Johnny Peden: And like I had mentioned earlier, I’d been involved in politics when I was a kid, so just kind of a natural… I don’t know, my psychic makeup always wanted me to do something [laughs], something progressive, something um, with empirical evidence of success, kind of. Not just waste my time in an organization just because I don’t have anything else to do. I want to do…I want to be involved in something where I can see results. I want to help make things happen, for the good.

Houston Equal Rights Ordinance – to be voted on in November 2015

And voting against HERO, um, is a vote for discrimination, to my way of thinking. We shall see. It’s going to be very interesting. I think that Houston is a progressive enough city that ah, we’ll get the ordinance. But we can’t take it for granted. We need to work and work hard. Um, not only because of the, the fiscal perspective that I mentioned at first but also humanitarian. People are losing their jobs every day in Houston. We can’t afford to see more jobs lost. We’ve got to do what’s best for Houston, and what’s best for Houston is what’s best for every individual. I mean, you say Houston, you’ve got to put a face to it [laughs]. I mean, when you say just, “Houston,” what does that mean? That means a pregnant woman. That means a minority of any race. That means a person in the military. That means all ethnic groups, all religious groups. Um, these people have jobs here. Ah, good jobs. And, ah, we need to see everything we possibly can, see that everything’s done to save the jobs in Houston. Ah, if discrimination gets its way, ah, Houston will suffer in many ways.

Campaigns and Networks

I started out almost exclusively as a volunteer. Ah, and a lot of people don’t realize how much—what I call—grunt work needs to be done in a campaign. It’s not just going to parties [laughs]. I mean there’s a lot of hard work involved. And just organizing people, and organizing volunteers, and doing some of the grunt work. Going out, knocking on doors. Ah, calling people. So some of the work that goes on behind the scenes that some people don’t know about or might be surprised to know about is training the candidate. [laughs]. Here’s what you say when you call someone to ask for money. Here’s what you say to the press [laughs]. Here’s what you don’t say to the press [laughs]. You know? There’s a lot of research that goes on in a campaign. Where does a candidate best spend their time? Where the most people are. So planning the candidate’s schedule. Doing research of not only how to get there [laughs], where we’re going, um, or where they’re going, but learn what you can about that organization, so that when you get there you
have some understanding about them. So I’ve worked in all those aspects, and ah, the most rewarding of course has been the work for the mayor.

Ah, but you were ask—you asked me about the networking, and certainly through any church you’re going to meet a lot of people. Ah, and certainly through the Caucus, you meet a lot of people. But I guess I just always have been an activist at heart, and looked to see what I can do, and, ah, if anything, and try to be creative, think outside of the box, what’s not being addressed: don’t just replicate what somebody else is doing if they’re doing a good job of it. But talk with people. See what needs are not being met. And it was so, so easy, and such a rewarding experience for me. I mean it—that sounds very selfish, ah, but whenever we volunteer we have to get some satisfaction out of it. You don’t want to just, you know, grunt and groan about it, “Ah, I’ll be glad when this is over!” Do something that you enjoy, something that you know is doing good for other people. Ah, and there’s so much out there that still needs to be done. And I am just so proud of what the gay community is doing today here in Houston, ah, for people of all ages. Um, and one of the reasons why I still stay involved a little bit in politics is because of the friendships you build. By going to the Caucus meeting yesterday was somewhat of a family reunion, with gay friends and straight friends! Some council members, but mostly some of the other citizens who were there. You build good friendships out of it. And, ah, hey, that’s what life’s all about! Where would, what would life be if we didn’t have friends, for goodness sakes! And friends where you have some things in common. It’s good to have friends where you don’t have everything in common though, so you can complement each other and learn from one another.

**Religion and Weddings**

Every once in a while as we get older I think we have to reinvent ourselves [laughs]. Yeah. Ah, as you know, I was licensed and ordained many years ago, got my bachelor’s, got my master’s, was on church staff of a Baptist church when I was outed. And had not been involved really in church work, ah, for many years, ah, except for when I helped start the early service at MCCR, now Resurrection MCC. Um, and, ah, worked with the HIV support group, and ah, did those type things in, in ministry. Um…I was down in Florida, I was campaign manager for the fellow running for state rep, and ah, someone back here in Houston mentioned to me, “What are you going to do when you get back?” Because I’d been to Costa Rica for a couple of months, been down in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale. “What are you going to do?” “I don’t know, just bum, probably travel some more, because I love to travel.” They said, “You know, you need something to do. You can’t just sit at home all day. Why don’t you do some marriages? You like being around people and going places, you’re a people person, and all that. And you, you’d enjoy doing it.” And they told me about a website, um, and they said, “you know, check it out, see what happens.” And um, boy, it’s been unbelievable. Ah, I’m not the conservative I used to be, in religion or in anything else [laughs]. Um, I respect all religions or none equally, and I sincerely mean that. I even have that on my website. Um, to me, there’s a God who’s bigger than any one religion. No religion is totally right, no religion is totally wrong. There’s something good to be
found if you look with an open mind. Um, I still have doubts. Ah, I don’t interpret the Bible literally. I mean, how in the world can you interpret it literally? [laughs] Give me a break! Ah, no. Ah, it’s not a history book, it’s not a science book [laughs], the Earth is more than two thousand years old [laughs], um, but I still find the Bible, along with many other books, a great source of inspiration. And I find inspiration in other religions too. There’s a lot to be said about Buddhism, for instance, and the meditation. A lot of the quotes, ah, very profound. Very profound views there. Um, just for meditation, there are so many Buddhist quotes of one sentence, where you can mediate on that all day and glean insight and inspiration from it. Ah, so like I said, I respect all religions—or none—equally. That’s it.

**Personal Archives and LGBT History**

I’m sentimental, I keep a lot of things. Too much, sometimes, if it has special significance. One, because I am sentimental, but secondly, from a historical perspective, to keep it. Um, I think it’s important to know our history. Um, I value uh, the historical progress that has been made, and it needs to be documented, and it’s great that you are, yeah. And then we have libraries. GLBT libraries, yeah. Uh, what little bit I have at home seems like a lot, ah, you know, for just an individual, but compared to what the other libraries here in Houston have, ah, it’s a miniscule amount. But why do I keep it? I mean, like I said, sentimental. You know, the personal connection. Brings back great memories. Well, some are great, some are not so great. Some of the infighting that was going on back then, that kind of thing, I don’t want to concentrate on, but accentuate the positive. And then of course, from a historical perspective, it’s important to keep that.

**How do you make time for yourself, between the weddings and the political work?**

See that *is* time for myself, because that’s what I enjoy doing! That is for me [laughs]! It’s both ways, you know? You receive by giving. But it’s as simple. I get a great deal of pleasure out of those. Um, having a small role in a person’s life, for that fifteen minutes or however way. I mean, it’s quite an honor! Um, it is a two-way street. And doing a lot of the political work I do now, I get a lot of pleasure in that, because that’s impacting people’s lives. If you don’t really enjoy what you’re doing, don’t do it! Yeah. Um, it’s a two-way street, like I said. And if I weren’t getting pleasure, satisfaction, out of it, I wouldn’t do it. I’d find something else. But I haven’t found anything else that gives me such pleasure and satisfaction, as the politics and ah, performing the weddings.