Rosemary Cloud Oral History Interview

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Rosemary Cloud: I'm a mother of gay son and straight daughter and I've been in PFLAG since back in mid-90s and I'm president, this is my second term haven't been impeached yet. We're really trying to work on just making ourselves known. The City of Houston, we have a lot of work to be done and I'm just really equality for all is in my heart.

Q: How and why did you become involved with PFLAG?
RC: One day my teenage daughter came into me and she said, "Mom, we need to talk." Well that's not a good sign as a parent. So, I said okay. She said, "I'm pregnant." Teenager. And one step behind my daughter, was my son, who said, "and I'm gay." I went, who cares, your sister's pregnant, I don't care if you're gay or not. I had read in Ann Landers about PFLAG. I never heard about it and so, I went to PFLAG and have been there ever since. I was ruled prejudice and grew up in the east end, real conservative, redneck and it's opened my heart and my mind to this wonderful community of people and I've met so many wonderful people and wonderful parents. I was blind but now I see and I just think that we don't need to put up with all this stuff, all this crap, can I say crap?

Q: What are the goals of PFLAG?
RC: We have three missions, one is education, two is advocacy and three is support and we know that a lot of parents are traumatized when their children come out to them and I think that we just need to educate people. I got in trouble in PFLAG meeting because I called some people stupid, generally, the church is stupid, parents are stupid and they say that I should say misinformed. So, we have a lot of misinformed people. In Texas we have the largest chapter, but in a city of Houston's size, we should have a lot more people. It's just getting the word out and getting parents educated and coming to PFLAG. We're trying to educate the public on GLBT people are no different than anybody and they should be loved and cherished and celebrated as my pastor says.

Q: What are you personally working on right now?
RC: Every day I answer emails, mainly from parents about what do I do. I don't know about this and I felt like my child, you know, is on his way or I knew my child and all of a sudden, they're gay. And my first words are, thank goodness they told you. That must be very difficult for them and they waited for the right time. So, we're trying to encourage everybody to come and join us and be around this wonderful group of people and parents.

Q: How does PFLAG work with the trans community?
RC: We are reaching out, like I said, to the transgender community. We did a day of remembrance at U of H campus. We have two support groups and we work with U of H Clear Lake campus. Working with global, working with GLSEN. So, we're really reaching out. I've
just gone to two meetings with LGBT Task Force who is having a big seminar in January and I think your teacher will be involved in that, he's always there, and he's so cute. We're really trying to reach out. We are hosting a social at the transgender house and I don't know if you're aware, there is a transgender house in Houston in the Montrose area. It's not where they live, but they can hang out there and they have a social the first Friday of each month. And so PFLAG is hosting that. We're trying to reach out. It's a great barbeque and we're trying to reach out into that community also.

**Q: What scholarship programs is PFLAG involved with?**
RC: Since 1998, PFLAG Hatch Youth Foundation Scholarship Fund. It's a lot of an acronym, letters there but, we've given over $1.4 million to eligible GLBT students. We were so proud of them. It's in the Houston area. The big scholarships are $10,000.00 to a female or male and it's just unbelievable. If you don't ever come to PFLAG, come in July because that's when we honor these students and it is just so encouraging to all of us to be able to give this money.

**Q: How much has PFLAG grown here in Houston?**
RC: We're going through a cycle, you know, as every organization does. I think we've grown so much in spreading our word. We would like to increase our membership. We kind of ebb and flow on the membership, but we're at a 100 and I meet and conference call with all the PFLAG presidents in Texas and we're the largest chapter. But it's mainly getting our name out there. A few years back, before your time, we did a billboard campaign that said "Hate hurts" and "Love unconditionally" and we had our signs on buses and gave out cards and I think we need to do that again. We just need to spread the word and get more support.

**Q: What are some specific problems or conflicts you have faced at PFLAG?**
RC: Still ignorance, the protestors at the Pride parade. They tell us not to engage with these people that have, you know, you're going to hell, God doesn't love fags. The same thing, is they have kids doing this too and while we're being applauded by the whole community, they're out there just spouting hate. My son saw them and he said, "You better leave before my mamma gets here." And that's been the main thing, is that we're still - I'm working with a program called Welcoming Schools, and you know, nobody likes bullies in schools, but when you say LGBT issues, they don't want to do that. But Welcoming Schools is attacking for LGBT student's bullying, antidiscrimination and I just read a letter from a counselor, that said, don't you know Jesus Christ is coming and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Kendall Post: Like a school counselor?

RC: A public-school counselor, and this is why I say we have a lot of work to be done.

**Q: Have religious organizations in Houston helped PFLAG in any way?**
RC: Resurrection Metropolitan Christian Church is very welcoming. I go to Saint Paul's Church, Methodist church. We hold our meetings there. Bering Methodist Church is very supportive and are the UU chapters. There are pockets of Baptist churches, Saint Stephen's, an Episcopal church, just did a same sex blessing. I just went to the big gay wedding at RMCC and 16 couples, GLBT couples, either committed or recommitted their vows, and that's not legal, but it was a wonderful ceremony. What was so encouraging to me as a parent, to see all their parents
there, just taking pictures. These people, they wore wedding dresses, tuxedos and just a traditional wedding, some of them did, some of them wore jeans, which is traditional to me. But, just to see their families, celebrate them, that was really unique. I also just spoke at Saint Peter's Methodist Church in Katy that has a support group. So, it's coming. It's just letting people know that the church is accepting them and my son said he learned early on, "You're going hell" from the church. Not so, not so. And if they're in hell, I want to be in hell with them. That's it.

Q: Tell us about your work lobbying the Texas State Legislature.
RC: All we're trying to do is get GLBT added to the anti-discrimination clause. You would think that would be a given, right? There's ethnicity, age, gender. But, when we say GLBT, a lot of people, whoa and one legislator, who shall remain nameless, and I had to write the Honorable, so he's a senator. He had the audacity, the staff, they're supposed to speak for the people, because nobody really don't get to see very many of them, I say they're strutting their stuff in Austin. Compared granting the rights to GLBT as granting the rights of beastiality. And I'm thinking, this woman patted the bible as she spoke to us and we just couldn't believe it. So, that just prompted me, I'm on my letter writing campaign and it's really scary. Just if you throw term out there, GLBT, there's a lot of misinformation, a lot of fear, a lot of stupidity.

Q: How have you worked with Planned Parenthood?
RC: I volunteered there actually about 2 years and I just really believe that abortion is a woman's right, I've always felt like that and it's not anybody else's business, certainly not the government. So, when I retired, I wanted to volunteer and I've always done PFLAG, but I wanted to do something extra. I first started as an escort, and what we do is that we have so many protesters and so many crazy people that are out there spewing hatred and just awful information and they're trying to prevent these people that have access to Planned Parenthood. Now Planned Parenthood is the major facilities where I worked, most of the time and it's fenced in but we have to let the clients in, patients in. And they've made appointments, everything and you know the thing about that, is that only 3 percent of Planned Parenthood activities are abortion. The rest, they do pap smears, they do well women care and it's on a sliding scale. So, low socio-economic women can get care there and men also. They also do STD testing, HIV testing, which I was involved in. So, I spent about 6 months as an escort and as I said, I saw the ugly side of the protesters. So, when they offered this HIV Task Force, I decided that I wanted to do that, and of course we went through training and had wonderful people that I worked for and worked with. We went into the gay clubs down on the Montrose area, mainly in the Montrose area, but we also did health fairs and different things like this, and did HIV/STD testing and we did the quick test, which in 20 minutes they know if they have HIV and you have to go through an intense counseling to try to talk to these people first of all, because they're suspicious of people coming into their clubs and thinking that we're going to judge them and then we have to do the STD test, it takes about 2 weeks, but the HIV, they know right then if they have HIV or if they need further testing. So, we have to counsel with them and more times than not, they're negative, but there are people that are positive and don't know what to do and are just devastated by this news. So, we put them in contact with the proper health authorities that can actually put them on a course of medication. I always say I hand out candy in this hand, condoms in this hand, whatever you want.
Q: Coming from such a “redneck” area, how did you become so accepting?
RC: Because of my son was discriminated against, bullied, long before bullying came into all this publicity and by even teachers. So, I just, had I known back then all what was going on in the school, I couldn't have stood it. But he didn't tell me until he quit school, he quit high school. He changed four or five times and then he quit. Said he wasn't going to do it anymore because of all the bullying that went on. I just thought, this is crazy, this is my son and he's the same kid, whether he's gay or whatever, I mean, he's my kid and how dare they treat him this way. It's really so important that we educate people and especially parents that choose to throw their kids out. Parents wouldn't have that prejudice against their children had it been something else. But they think it's a choice and that's where we're trying to educate people. I want to thank you girls, I hope you don't get offended calling you girls. This is really a great opportunity for me to talk about the things that are dear to my heart and it's really encouraging to me to see that you have this kind of program at Rice and I just thank you for letting me do this because it gives me such hope to think that the young people are going to change things, even in Texas.