Interview with Bryan Hlavinka
Lily Yu
Raven Wrencher

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[1 FM. This is KPFT Houston and now Houston's only primetime radio program
dedicated to news and concerns of the les, bi, gay and transgender community. This is
Queer Voices. Good evening, this is Jack Valenski. And Jennifer Rene. Bryan Hlavinka.
Daniel Williams.]

Bryan Hlavinka: My name is Bryan Hlavinka, the "H" is silent. So most people don't get
that. Uh, it's Czech and so they put two consonants together. It's, I call it the family curse but
**** the "H" is silent. And I'm from a town called Brazoria and went to school at Texas A&M,
uh, I have a degree in chemical engineering and now I'm working the oil and gas industry and I
live in midtown Houston, near downtown, so, and I have a partner of almost 7 years.

Lilly Yu: Cool.

BH: And I have dog. It's a boxer. It's a she.

LY: What's her name?

BH: Her name is Kimmy. But I call her Pooper 'cause she poops everywhere.

**Q: How do Houston and Brazoria compare?**

BH: Uh, and like, it's like, a tiny, tiny town to a metropolis, I mean it was, Brazoria has 3,0000
people in it, and so, I mean I grew up near Houston, and I thought I was going to live here, I
always wanted to live in big city so.

**Q: How did you finally setting on Houston?**

BH: Well, as a chemical engineer, this is kinda the land of milk and honey. This is where the
opportunities were the best. And, you know, where all the companies and jobs are. Plus I love
Houston, so I always, I've always wanted to live here and I love living here.

**Q: You did theater in high school. Are you involved in Houston’s theater scene?**

BH: I did, I was a thespian. I went, and attending I go, I go to as many as I can, and we try to do
interviews on the radio –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – to different, uh, smaller, uh, performing arts venues like theatre, or stages, and theatre
lab, and you know sometimes, the Alley Theatre and so we try to talk about that, but I'm, I'm a
big theatre person –

LY: Oh wow.
BH: – so I like to go into the mix, and then I like to go to New York and see Broadway stuff.

Q: What was your nickname for your university, Texas A&M?
I call it Closet Station. Well because it's, you know, it's a big, it's a big university, but it's very conservative, and there's the George Bush Library there, so it's kind of, uh, on the down-low –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – I mean it's kind of, you know, everyone's kind of quiet –

LY: Right right.

BH: – but there's a lot of gay people there.

Q: How has A&M changed?
BH: Right it's, I think everything is changing, I think society's changing, whole world is changing, and so, uh, as we get more visible, uh, role models on TV, and more representation in media, and movies, and in film, and in screen, uh, it, everything's changing, so A&M's changing too.

Q: How do you feel the environment around coming out has changed?
BH: It's extremely, I think it's a lot easier now. 'Cause there's, you know, there's stories about people coming out, there's things you can go online and kind of find out about and there's some movies and there's people on Glee that are coming –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – out, you know, it's just, it's everywhere so it's, it's totally different I think. It's easier, I think. But it's also, it's not, you know, there's still some challenges I think –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – and it's about acceptance and will people still love you.

Q: Are you ever able to combine your career as an engineer with the activist work that you do?
BH: Pretty much no. Yeah, 'cause it, it's, it's two separate things and it's kind of, the engineering kind of is the technical side of me and the community stuff is the activist side so I can kinda be creative on this side. They really don't, one pays the bills and one I live to do -

LY: Okay.

BH: – if that makes sense, and I'm kind of an anomaly –
LY: You are, yeah.

BH: – Most engineers are not, you know, they're all, they're kind of their own little –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – little, you know –

LY: Mm hmm, yeah.

BH: So I kind of broke the mold I guess. People ask me what I do and I'm like, I'm an engineer, and they're like, what? Yeah, so. Yeah. You know, but they, you know, if I, if I had unlimited resources then I would be a activist full-time –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – but, engineer pays the bills –

LY: Yeah, yeah.

BH: – it allows me to do the things I love to do.

LY: Yeah.

Q: How did you get involved with radio?
BH: Well, I was first brought on to, uh, discuss the fundraising, um, event that we were having back in, like, 2007, 2008. And, um, it was very, it became very natural to me, and so they asked me to come on and be an intern and it was, uh, it was interesting, so, you know, it's kind of one of those undiscovered talents I had to do radio.

Q: Are there any specific talents you need for radio?
BH: We have to, uh, arrange interviews, you have to kinda know –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – who's involved in the community, kind of know people to bring onto the show. Uh, but you know it's kind of, you know people and you talk to people if you're a natural, like with speaking or –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – especially if you're going to be on the radio, it's very, it comes easy to do, it came easy to me.
Q: You’re a full time engineer. How much time does Queer Voices take and how are you able to balance?
BH: It's a huge balancing act and then I come, come, I, I'm very good at time management, it's, uh, constantly balancing things. Um, uh, I work, you know 40 hours a week, but then, most of my time, spare time, is spent either going to events, or planning events, or doing, planning a show, the show takes about, um, a few hours a week. We plan, we meet before each show and kinda discuss the next couple of weeks, so we plan several weeks out, so we're constantly planning for the next couple of weeks on a show.

Q: What’s the most interesting show you’ve done? Anything crazy?
BH: Crazy, for instance, when we had Sandra Bernhard one time, you know her?

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: She was, she was, uh, she was a comedian, she was on Roseanne, uh, she's kind of big in the gay community a while. Uh, we had Leslie Jordan, who's on, um, Sordid Lives, the TV show –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – and then, um, you know, we had the mayor on before –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – she announced, well, actually the year before she started her campaign for mayor. Uh, she came on our show and announced it on our show. Um –

LY: Wow! ****

BH: – Yeah and you know that really got me kind of, uh, politically –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – excited and so.

Q: Was Mayor Annise Parker your most interesting guest?
BH: Probably the most to me the most inspirational I would say to come on and kind of, you know, go from big City Council up to being the mayor of fourth largest city obviously the LGBT community.

Q: You have a media, political, and an activist role. Do you prefer one, or do you feel like they all fit?
BH: I’m kinda on a political kick now

LY: Mm hmm.
BH: – raising money, I see that as our movement moves forward, to make more progress we need to be more political, get our people into office are making laws, we need to have our voice when it comes to legislation and making laws and that comes from having our people represented equally. So that's, that's the challenging thing I see now and it's the most pressing issue. I'm constantly changing hats. I'm kinda ADD, the ball’s spinning all at once… keeping the ball spinning -

Q: Have you ever thought of running for political office?
BH: Yes. Yes. Probably, I have a lot of stuff I want to do in the community first, so probably 10, 15 years, you know.

LY: Wow.

BH: So I'm kinda planning this right now. 'Cause you need to build an awareness –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – to be able to raise money and that takes, you know, relationships within the community, and within people that are politically active so, I see the master plan would be maybe 10 years, 15 years from now, so let's see, that would be, uh, maybe 2022.

LY: Cool.

Q: What will be your campaign consist of?
BH: Uh, it would probably be, um, making a difference, representing our community, and being, uh, a voice for, not only LGBTs of Houston but all of Houston. 'Cause I, as I've gotten more active, I'm starting to meet more people and reach out into different communities, and so being that voice, that –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – sensible engineer voice on Council 'Cause we know engineers have a different way of thinking.

Q: How has the election of openly LGBT officials impacted the community?
BH: Well, it's, it's opening doors. Especially with Annise, it's kind of broken the glass, a peek–

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – in the glass, where, uh, a few years ago, it was unheard of that a mayor **** would be LGBT –

LY: Right.
BH: – of Houston, and now she's in her second term going for her third term. So, you know, it's, it's changed everything. She was in the world press –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – just, just for being elected here. And it was, it was important that it was done here, 'cause a lot of people said it would never happen in Houston –

LY: Right.

BH: – and, and it did. So it, it changed the game I think.

LY: Yeah.

BH: And that, that's what politics can do, it can change the game really.

Q: What are the remaining political barriers for the LGBT community?
BH: Well, I, you know, higher office of course. Uh, we're gearing up for the Tammy Baldwin race this year. She's running for, uh, Senate.

LY: Wow.

BH: So, if she were to win this year, it would be the first LGBT, uh, Senator, so the first –

LY: In like anything.

BH: – uh, ever! So, the first –

LY: What?

BH: We were ****, so – – she's, she's going to be in town, we're having a big fundraiser for her yeah.

LY: No way. Wow.

BH: So, yeah, so, you know, just –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – breaking those ceilings, but there's, there's so many races where we're not represented so –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – you know, locally, and the state, the state legislature has no one openly gay right now, in the State House in Austin so, that's another place we can go, okay. Uh, I'm the, I don't know
if you found this in your research, I'm the new head of the Victory Fund and that's where, their whole mission is, or our whole mission is to put LGBT people in office, to train and endorse them and fund them for office. So, and that's kind of breaking, you know, changing minds, but putting, um, our people into office.

Q: How were you involved in Mayor Parker’s campaign?
BH: Uh, it started, uh, when she first, when she came on the show, and she, she declared her race, her candidacy and I'm like, okay, I'm gonna do whatever it takes to get her in office –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – 'cause I was inspired. So the first thing I did is I, I had a fundraiser in my house. I invited my friends over and we raised about $4,000.00, and um, so someone in her campaign noticed and so I was asked to come on the finance committee, so I never served on the first finance committee before, you know, raising the money for her. And you know, the cool thing about that was that you get the behind-the-scenes, like, we would have weekly meetings –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – with Annise and she would come in and we'd talk strategy and, you know, how they, how things are changing, you know, how we're changing the campaign. You know, and then on election night, we were kind of in the inner sanctum.

LY: Yeah. Wow.

BH: **** behind the scenes. When, when, when she held her partner's hand in victory, I, I cried. I mean, just to be there for the history was just, and after all that work –

LY: Yeah.

BH: – and you know, we made history in Houston, that night, so that was the most rewarding part. Uh, she’ll hug me whenever she sees me. You know, we're, we're actually working on this, uh, non-discrimination ordinance –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – for the City, and we're kinda working with the mayor and we're gonna build a multi-year plan to make it illegal to, uh, discriminate against people for being gay, you know. It's, it's still legal to lose your job for being gay, or to lose your house or your apartment, and we're working to change that.

Q: When did you become politically active?
BH: This is, I was not politically active until 2009 with, Annise with her campaign –

LY: Uh huh.
BH: — and I never really cared much about it. Uh, but that's when I, I saw it, and I saw the difference that it can make –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: — and, you know, the good that it could do, and have it make such a change. So that's when it started.

Q: What is the LGBT community’s political future?
BH: Politically, uh, just winning different victories around the country. Uh, you know, it's Texas, and maybe having Annise run for governor.

LY: Wow. That would be, wow.

BH: And so, you know, in the next, after this next, uh, term, she'll, she'll be the mayor, or the governor of Texas. Yeah, so that's kind of the next, kind of big thing coming up. But of course Tammy would be a huge win if she would win for the Senate.

LY: Mm hmm. Absolutely.

Q: How do you feel the discourse and management of HIV and AIDS could be improved?
BH: Yeah. I think with HIV and AIDS, it's become very, uh, people have become complacent. They think that it's a manageable disease, you take a pill once a day, and then you kinda forget about it. But it's still a virus, it still can mutate, so there's a chance that, that, you know the, the deaths of the 80s and 90s could come back once the virus becomes drug-resistant. And so I think in the younger community it's, portions of our community, it's people that have not seen the death and the destruction of HIV/AIDS so there's not that, that fear and so they, they feel kind of immortal, and so I, I have, I have a fear that that will come back. Well, I think, uh, by talking about it, and uh, attending events where people, uh, have a comfortable rapport and, and are able to ask questions and to get, get you know, meet people who are HIV-positive find out, you know, different treatments, uh, come to the Center for AIDS, which I am the Board –

LY: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

BH: — chairman, and talk to our, our staff, and uh, learn about the latest in the treatment and medication and, um, what's going on with the disease.

Q: How do you become Grand Marshal?
BH: Well, it starts, uh, each year there's a nomination process and they nominate about 10 to 12 people and then, uh, all of the former grand marshals get together and have a short list, they create a short list of about 4 to 5. And last year there was four finalists and then, once you're on the short list, then you go to, uh, the community as a whole for a vote and that's online. So it's, then there's like 3 months of voting. So it becomes like a mini-campaign.

LY: Cool.
BH: And so, uh, and you campaign for 3 months and then, like a month before Pride Day, they announce the winner. So I had a Facebook page and ask people to vote and get your friends to vote, and I had like little, little campaign managers who would help me. But I mean it, it's like running a full campaign. It's, it's a popular vote throughout the whole city.

LY: Cool.

BH: So.

LY: Practice for the future.

BH: It kinda, kinda was. It was like practice, it was hard.

Q: How did you prepare to be the Grand Marshal?
BH: Uh, a lot of practicing the wave. My, uh, my partner who is very, uh, is very shy, I made him a deal that if I won, that he would have to ride in the car with me, and that's his biggest nightmare is to, to be in front of literally 200,000 people looking directly at you. And, um, so, he, he did I swear to God, psyched him up for that, you know, but it was cool. I know a lot of people like tanning -

Q: What was the day of the Pride Parade like?
BH: It was like being king for a day, or I guess queen for a day! It was, it was like a royalty because you had, uh, your own private area and you had your own private car, and you had your, your spot, and you're in front of the parade, you know, and uh, everyone **** 'cause you're sittin' on the back of a convertible and just waving. You know, it was, it was amazing, it, it was probably one of the moments that I'll never forget that day last year. It's a life-changing moment I guess. You know, when you look back, that's, that's one of the moments that you remember. I was sitting in the car with David, my partner, and just, seeing people in the car behind you and kinda waving to them and throwing beads at them, you know, and then, it was unreal, I mean just being in the parade.

Q: What example do you set for the LGBT community?
BH: I try to, uh, be active and do what I can to make a difference in the community. Uh, I'm very passionate in that I try to inspire people to get involved, to do something –

LY: Mm hmm.

BH: – join our organization, join a non-profit, get involved in political, and people will come and ask me, you know, how to get involved. I'm like, well what do you want to do, what is your passion?

LY: Mm hmm.
BH: So I encourage people to follow their passion to get, uh, get involved, make a difference. 'Cause Houston is huge and the gay community is, is large, but you know, kinda find your niche and make, make a difference.

Q: Any last words? You know, I love Houston and I love our community and I think there's a lot we have done, but there's a lot still left to do and so, I'd like to be part of that.

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