meetings here, so I started going to AA meetings and then I had heard about the SAGE program and I didn't know what that was all about, but I went and out of a group of twenty people there were two other lesbians and myself. It's been a great experience for me because I identify with a lot of us in that particular group that it wasn't save to come out. I mean I think it was to a certain degree, but if your fifty-one I'm kind of a

newbie of that group, because many people are more retired age, sixty-five, seventy, and it's just been this incredible experience working and meeting rich stories from the GLBTQ community that I don't know about you, but no one in my family or none of my friends have come and said tell me about your coming out experience. It just isn't on our radar, unless we have experiences like this, like the sage program, the story telling group. They also have a toast masters group here that I want to become a part of and be a little bit more fluent I guess in speaking and things like that. Did that answer your question?

[JN] Yes, to a point. I'm just going to ask you a yes or no question. Do you go out and advance GLBT issues by participating in demonstrations or organizing demonstration, or anything of that nature? That kind of activism.

[BK] No.

[1:04:30] [JN] Is there anything that we have not talked about at this point that you would like to contribute on your own?

[BK] Yeah, sure I want to talk a little bit more about the fact that I was for years in teaching- let me put it this way in my passions in life, which used to be running and backpacking and hiking and bicycling and things like that, the catastrophic injury, or event in my life, in 2002 getting hit by a drunk driver, weighs heavily every single day. That recovery was very challenging for me because my family lived out of state, I had left the relationship. So, I was a traumatic brain injury survivor just truly trying to survive, so this past decade of falling through cracks, in 2005- I was always such a good go getter and very accomplished that when I moved to Denver in 2002, I thought I think I should get a house. I was still teaching even though I had all these injuries but I was so good at it that I kept teaching. In 2005 I brought a house in Washington Park and people asked the question why would you buy a house. I brought a house on the same day I took a nonpaid teaching sabbatical from my work. Who does that, it sounds like your crazy, well I wasn't crazy, but I had a brain injury and I had cognitive challenges and so that experiences of falling through the cracks I've been slowly coming out of that and so one of the things I'm proud about is, I was always good at grant writing or grant research and so I knew how to find funds that other people didn't know how to do. For example, when I got involved with the brain injury association there was a grant through the Colorado traumatic brain injury trust fund, and so I went for that grant and I was able to produce a booklet called Colorado's brain project, and brain is an acronym for brain resource information network. Because I was able to write that then I went on and got another grant for ten thousand dollars through the department of oak rehab to start my own business called common since communication. So my last name is Kahman... and so now what I'm trying to do is start a new life for myself to say hey, you know what, I may have this brain injury or I may have this sever wrist injury but I still am a functioning part of society and I'm going to contribute in that way- the other thing to is I was talking about colors when my life turned from black and white to color it's interesting to note that because of my brain injury one of the speech therapists said, Beth if you color code your life it might be easier for you. So, that's what I did. I developed a color coded system so for example yellow equals community, yellow can also mean education, yellow can mean social network system, green would be financial, red medical, and blue is legal or government, so that's how I keep my mind in order, that's how I keep my paperwork in order, and that's how I'm going to teach other people whatever you have wither you just moved to Colorado and you don't know where the resources are,

then you can come to common sense communication and find access to recourses, that people don't know about. That's what I'm really proud about, is this new life that I have.

[JN] That's very interesting. Now as we close the interview, one last question. Do you know of anyone that we should contact to interview?

[1:09:13] [BK] I do know a few people sure, I can pass those names on to you. In fact, I told some of my friends about this interview and they were so psyched another gal... I was telling her about all the recourses here and she said, and you know they do this lunch and learn series here which is incredible, and so I told her this cool project is taking place, and would you ever be interested. She was like, oh I would love to, so I think there are a lot of lesbians that their story isn't told, you can't go to the bookstore and pick out a book, because it's that generational thing where once we're kind of closeted then everybody else is kind of closeted. But now the preceptions are changing and again for me personally this has been an incredible piece of my life, particularly the sage and listening to the stories of my brothers and sisters in the rainbow community. It just gives me so much strength that I want to continue interviewing people as well, and that's what I intend to do. In terms of rap-up I won other book, or the story is called the Anatomy of a Catastrophe, so that's going to be my third publication hopefully.

[JN] Thank you Beth

[BK] thank you

[JN] this concludes our interview on the 7th of October at the GLBT Center in Denver Colorado and this John Nelson saying good luck Beth and good-bye.

[BK] Thank you