

Phil Hoyle Oral History

(Part 2) Narrated by Lewis a volunteer for the Colorado LGBT History Project

October 31, 2014 at GLBT Center of Colorado

Transcribed by Amy Baltin.

Abstract: Continued from part one, Phil Hoyle talks about his living his life as a gay man. He talks about his work with the Colorado AIDS Project, giving massages to people suffering from AIDS.

Phillip Hoyle. Born 1947 [Lewis] [L]; [Phil Hoyle][PH]

[L] [00:04] Ok, the next question that I have for you is, you'd mentioned that going into this gay bar in Tulsa and that this friend had told you that every time they went into a gay bar they felt a spiritual awaking or experience and you said that you felt the same things, more or less?

[PH] Well, I don't know if I felt what he felt.

[L] Tell us what you felt.

[PH][00:27] Well, my early perception of what he felt was that he's not very outgoing and always embarrassed by his sexuality, but sometimes he just had to go, and often those encounters ended up with him in very compromising positions. But it was also not only a sexual experience but it was there was something about his makeup that he just had to go and his being there was a very spiritual kind of experience. I thought of that when I went into that bar and saw that phallus sticking out of the wall with Mardi Gras beads hanging from it and I'm not sure what else. It was all painted up and cute. I realized, oh yeah, that spoke to me in kind of a light-hearted way but very deeply spiritual. It was like I had come to the right place. Now remember my mother was a prohibitionist and my being in a bar at all was something I had to learn as an adult and it was not anything that I loved, but I did kind of like the dancing and I liked drag shows I saw in bars when I was doing social research at seminary. I thought that was the funniest and weirdest kind of thing because then I was trying to figure out what's going on here, what's the meaning of this, because I was studying philosophical theology and stuff like that. I also realized it was a great a deal of fun and I hadn't been to one of those places for a long time. I go to that bar by myself and I think my own kind of spiritual thing was I realized after I was not going to lie to Merna, I was not going to allow myself to do that. I just was not going to put myself into that where I'm cloaking things about my life because that is not what- I realized I am going to live as an openly gay man. So, when I went to the bar it was like the crisis of that decision getting under way.

From that point on it was not only clear to me, it started being really clear to other people. I had already come out to my children because when Merna and I started talking she said you have to tell the kids. She was- for her reasons was scared that our relationship was going to end as husband and wife and I thought that was, because I had spent my whole adult life thinking of myself as bisexual or most of it anyway. I thought well maybe there's some other way to solve these things, but I also knew that when

you put language to- when you start morphing the realities you add tags, and all that kind of stuff...that when you start doing that you also create something. I was kind of influenced by the constructionist people.

I realized that to tell my children in English, I had to be very careful because I was creating something in myself as well as in them. For them I did not use gay, I didn't use those tags, I said I had sexual affairs with two men in Albuquerque and Merna and I are talking about that. But I knew of course that would out me in Jefferson City where my daughter lived because she would either think it was very funny and interesting and would never be upset by that about her dad it would be probably much less shocking to her than to either of her idealistic brother or mother. She would never think that was a bad thing because of the way she was raised, she just didn't think stuff like that was bad. I knew that if I came up in a conversation, and anything came up I would be outed to the people she was talking with and then a smaller town that could be the whole place. The other thing was I knew in myself I was creating something and I realized then that I was in a different place in my life. That I was committing myself in a sense to myself in a way that I never had and while that can be seen as very selfish it also turned out to be for me a very life changing and spiritual experience. I had dealt with the theology of it and there were no hate words in my vocabulary towards people of any kinds of sexual difference from what people took to be the norm. It was one thing to do all that in your mind and to even tell your children. My wife heard those conversations, I made sure that she heard them, she didn't hear both responses but she heard them we had one telephone. Then when we decided to separate it was another round of phone calls and that one included one to her mother, and I said the same wording and of course it was later when my wife talked to her than she said he's turned his back on God and my wife said mom that's not how I think about it. She also was very liberal and I realized when you set yourself up to become talked about in ways that people are accustomed to talking about you, you pick up all those years of prejudice and so on.

I realized also I not only was creating something in myself, I was creating something in my society about me and so going to the bar by myself then became a way in which it became more real, because I realized this is not Ted's bar, he's the first one who took me to a gay bar. The next book I read was not one of Ted's, all of this stuff was Phil stuff and it was also one that was leaving behind the bisexual Phil and creating the homosexual Phil. I was always homosexual but I was creating the gay Phil and it was a very powerful moment for me of self-realization that just like when I feel in love with Steve I laughed and I was so happy to be there, and a guy come over to me and talked, he was not after me, he was the hostess at that bar. A man that later, the church organist brought to one of the Christmas, seasonal things, that featured the choir quite a bit. He said I want you to meet John, and so I said I'll be looking forward to that. Well I found out it was John the hostess, who wasn't really the hostess, but was the one that made everyone feel good. I watched him go around the bar he talked to anybody and it was always sweet and humorous and involving. That was the beginning of the building of my new communities for me outside of individual friendship. That was the place where that happened over the next few months, I guess about seven months. Had wonderful experiences and got to know very many people.

Years before, in church during the communion, which in our church was a very quiet time, none of this traipsing to the front or any of that. In our church, they passed the communion aliments through the congregation like Presbyterians and it was seen as a very private thing in a public setting. The public setting was the announcement part, but the thing was a meditational time. I found as a married young

adult that sexual thoughts kept coming into my mind during that time, because it's where beautiful music was being played, by that time pipe organ by very fine musician, always tastefully done and my mind would- like my mind does- just goes and I'd have these sexual thoughts. By that time, I mean I understood that sex was a gift of God and so I realized because I might want to pray about something else at that time so, I made up a short prayer that I thanked God for sex and my sex. I had made that kind of accommodation or peace years before; before I really started to think about myself as a gay man or thinking that I would ever live in that way whatever that would be.

When I saw that decoration behind the bar I knew I was in the right place, and met John, and I knew like this was the beginning of a new life. It wasn't the end of the other except in a kind of practical way it wasn't an emotional end of it, but it was certainly a great emotion changing to that episode or most protracted area of my own life. That enough of that? So, you want to ask another?

[L] [10:45]Now, how would you say you've engaged with the LGBT community as an adult?

[PH] When we lived in Montrose, Colorado for the year and a half, taking care of my in-law's I would occasionally come to Denver to meet my old seminary buddy, the one who had talked about being in a gay bar as a spiritual experience. I would come and stay with him and he had been in our home in Albuquerque, and we had visited him when he lived in different places in Colorado, so he was living here and I would come over and stay a few days and then go back. During that time, I went to the public library and the art museum, two of my favorite places and one day he was doing some volunteer work at Colorado Coalition...something like that, it was based here in Denver, they had an alternative medication buying part of it...anyway, he used to stuff envelopes for them as volunteer work as a gay man. It was AIDs related, for people, a buyer's club...that organization was here for quite a few years. While I was there when he was- took me over there and we stuffed envelopes, someone came in with a massage table and I'd heard the hubbub, because they were going to come in, it was talked about because it was all a little place, like the front room of a house over on what I later found out was Corona. I was intrigued because here these massage therapists was coming in taking this big old, lumbering outfit up the stairs to go to a room to give massages. I found out they were free massages for people living with AIDs. I thought, that's really a wonderful thing, because I knew from Ted's experience, because I had visited him a number of times, and had meet people at his memorial service, I knew that he had a lot of pain that would be a wonderful service element for someone living with a disease that was not going to go away; that was going to kill them at that point, was probably going to kill them. I was deeply impressed.

When I came to Denver I wondered what I was going to do. I had broken a promise to myself that I would never leave a job without having another job in line, but I left my job. I was not interested in anything except to leave it and not angry, but I was just done and I was not going to go to any more meetings. I came out here, started looking for a job, looking in the paper every day, finding hardly anything that I could even claim to be prepared for, or things I could do but- cash register was so long gone, everybody's using a computer even to check out retail and I didn't want to deal with that. I didn't think I could stand that much. So, I just kept seeing the ads for massage therapy schools that were in the Denver papers and I thought that would be ok. I think I can work part time and make enough money to live very skinny and eke out a like bit of a living, so I wouldn't starve and I could actually have a place to live, and do my artwork and writing, and I would just be happy. Not that I wasn't, but you know, take care of my income needs. So, I went to school, a massage school... I went to three schools to interview them to find out what their program was like from my point of view, knowing myself as a learner. At the

school I ended up choosing there was up on a bulletin board- the women giving the tour said, this has a lot of stuff for students to look at and people are selling things like tables, and all that kind of stuff, but there was an ad for Colorado Aids Project looking for people to give massages in their clinic...I'm going to do that it was one of the things to help me make my decision for that school, because it was in this neighborhood it was close to where Colorado Aids Project was located, close to where I wanted to live. So, I moved here and as soon as I finished Swedish massage training, which was a third of the program I went over to C.A.P. and talked with Angela and said ok I'm ready to go. We did whatever paperwork, I took Aids 101 course over there, I actually got credit for that in my massage training, and every Tuesday afternoon I gave three massages, and I did that for three years there. Usually students last for about six months until their out of school and then they quit, because at that school we had to get a lot of hours of practice. I kept on, I just loved it, and did that for three years there, and at that point I had my own practice underway and I still wanted to do the HIV massages I had learned so much from it, I had met so many interesting people. I said to Angela, send me people I'll do it on the same bases I'm working here and just feel free to refer people to me and I'll take care them. At that point I was giving them a free massage over there at Colorado Aids Project and I would give them what was then a half price massage in addition to that. They get their free one then they could come to my studio and get a half price one which would be less than most of them were spending in the bar on a single Saturday or Friday night, or some of them every night of the week. I realized I was watching this whole stuff because I was learning about gay life in the city during this time. Some of those people I was still giving massages to when I closed my practice last December, and they were wonderful people who taught me so much about myself and about people living with aids. Some of them were gay and some were not. Some were men, some were women. I just learned so much about life from doing that and I had the record of volunteer massage and I had people when they ran out of money because many of these people were on disability or others weren't and they didn't have aids but they ran out of money because they lost their jobs and that kind of stuff. I gave a lot of free massages to a lot of people. It just seemed perfect to me.

[18:00] So, that was one of my things and then it wasn't too long before I discovered the Terry Mangan library at the GLBT center of Colorado which at that point was on Broadway, down closer to the baker area. I was absolutely thrilled, because I had brought a lot of gay books with me, but I really had no place to keep them. I thought I'll just donate them here and then I'll have access to them if I need any research, because was writing by that time and I didn't want to not have those books. I gave a lot of books to the library and did a little volunteer work for our librarian and I loved this group because it supported- the center because it supported GLB's and T's. I loved the diversity of that, its outreach to many different kinds of people and its bringing such people together also. I liked that there were health clinics through this place, there were a lot of inoculations given, lots of HIV tests done from here. Then a few years ago, a straight friend of mine called that she had been looking online, she said, Phillip they've got a program for old gays and lesbians, she said they have art and storytelling and I think you should check it out. I came down here to the storytelling and brought some of my stories to see what it would be like to tell them to GLBT audience. I loved the experience, although it was all gay men at that point. I ended up being the leader of that group, and still enjoying it... Those are my things, early on I had told about supporting GLAD through our denomination, anyway, that's it.

[L] Ok Phil, can you tell us over time what changes you have seen and what challenges do you see remaining?

[PH][20:24] Ok, lot of changes in myself as I've kind of indicated. I do remember when I was out in Montrose that year and a half when I would go into town, they had this little windmill kind of things that were being made out of cloth, weather resistant cloth and there were little twirly things and things that went around the spirals and I saw out in front of a store one of those in a rainbow colors and it just raised this question because we had given one of those to my mother-in-law and my wife said she has no idea, that that was gay colors. It had become popular and here this thing was twirling around and every time was in downtown Montrose I went in that store because it was a store I bought things at. Of course, I was always observing behavior to see if there was any hint inside the store that there was something gay there. I never, I wasn't curious for myself but I was curious as a social phenomenon and I never did observe anything, after all this is Montrose. The other night I meet a second younger man from Montrose who is living in Denver, in the years I've been here, so yes of course there's gay life in Montrose, but fewer symbols of it although I bet there's more things like that now, then when I was first going out there in the late 60's. I came here when about the same time that tri-therapy had been developed for people living with HIV/AIDS and I saw lots of change, although when I first came here even in 1999 when I first started giving massages many people were still dying from their HIV related diseases and then I saw over the fifteen years I gave massages to many people living with HIV I saw this like, great host of therapy's, different kinds of medicines being tried on my clients, with varying effects. That was changing fast, and that's not an overall GLBT thing but it was one of the very important things giving the volunteer work I was doing, that changed the world for many people. I was acutely aware of that because I had lost Ted to that terrible diseases and he was a long-time survivor, if he had just been a little more healthy, couple more years he would have been probably still going today.

Of course, those first thoughts I had when I was in seminary about ministers being ordained and that I had met one of those who was openly gay, ordained in New York City, and in the New York region of our church, and that was the ordination then that started moving more and more of the regions to make the declaration that they would not ordain openly gay people. He got in, when I deciding to leave church work I thought to call him, because I wanted to find out what he thought. I got hold of his phone number, or the church he worked in in New York. I had met him before and I reminded him who I was; I said, I want to tell you something and I want you to think about it for a week and then I'll call you back, make sure it didn't cost him anything because I figured, he was an associate minister type and he wasn't making enough money to have to pay for that. I said, I will call you back in a week and I want you to be very candid in your answer, and so I told him about my situation, I was separated from my wife, I was a gay guy and I really had decided that what I needed to do was to leave the church... I thought because I was married; because I was involved in marriages of other people; and because of my age, because at that point I was almost 51 I said it occurred to me that I would be happy to stay around in the denomination doing some kind of work if it would actually be helpful to the cause of people really being more open to gays in their churches and in the denomination and in leadership in the denomination. I told him my reasoning about why I thought that would not be good and I said, don't answer me now, just tell me when I can call you back and so the next week I called him and he said Phillip I'm really surprised but I do agree with you, and it's because of my longstanding- being a minister in churches as a closeted gay man, and I just could see that that was going to help the cause. I was too old I was longtime, although I was known as very liberal I was opening and accepting of other people no matter where they came from or no matter how they felt about me, it was just that way, but he said, well let me asks you did you ever molest an underage person. I said oh no I've never done anything like that. I told him exactly what my sexual experience was with some ministers. He said, it just makes sense to me

what you're saying, and he said it really surprised me he just thought you recruit anybody and he realized from my point of view, and my age, that I might actually become somehow detrimental to the situation. So, I was relieved to have someone agree with me.

I've watched that continue now where many churches go online they've got wedding and marriage ceremonies for other kind of GLBT folks. They've had those long before anybody thought to, or they were thinking about it but actually made these marriages available to people. That of course is a great thing, I don't know where that lies in disciples or other congregations, whether it sits really crooked, like something up their craw but I imagine all kinds of things, depending on what part of the country you're in whether you're in an urban area or out in the sticks. I don't say any of that disrespectfully but it's just something that has changed as we all know. Those are the big issues of recent times that are still to be resolved, but my gosh, I can't even imagine the future. A friend of mine said, I can't believe I'm not so radical anymore and we've surely got things we've got to get to and I agree with him. I'm a little unsure of what they are in terms of being overtly polling and drawing attention, but certainly know what has to happen among my gay friends in terms of their- gay male friends- their attitudes towards women, their attitudes toward themselves.

[29:07] I was so shocked when I went to the MCC church when I first came to Denver, it was very healing for me to go there and it was also was the place where I discovered within myself homophobia related to gay clergy, one of whom I had been. I realized the homophobia I had was stuck right there in the middle of my career and it was a shock to me to realize so clearly how I had so deeply incorporated that prejudice. Fortunately, I had read enough about homophobia and every other kind of social stigma that we carry deep within ourselves, racism and that stuff and I had not disagreed with any of that, but I didn't see within myself the homophobia against gay clergy until I had left it. There it was, darkly looking me in the face. That was another place where I had had a spiritual experience, it wasn't the one I was wanting or imaging. Then I became very realistic, I understood I could no longer suffer the Trinitarian language of the MCC's then I could among the disciples who still messed with that stuff. That's way too many stories.

[L]No, I think it's great, and I want to thank you very much for the time to do this.

[PH] It was fun.