Oral History # 69

An Interview With
JD Doyle

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Interviewer: Renee Tappe

Terms of use: open

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RENÉE TAPPE: This is Renée Tappe interviewing JD Doyle for The oH Project, Oral Histories of HIV/AIDS in Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas. The interview is taking place on September 3, 2019, in Houston, Texas. The purpose of this interview is to document Mr. Doyle’s recollections concerning the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas.

Hi, JD. Thanks for joining us today.

JD DOYLE: Thank you.

RENÉE TAPPE: Let’s get some of your early history. Tell me your full name, where you were born, and a bit about your family.

JD DOYLE: James Alfred Doyle, but since college I’ve gone by JD, which sometimes confuses people because they think the “D” is my middle initial, and it’s not. I grew up in a small town in Ohio, Salem, about 12,000 people, so one high school. This was the early 1960s, so you didn’t hear anything about being gay at all. You didn’t see anything on television, nothing, so there were no role models, no one to look at. I went to college at Youngstown State in Youngstown. That’s about 25 miles away. It was a five-year course in engineering, chemical engineering. I had no gay experiences in college. It was a long time after that before I had gay experiences. I got a job after college at Kodak in Rochester, New York. Lived eight years there. A good job, good company. Hated the climate. I hate snow, cold.

RENÉE TAPPE: You were raised with it.
DOYLE: I was raised with it, and this was even worse in Rochester because right on the lake, you got lots of snow, and it was just ridiculous. I spent all of the 1970s thinking about being gay but not doing anything about it.

TAPPE: Was this true in high school, as well?

DOYLE: No, I didn’t really think about it. It wasn’t in the consciousness of probably anybody then. I can remember cute guys I liked in high school, but that’s all. I very slowly processed being gay, and I processed it by myself. I didn’t know anybody, period. I remember by probably 1976, 1977, once in a while buying gay magazines. Of course, you had to be very secretive that someone might see you buy that. Even though I was living in a house by myself in a suburb, it was a secret. When I got tired of Rochester — this was 1978 — I found a job in Norfolk, Virginia, for another chemical company, and it was not in my head I’m going to move to Norfolk and come out, but that’s exactly what happened and right away.

TAPPE: How did that process work?

DOYLE: They have had a very organized gay group, the Unitarian Universalist Gay Community that met in a church, but it wasn’t related to this. The Unitarians just let them use the space very generously. I was there a week, and I called their hotline. They were very organized for 1978. I talked to somebody, and they said, “Well, come on down.” Of course, you drive around the block a couple of times first. Then I came in and met people and was welcomed right away, and it was the most giving group of people.

A number of those people, I still know. Forty years later, they’re still friends of mine. My best friend Scott from that time period came down when I
was Grand Marshal and sat on the car with me in the parade. There are still people I talk to on the phone. I still interact with people there. Now it’s more of like how can I help them as a historian with things that I remember from that time? After living there about a year, that group did everything. They did the gay switchboard. They did spaghetti dinners. They did picketing of the movie Cruising. They did talks to colleges, and I did that, just really stepping out of my box to do that.

TAPPE: You did talking to college classes?

DOYLE: Yes, imagine.

TAPPE: About being gay?

DOYLE: Yes.

TAPPE: The coming-out process or the community?

DOYLE: Just being gay, because they had never seen a gay person.

TAPPE: Like you. You understood that.

DOYLE: Yes. I remember a couple of those classes. I remember one guy, I think he was British, and he was a coin collector. He asked some question, after the session, some question for me about coins. It’s like that was not really his motive. He just wanted a further connection. He didn’t come on to me or anything, but he wanted —

TAPPE: He wanted to be able to talk to you somehow.

DOYLE: Yes, and you get that. You certainly understand the need to talk to another gay person one-to-one. That did not happen in Rochester.

I had my first gay sex actually before I left New York. My group of friends there were all record collectors, as you might not be surprised, and five or
six of us went to a record show in Toronto, which was a three-hour drive from Rochester. This was in September. I got a hotel room, and this was like a Friday night, and I went walking down Younge Street, which is one of the main streets in Toronto, and went into a magazine store, not a dirty bookstore like the name might imply. It was just a magazine store, but they had a gay section. I was looking at the magazines very deliberately, and this young guy was doing the same, and we kind of made eye contact, and he slowly walked out of the store, making sure I was watching. So I put my magazine down and followed him out the door, and walked up to him and said, “You want some company?” How bold was I? None of this, “Do you have the time?” “Do you know where such-and-such street is?” None of that. So we went up to my hotel room and spent the night. The name was Scott, and it was very nice. I remember the Miss America Pageant was on TV. I thought that was funny. That was funny.

TAPPE: You must have on some level worked on this in your head, subconsciously even, don’t you think?

DOYLE: Oh, yes, I had well accepted myself by then.

TAPPE: But you just hadn’t experienced anything?

DOYLE: Right, that was my first sexual experience. That was 1977. A postscript to that. The next day at the record show — of course, our gang all met each other at the record show — I met this couple, a man and a woman who were record collectors and knew we were visiting. “Where did you stay? Where are you staying?” It turned out they were at the same hotel, on the same floor, in the next room. It just flashed through my head like, “Oh, my God.”

TAPPE: They didn’t say anything?
DOYLE: What would they say? They didn’t know. They didn’t know that I had a

visitor, a guest. To me, it was just, “Oh, my.”

TAPPE: It all worked out.

DOYLE: Yes, it did.

TAPPE: It was a positive experience for you.

DOYLE: When I got to Norfolk, I came out right away and got involved and worked on

the gay switchboard and worked on the gay newspaper. I really liked doing that.

I liked the layout, the layout work. It was all very hands-on at that time. You
didn’t have computer programs. You didn’t have computers to do any of that
stuff, so you did it by hand on full-scale, full-size pieces of paper that you would
type the articles and paste them on the board and do the headlines by hand with a
product called Chartpak, which you would rub to rub the letters individually to
make a headline of whatever font and size you needed. Very laborious. So you
did that. We did a monthly paper, and it was a good paper. I was proud of my
involvement. I really took to it. I was good at it. After six months of helping out,
the present editor decided he had done it long enough. He had done it for a
number of years. Decided he was stepping down, and there really wasn’t
anybody else logical except me.

TAPPE: To take it over?

DOYLE: To take it over. It was like, “Whoa, this is a crash course being gay.” So I did,

and I was editor for about a year.

TAPPE: Did you write?

DOYLE: Oh, yes, God, yes, I wrote. We all had to write. We wrote the stories. You

wrote reviews: movie reviews, book reviews, God, yes, even some poetry.
TAPPE: Were you a writer prior to that? I mean, that’s not your educational background.

DOYLE: No.

TAPPE: That just came naturally to you, apparently.

DOYLE: Yes, I guess. I guess I was not a typical engineer. I loved books. I always was well read. I remember the summer after I graduated from high school, I read all the Russian classics on my own. It was like, “What an idiot. You are weird.”

TAPPE: But you enjoy that.

DOYLE: Yes. I had a bent toward the English part of stuff, so I guess I didn’t find writing that difficult.

TAPPE: How long were you in Norfolk?

DOYLE: Three years, and I liked it. I had lots of friends there, but I was getting restless. It was a small town, after all. You get to the point where you’ve already gone to bed with everybody you’re going to go to bed with, so what do you do now? The company I was working for, Virginia Chemicals, was not a good company, and I was not really happy there, so I wasn’t really upset when they started laying tons of people off. Like a third of their employees, they laid off, including me. I had something very rare for life. Two things seldom happen at the same time: time and money. Of course, I had time, and I sold my townhouse in Norfolk and had money.

My dad suggested, “Why don’t you take a cross-county trip?” so I did. He also suggested, “Why don’t you keep a journal?” which was really a surprising thing for him to say because I never saw him read a book, ever. He was working class, worked for a pump company, and he was a local union president, good guy,
but no literary bend at all.

TAPPE: He was aware of your interest, anyway. You’re right, it’s interesting that he would think that, to suggest that. Is that what you did?

DOYLE: Yes, for almost six months. I started in Norfolk, went through Atlanta, Mississippi, Alabama, New Orleans, Houston, Dallas, across through Arizona, New Mexico, southern California to San Diego, L.A. [Los Angeles], San Francisco, Russian River. In Houston, I was here like six weeks and met a guy, and we started dating. That was cool, because he showed me a lot of Houston, more than I surely would have seen as a tourist. I was staying at a guest house in Houston in Montrose, but I got to see a lot through him like the bowling league and, of course, all the bars and his friends. We started dating, and when I got past California, started coming back through Wyoming, he flew out to Colorado to meet me, and we drove back to Houston, and I spent some more time in Houston.

By that time, I decided I’m going to live here. I didn’t move to Houston to be with him because I knew that wouldn’t have worked because he was very promiscuous and I was not at all. I liked him a lot, but I was smart enough to know that that would not be a reason to move to Houston, and he wasn’t encouraging that part either. He liked me, but he didn’t want to be lovers.

Anyhow, I decided to move to Houston, so then I decided if I’m going to move to Houston, I better make my return trip to Norfolk a little wider and to up through Ohio, see my family, and I went to Philadelphia to see a good friend there, and then back down to Norfolk.

I wrote it all down, every bar I went to, every trick I picked up, observations I had about meeting people. For example, I met Ray Hill on that
trip. I met Leonard Matlovich. Do you know who he is?

TAPPE: Yes.

DOYLE: I met him. In fact, I spent the night with Leonard, so that was very nice. It was really interesting because I used my connection to the newspaper, the gay newspaper, which was *Our Own Community Press*. I used that connection.

When I got to a certain city, I would call up the newspaper there, say, “Hey, I was just editor of the Norfolk paper. I’d like to see your facilities.”

Of course, they all welcomed me in, and red carpet, and gave me tours, and we went out to dinner, and they said, “Oh, you’re in San Diego. There’s this play that’s only on tonight. If you go over there, you probably can get in to see it, a gay play.” I did, and so I experienced things a tourist normally wouldn’t know about, because I made those connections.

TAPPE: Within the community.

DOYLE: Within the community. Like for example, my trip was slightly planned, like I knew when I got to Baton Rouge, I was going to go to a gay conference and represent the Norfolk group there. I knew when I got to Dallas, I was going to go to a gay press conference and do the same thing. I wanted to be in San Francisco for Pride, and I was there several weeks around Pride then. It was figured out.

TAPPE: I bet that was fun for you.

DOYLE: It was. I just had that journal transcribed this fall. It was handwritten, 120 pages. I’m going to think about what to do with it now. Do I publish it? Who’s going to care? I think I should do something with it, but I don’t know.

TAPPE: You haven’t decided yet.

DOYLE: Haven’t decided. I’m going to have to go through it carefully and take out last
names because I wouldn’t know how to contact the people who are in the book. They may not want their name mentioned. It’s not my call to do that. I think I’ll just use their last initials, I guess.

TAPPE: You’ll figure that part out.

DOYLE: I’ll figure that out.

TAPPE: So you decided to move to Houston?

DOYLE: Yes, I decided that not only because I met some nice people here, but my criteria was an organized gay community in the South. Not in the cold. In the South. What are the choices there? Atlanta is an island. No. California? Not quite. A lot of my friends in Norfolk thought I would move to San Francisco, but no, and really expensive. Even then, it was really expensive. I knew some people in L.A., but that just didn’t quite do it, and L.A. is so big.

TAPPE: Yes, it is. When you moved to Houston, did you live in the Montrose area?

DOYLE: Yes, I had an apartment on Garrott between Hawthorne and Alabama. It was an awful apartment. Apartments were hard to find in 1981. This was September in 1981. They were hard to find, and so I didn’t find a very nice one, but after six months, I was able to move to Richmont Square, which was then known as 1400 Richmond, a very active, huge complex, which I took advantage of.

TAPPE: You knew what to scope out. Before we move any further into the 1980s in Houston, I want to talk a little bit about your collection. You have a massive, well-known website named JD Doyle Archives. It includes a number of LGBT-related [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] projects. Tell me how that got started. What prompted you to start pulling the music together. Where did all this start? Tell me about some of your projects.
DOYLE: It was an evolution. I was always a record collector. In the 1970s in Rochester, I hung around with record collectors. I was not collecting gay artists then. I was collecting the rarest of the rare stuff I could find. Being a focused engineer, I could really focus on finding stuff. I collected rare Beatles, Beach Boys, doo-wop, rhythm and blues, Elvis, just stuff collectors wanted, the prime stuff. I sold that collection. In Norfolk, I sold it because I was paying less attention to it. I now had a gay life, now had a gay social life. I wasn’t paying much attention to the collection, so I sold it.

Collectors never stop collecting. In Houston now, it was the early 1980s, I started collecting girl groups of the 1960s, like The Ronettes, The Chiffons, The Angels, and thousands more that you’ve never heard of. I became sort of an expert on that and even wrote some articles for record-collecting magazines and a couple of times the liner notes for CDs [compact discs].

That got me some connections in London. When I went to London in 1980 — I was still in Norfolk — I stayed with one of my collecting friends there and met with six or eight of his friends from all around London. We went record shopping together and just had a great time because we were all on the same wavelength, and we all collected girl groups of the 1960s. Who knew that was such a big area?

TAPPE: Oh, my gosh, of all things for you to choose.

DOYLE: Girl-group collectors are mostly gay and mostly men, so that was interesting.

TAPPE: You probably were not aware of that at the time, or were you?

DOYLE: I knew some of the ones that I met were gays, and some I suspected were gay.

My host, the only cute one, was straight.
TAPPE: Oh, well. So you were collecting the young —

DOYLE: I was still collecting all the time and had a huge collection of a certain type of records. As the 1980s finished, getting into the early 1990s, I was losing interest in that also. I was moving to something else, and so I sold that collection. I did it more wisely that second time. I sold them through auctions and record magazines, similar to eBay, but you didn’t have eBay then. You didn’t have computers then. I sold them piecemeal and made a lot more money. But anytime I sold a collection, I always kept the queer stuff. There wasn’t an awful lot of it, but I always kept it. By the mid-1990s, I started focusing on gay and lesbian recordings. Again, I’m focused. I knew how to collect. I knew where to find stuff and got quite a collection. By the end of the 1990s, I had a good collection. I had been involved a little bit with a group in New York called Outmusic, which promoted independent GLBT artists, mostly G and L artists, not so much B and T then.

TAPPE: Back then, that’s right.

DOYLE: Promoted those artists, and I was a judge for them for a couple of times. I would fly up there for their awards show every year. I think I won an award from them, the Outmusic Awards Award for Outstanding Support, 2002. That was a
good experience because obviously I met more people. This was before I started doing radio. I was making some contacts with gay artists, and I use “gay” to mean everything because that’s the way I grew up. When you came out in 1978, “gay” was all the letters. Do I have to explain this? I guess I do. I’m not slighting anybody. It’s just that’s the way I learned. I still call it the GPC.

TAPPE: So do I.

DOYLE: Even though I know it’s more than the Gay Political Caucus.

In 1999, I had met and become friends with Jimmy Carper, who hosted the After Hours show on KPFT. I started calling him up. This was a Saturday night midnight show. I started calling him up to say, “You should play more gay and lesbian artists. Nobody plays them. They don’t get any exposure. Where are they going to get played? You need to play more.”

I did this several times, and he said finally, “Why don’t you come on and play some?” I didn’t see that coming.

TAPPE: You had never been on the radio before?

DOYLE: No, nothing. No experience whatsoever. I put together a few records that I could talk about. He was a great host, a wonderful host. He could give you the feeling that you were the most important guest in the world. What a gift to be able to do that. I can’t do that, but he was able to do that, and we had fun. He had me on a couple of times, and it was just fun for like a half-hour segment.

Jack Valinski heard me on there and invited me to do a segment on Queer Voices. It was then called Lesbian & Gay Voices. Never been on the radio, had no experience, didn’t have any clue what to do, so he got me fixed up with an engineer to help me record my show. I didn’t want to do it live because I wanted
to do a better job than doing it live. I wanted to do interviews with artists and
have the music fade in to the artist. I wanted it to be a lot more technical than you
could just do on the fly.

He got me an engineer, I guess through the station, to sit with me a couple
of times and show me the station equipment. I did, I think, one interview with
somebody at the station, and it was just too hard. The person theoretically
showing me was not reliable, and it was too hard to get studio time, so I decided
this is no good. I need to learn how to do this myself at home, so I bought a
mixer. I already had a tape recorder. I just figured it out.

TAPPE: Your focused self.

[END OF AUDIO PART 1]

DOYLE: Yes, engineering background, but not radio background. Focused enough to
write a script and plan the show and so forth. I was very particular at what I did,
very particular. I would spend hours and hours on a one-hour show. Started
doing the segment, and Jack Valinski got me started. Lately I’ve been thinking of
him as one of the pivot people in my life, where you run into somebody and after
you meet them, your life goes in a different direction. For many people, it could
be a spouse, a lover, a boyfriend, an ex. Could be one of those people, but it’s not
always that way. Jack was a pivot person. He got me started in radio.

It wasn’t long after starting the monthly radio show that I wanted a
website, which also I knew nothing about, because I wanted to share what I had. I
wanted it to be archived. I felt no one was playing this music. Why have it just
once on the air? It needs to be available. I spent several months learning a
website program, Dreamweaver, which people would shake their heads if they
knew I was still using Dreamweaver, but it’s the one I understand, and it works for me. I first started using AOL’s [America Online] free — I’m using air quotes — free websites. Well, they weren’t free to the extent that I wanted them to be free. I wanted a lot more than what they were offering, so I got my own site, rented space on a server, and it just grew from there. I did the show, and I think I did a really good job, and I think it was important. No one else was doing this work in the world. Like why not? There’s plenty of music. There’s plenty of history. Somebody else should do it also, but they didn’t. So I did it from 2000 to 2015. I did lots of interviews with people, a number of people who have passed on, so it’s capturing their interviews.

TAPPE: That was Queer Music Heritage?

DOYLE: That’s Queer Music Heritage, yes, and I was using the word “queer” in 2000.

TAPPE: Which was unusual, a little bit ahead of your time.

DOYLE: Which was a little bit ahead. I was on Lesbian & Gay Voices, but I was using “queer” in my segment’s title, and they changed it to Queer Voices about two years later. I think I must have led that change.

TAPPE: You stopped that in 2015?

DOYLE: Yes, it’s not that I had covered everything you could cover on a gay music show. You could never cover everything. But I did a thorough job. I’m especially proud of the coverage I gave to women’s music and transgender music. Hardly anybody else was doing that, and certainly not to the fanatic extent that I did. I was only required to do an hour show, but I couldn’t stop at an hour because I had more information than that. Since I had the Internet, I would do multi-hour shows. You’d listen to the first hour online or you’d listen to it live on
Queer Voices, but you could also, on my site, listen to several more hours. I did a nine-hour show on gay choruses. I did an eight-hour show on gay Christian music. Three hours on gay hip hop. Gay disco. Music for bears. Punk music. I did these four- or five-or-so-hour shows routinely every month. “Did you have a life then?” because you’d spend easily 100 hours a month preparing radio shows.

TAPPE: Were you employed at this time?
DOYLE: Oh, yeah. How did I do this? I would tell them, “I don’t have time to go to work.”

TAPPE: You were working an engineer-type job?
DOYLE: No, I was working for the IRS [Internal Revenue Service].

TAPPE: How did that happen?
DOYLE: How did that happen? I moved here to Houston in 1981. It was during an engineering bust period, and you really couldn’t find jobs. Also, my experience was not in the oil industry, so even worse, so I found other work. In 1985, I went to work for the IRS. I started on the phones in customer service. Hated that, but I worked my way up. Ended up in a group called the Taxpayer Advocate’s Office for about the last eight to ten years I was there. That was a good group. We were a problem-solving group. We had cases assigned to us where we would try to help people having problems with the IRS. Of course, there was no shortage of cases as people mostly always caused their own problems. Like, “Can you get this levy off my bank?”

“Well, we can take the levy off if you file these five returns you’ve never filed, in 30 days.”

TAPPE: Did you retire from the IRS?
DOYLE: I did, as soon as I could. In 2010, I was 62. It was a stressful job because they kept increasing the number of cases and also the amount of red tape you had to go through, the amount of walls you had to go over to get stuff done where years before that, you had the authority to abate a penalty, then later you didn’t. By 2010, I was ready to retire, and as soon as I could, I did.

TAPPE: I’m assuming you continued to stay focused on your radio shows and your collection?

DOYLE: I was doing that all the time. By 2010, I started a second radio show, called OutRadio, to play current music. The other show was historical. I also did current music.

TAPPE: How often was OutRadio on?

DOYLE: They were both monthly. It would often have three or four hours also.

TAPPE: You did that from home, as well?

DOYLE: Yes, I did it all at home. In the early years, I would put them on a CD and take to Queer Voices what they were going to air, an hour show, and of course, it was timed exactly for what they needed. It was 58 minutes. Later, I could transmit the show through the Internet to them. They would go to a special page I set up, and they could download the show, so it got easier that way.

TAPPE: Tell me about “Audiofile.”

DOYLE: “Audiofile,” that was a good project, too. Through my connections with folks
I met — they were from L.A., but I met them at the Outmusic Awards shows in New York that we all went to. Chris Wilson and her partner, Pam Marshall, were hosting a radio segment called “Audiofile,” which was an eight-minute segment. It was aired on This Way Out, a radio news magazine which was broadcast weekly all over the world, on about 200 stations. I had met them, and Chris’ partner, Pam, wanted to stop doing it, so they asked me if I wanted to step in. They’re in L.A. I’m in Houston. It doesn’t matter. You had the Internet to get things back and forth. I started working with them, doing more and more, and eventually started writing the scripts. There was an engineer involved also, the third person.

I did that about eight years. They did it a little longer. That was cool because, again, it was a good way to network with the artists. If you want to contact an artist like Janis Ian and say, “I want to do an interview with you, and we’re going to feature part of it on This Way Out on 200 stations around the world,” well, you’ve got some clout going in the door to get their attention, which, of course, I didn’t use the material just for that eight-minute show. I used it for my own show, too, so that was great for me.

I also learned a lot technically. The engineer was very picky, which was good, so he taught me a lot including how to use some of the sound-editing programs, which, of course, I didn’t know existed. They came to Houston twice to train me, essentially.

TAPPE: This was on your own equipment?

DOYLE: Yes, equipment I had bought. It was in my home office.

TAPPE: Are you doing any radio now?
DOYLE: No. I might guest once in a while on *Queer Voices*. When they need me for something, I’m glad to do it. I learned how to do interviews for anybody, really. We all did it. We all learned. If someone would say, “We need to interview somebody from this group, and just do it,” you didn’t need to prepare because you knew how to do it. You knew how to ask the who, what, when, where, why, and, “Do you need any volunteers?” “What’s the name of your event?” “When is your event?” We learned how to do the interviews. Also, Jack has occasionally had me on to talk about my projects, sometimes when he couldn’t get another guest, but that’s okay.

TAPPE: “Call JD. He’ll fill in.”

DOYLE: “Call JD. He can talk.” And Jack and I could always talk together. He was really good at it.

TAPPE: Besides the radio portion, you have several different projects within the archives.

DOYLE: Yes. As I was moving out of *Queer Music Heritage* — the last show was in March of 2015 — I was starting to put some photographs that I had taken from the early 1980s of Pride and the Westheimer Arts Festival on my website. My website was the music site, so that wasn’t logical, but that was the site I had. So I set up a little section for Houston history on that site. I suppose you could find it using Google, but it wasn’t logical. After a few months, it grew, and I decided it needed to be its own site.

TAPPE: That was the Houston LGBT History site?

DOYLE: Yes. Also, fanatic that I am, I started the Texas Obituary Project about the same time. I was involved with a group called Houston ARCH, Houston Area
Rainbow Collective History. Local historians would meet from all over the city — from U of H [University of Houston], from Rice, the public library — and we would talk about history efforts. During that time, I had found a website from San Francisco that someone started on obituaries that ran in the Bay Area Reporter. I thought this is really cool, because they’re posting all these obituaries for people who died in San Francisco, mostly of AIDS, but not just that.

TAPPE: But within the gay community?

DOYLE: Yes, definitely gay obituaries. I thought we can do that, so I mentioned this to the group. I told them about it. They thought that’s a great idea, and then everybody takes three steps backwards. For several months, nothing happened. Then I said, “Screw it. I’ll do it myself.”

I contacted the people in San Francisco and bounced some ideas off of them. I didn’t do it the same way they did it. I wanted it to be more versatile. On theirs, you search and you bring up a thumbnail photo of somebody, and you could click and see a larger version. A searchable website of obituaries for San Francisco.

I wanted to set up a page for each person so that it could contain more, so that you could search more. On my site, you can search — these are all built in — you can search by year. You can search by city. You can search by name, certainly. You can search for all the Bobbys who died, all the Stevens. You can search for tags that I had for black; Latino; female, because there weren’t that many female obituaries relatively. Violence, if it was a murder, if it was a gay bashing, you could look up those under the word “violence,” and sometimes people want to do that. Researchers want to be able to write an article on gay
bashing in San Antonio, so you could do that. I designed it for researchers. Of course, AIDS was also a tag, and I didn’t use the tag “AIDS” unless the obituary said it was AIDS. Sometimes you could say he was staying at such-and-such hospice or he was on the eighth floor of Park Plaza, which I knew meant AIDS, but unless it said that, I pretty much didn’t think it was my call. But by my estimate, if you did a search for the word “AIDS,” probably the number should be twice as big, from my database. The database has about 7,000 right now. It’s a large AIDS database, but there’s more to it than that.

TAPPE: You’re saying if you put in “AIDS” as a keyword or a tag, that maybe 1,000 or 2,000 come up, but you think it should probably be 4,000 because people were not outing themselves or the families were not outing?

DOYLE: Correct. That brings up an unusual aspect of this selection of obituaries. These are mostly from This Week in Texas, which was the statewide gay publication from 1975 to 2000. It started having obituaries early in the AIDS crisis. They seldom had obituaries before that. It would be like car accidents, so they weren’t obituaries then. They were a news article. There finally got to be enough volume that in, I think, mid-1983, they switched to having an obituary section in the back of the publication. Of course, it got to be very heavy sometimes. Sometimes you would have 20 or so a week. People would go to the bar every Friday night and pick up This Week in Texas, the TWT, as we called it, to see who died, because sometimes you didn’t know their names, but you’d recognize them.

TAPPE: These are just the ones that ended up in TWT?

DOYLE: Yes, and another angle is the ones that ended up in TWT, this is probably the
first time in history where obituaries were done by the community, the friends of the people who died. These were not family obituaries from the *Chronicle*, where they might have mentioned the lover’s name, maybe not; might have mentioned that they were gay or alluded to that, probably not. These were by the gay community. These were the friends or the lovers left behind doing this, so they were more personal. They were not the city-newspaper format for an obituary, which is very sterile. It had its own format. This was not that. Sometimes all you had was a poem. Sometimes you had some nice memories. Sometimes you had political statements. There’s a page of my website that I pulled out distinctive obituaries. One of them particularly was very angry. Another one stated that so-and-so would have wanted this to be known as an AIDS death because it was important for people to know people died of AIDS; it wasn’t a closet disease. One stands out that so-and-so died and wanted people to know that it had nothing whatsoever to do with AIDS.

TAPPE: Is that right?

DOYLE: Yes.

TAPPE: It was in *TWT*?

DOYLE: Yes, like he wanted to be clear this had nothing whatsoever to do with AIDS, okay?

TAPPE: In death, he didn’t want that stigma attached?

DOYLE: Right, yes, it was a stigma, and that’s why a lot of the obituaries were not identified for the cause of death. That’s why a lot of families never did obituaries, because they didn’t want people to know Harold had died of AIDS. Also, many people moved home. They went, “Oh, I’m going back to Tennessee to die,” and
the people in Tennessee, whether they meant well or not, didn’t know about *This Week in Texas*, so there was no obituary done here, so it was up to the friends. The friends sometimes would have the person dressed in drag because that’s what the person did, that’s what the person loved to do. I’m sure it’s the first time in history you saw drag photos in obituaries.

TAPPE: I would think so.

DOYLE: The AIDS crisis brought some unique angles to the way we dealt with it.

TAPPE: What impact has the Obituary Project had on family members or friends?

DOYLE: I often get emails from people thanking me for the site. There was one that I could sense in the email that she was crying as she wrote this because it was so important to her that she had finally found her friend, her best friend who had disappeared 25 years ago and she never knew what happened to him, and he had gotten her through a lot of rough times, and then he was missing. Who knows where he went or exactly how that worked? But she didn’t know where he was, or she suspected he had died of AIDS, but she didn’t know, and she found him on my site. She wrote a letter where, again, I know she was crying when she wrote it, and she was so grateful for the closure. Of course, she was mourning all over again, but she was grateful for the closure, so it was such a poignant letter.

A year ago, an article was written about my project for the *Houston Chronicle*, and it ended up on the front page of the Sunday *Chronicle* and that the author who wrote the article contacted this woman and did a mini interview, and she used that as the opening grabber for the story, how the impact was. I was not sure whether I wanted to give the writer this woman’s contact information because the woman seemed kind of fragile.
TAPPE: Over this topic, you mean?

DOYLE: Yes. If she’s crying in an email, I was sensitive to her state of mind. But I decided — and I alerted the writer to this, of course — “I’m going to give you her contact information, her email, but here’s how you need to approach it.” She did a good job, and the woman who wrote me makes yearly donations to my site on her friend’s birthday, so that’s how she remembers it.

TAPPE: Where does she live?

DOYLE: I think she’s in College Station. The people who write me could be anywhere, of course. I just got a very nice comment on Facebook from a person who’s become friends. He used to live in Houston. He lost lots of friends during the crisis years, and these were the “A” gays, if you want to call them that, the people that were like Steve Shiflett, who was a Caucus president.

TAPPE: Gosh, I haven’t heard that name in years.

DOYLE: He was like the third or fourth Caucus president. These were leaders and movers and shakers that he ran around with that he lost. He was good friends with Gene Harrington, Dr. Harrington. The name might be familiar to you. He just wrote me this a couple of days ago. I pulled it out to read it for you. This guy lives in Florida now, and he’s been gone from Houston for a number of years, but we’ve become friends through Facebook because he follows my history postings. I post history on Facebook, like 15 or so posts a day. That’s all I post, is history, so people who like history find me.

He wrote [reading document], “The 20 or so years I spent in Houston were the best and worst times, and I need to thank you again for what you do. There are days when I am so very sad that there is no one to share those memories with.
At times, I wonder if it was even real. The night John died, he thanked me by saying, ‘This ride with you has been worth the fall.’ Because of the connections you have given me through both the Obituary and the History Project, I’m really sure the ride was real, and that makes the fall so much easier. Thanks again, my friend. It’s so good to know next time I miss a friend or need to rekindle a memory, I have someplace to go.”

TAPPE: That’s wonderful.

DOYLE: Those kinds of comments are feedback that I just love because it gives me so much satisfaction for the work I do. I spend all day every day doing this, and pats on the back are nice.

TAPPE: Certainly, and the impact you have on some people’s lives is evident. Some people go through the history part of your archives and have fond memories. For others, it’s obviously very therapeutic, which is really nice.

DOYLE: I get emails like that maybe once a month, where they want to ask about somebody. Sometimes they will say, “Do you have more information about this person?” Well, probably I don’t, because this was an obituary I pulled from This Week in Texas magazine, and I don’t know who turned it in, I don’t know anything more about it, and I’m not going to know anything more about it, probably.

TAPPE: And you’re not going to research for them.

DOYLE: Actually, no, I’m not going to. I’m not a genealogist. There’s a woman, a doctor by degree, in Austin, who about a year ago started doing research for me, just volunteered. This is great, because there are lots of people about whom I had a little information but not what I wanted. Sometimes I didn’t know their age, I
didn’t know even what city they lived in because This Week in Texas was a statewide publication. They weren’t always cognizant of so-and-so died in Austin, San Antonio, Lubbock. You couldn’t always tell by context where they lived, just that they lived in Texas. I wanted to find these missing pieces, the minimum information that I wanted: age, city, sometimes cause of death, that type of information.

She was able to find out for like 100 of them that I was missing because I gave her like a printout. I would put on the page where I was missing information, “What age?” “What city?” Of course, you can search for the words “what city” and “what age” and pull those up. “These are the ones you want to research. That’s what I need information on. Help me.” She could do that from Austin.

[END OF AUDIO PART 2]

TAPPE: Have you ever met her?
DOYLE: No. She keeps saying she’s going to try to come to Houston and we’ll meet for lunch. I hope she does, but she hasn’t.

TAPPE: Yes, that would be wonderful. This information that she’s helping you plug in, you’re going in and adding to the obituary? This for the research on your site?
DOYLE: Yes, I am adding to the obituaries. If she finds what age the person was through the Social Security database or Death Index, I can add the age, I can add the city, and I do. I routinely edit that information into it.

TAPPE: I see.

DOYLE: Sometimes she would find the gravestone, a picture of the gravestone. There’s a site called Find A Grave, which sometimes it’s pretty good, sometimes not.
Sometimes she sends me a photo of the image of the gravestone. Sometimes that’s all I have. I don’t have a picture of the person, so I’ll just use that. This week, somebody was writing about remembering a Houston guy who died 10 or 15 years ago. His name was Creath Robinson. He was real active in one of the groups, The Misfits.

TAPPE: I knew him from the Garden Party.

DOYLE: Yes, the Garden Party and The Misfits. They posted a photo of his leather vest with all the pins on it. I have an obituary for him, of course. I did not have any photos, actual photos of him. All I had were clipping photos, which were not very good quality. So I just added a comment to that Facebook post, “Could somebody send me some photos of this guy? I want to do a better job.” The next day, I had a dozen photos of Creath, and I used most of them.

I like to use candid photos when I can get them of the people. I would use clippings about a person in their obituary. It’s not just the obituary. If I have other information about them, like Bill Scott, who was one of the founders of the Montrose Counseling Center, I have clippings about him, about his work, about awards he won. You’ll find those on his obituary page, too. If someone was a *TWT* cover boy, you’ll find that cover because people want to remember the person at their prime. I try to make it as personal as I can.

One guy was helping me research a couple of years ago where he would go through copies of *This Week in Texas* and compare them to my obituary database and find photos of people in the Hot Tea section. That was a gossip section of the publication, and you might see somebody’s photo at the opening of a bar or winning some go-go dancer contest or something, but it was a photo of
the person, and sometimes I didn’t have any photos of the person because not all obituaries did, so this was something to add, another dimension to add to it. He found me scores of these small clippings.

TAPPE: That’s wonderful you have people helping you with research.

DOYLE: Sometimes, yes. I don’t really have time to do that myself. I’m doing other stuff. I can’t go through every copy of TWT and then cross-reference it. I can’t do that.

TAPPE: When did TWT stop publication? Do you remember?

DOYLE: Of course I do. It stopped August 12, 2000. It restarted in 2006. The born-again version was a much lesser version. It was more of a slick bar rag then. Thinner and less content for sure, where we now appreciate how excellent that magazine was for 25 years. It was really good. I’ve got every copy digitized on my website because it needs to be there, and so I did it.

TAPPE: I remember going by their office every Friday afternoon. You said you’d pick them up in the bars. I would go by their office every Friday. It was always fun to read the stories. It was also very sad, prior to the HIV, about gay bashings and the police raids, that portion of our history.

DOYLE: Yes, I have got that collected in various sections of the History site. There’s a section on the bars, and it’s not every bar, of course, but a lot of the main bars. On that same page, raids on the bars, fires in the bars, arson, related sections like that, where you can read about bar raids through the years.

TAPPE: I remember exactly where I was standing in a condo I was renting when I read an article in TWT about “the gay disease.” That’s my first strong memory. This was before some of my friends had become ill.
What is your first memory of a health issue within the men’s community?

Do you remember?

DOYLE: The first person in my group of friends I lost was Terry. He was on my bowling team, so this must have been — can I look it up?

TAPPE: Sure.

DOYLE: I can’t remember, all these years [using computer].

1983, September of 1983, Terry Grimes, on my bowling team, and he was, as you can see, a good-looking guy.

TAPPE: Yes, and so young.

DOYLE: And so young. He was 22. God, he was 22. Wow. I happened to have some photos of him that I took at the Westheimer Arts Festival in 1981, so I was able to use those photos on his obituary page. He was the first person I knew that directly affected me.

By 1983, I had a partner, and we were living together. I’ve always been monogamous with partners, so we were, quote-unquote, safe. By the time I got out of that relationship about less than three years, I knew to be safe. He didn’t learn that lesson, because seven years later, he died. “Kim, weren’t you paying attention?”

TAPPE: It didn’t matter to him.

DOYLE: My first lover, Kim, we were friends. We all were in the same social group. I remember when he died, I helped sell his record collection for his mother, because when he was with me, he started collecting records. He learned that from me, and he started collecting Connie Francis recordings and had a very good collection of hard stuff to find. His mother, living in Conroe I believe, would
have no clue how to dispose of that collection the right way, but I did, so I helped sell it for her and gave her everything. It made her a few thousand dollars that she got. That was Kim.

There were a number of friends through those years. I could go to my site [using computer]. There they are. My best friend, Ron, died in 1990, and we did everything together. People would often think we were lovers because we would bicker so much.

TAPPE: That’s good for best friends.

DOYLE: Buddy died in 1991. He was my rock. He was very reliable, and if you needed anything done, he knew who would do it. I often joked that if you needed a left-handed Polish plumber, he knew whom to call.

I met Wes in 1987, and this was the relationship that seems unreal to me. We moved in together after three weeks, and just like, “Really?” Yes, we did, and we were sure of ourselves. After eight months or so, he got sick. At first, the doctor said it was bronchitis, but he was wrong. Then he went in the hospital and six days later died. I used to say I did not experience the illness through him, just the grief. Because he was sick so short a time, I didn’t go through that like many people did.

TAPPE: Did either one of you have a chance to even begin to wrap your minds around what was going on?

DOYLE: When he went in the hospital, he was not out yet to his family. They knew that we had become roommates, but that’s all they sort of knew. Who knows what they really, deeply knew? His family lived in Katy, and they were kind of redneck-ish, but they dealt with it okay. I remember being at Ben Taub, and his
mother came to visit right away. I think his sisters did. His dad had not come to
visit yet. I stressed to them to tell the dad, “He needs to get here. He will be very
sorry if he doesn’t come.” He finally did, the last day.

TAPPE: Wes was able to speak with him, or he knew he was there?

DOYLE: Yes. Wes didn’t look sick because he was only sick a few weeks. There was
no wasting appearance. He looked fine. We were actually talking about him
being released the next day, and during that night, he died. When the family first
started coming, I explained to them, “Look, you don’t need to worry about him
paying rent or his food. I will take care of that. I can’t do medical, but I will do
the rest. You don’t need to worry about that.” I took a very proactive, firm
approach with them. I did not ask their permission to do anything. It was like I
was very assertive, and we were okay with that. I guess I was so assertive that
they thought this was okay.

TAPPE: I’m assuming they knew at that time.

DOYLE: Yes, they knew he was gay then. They knew he had AIDS then. They even
mentioned me in his obituary in the *Chronicle*.

TAPPE: I was just going to ask you: How did the family handle that?

DOYLE: As a special friend.

TAPPE: That was the popular term then, but that’s kudos.

DOYLE: For a family from Katy who didn’t even know he was gay, I thought that was
doing pretty good. I remember I wrote what I guess you’d call an essay about
him because I didn’t feel his family knew the real Wes. They didn’t. I know they
didn’t know the real Wes, so I wrote about him and what he liked to do. He loved
Christmas. Just about his person, his personality. I gave a copy to the family. I
think his sisters probably read it, but I don’t think his parents ever did, and that’s a shame. That’s a shame, because they didn’t know their son, but I did what I could do.

TAPPE: Did you hear from the sisters after that in terms of acknowledging the essay? Do you recall?

DOYLE: No, I don’t recall. They were very courteous to me. He had moved his stuff into my place, and it included a big antique organ with foot pedals and so forth. I don’t know how old it was. I’m not sure why he had it, but he had it. It took up a big space in my living room. They asked, “Could we have that organ?”

“Yes, of course.”

But they asked. They didn’t, like you hear about some families coming and taking everything they could take whether it belonged to the son or not. They were very considerate. They felt they had to ask permission for me to give them their son’s stuff. I remember they asked, “What happened to his bed?”

“His bed fell apart. It was junk, so, sorry.”

TAPPE: I would consider that situation, that was good for you.

DOYLE: Yes, that was not typical for a lot of people.

TAPPE: I know they had so many people that came in and just —

DOYLE: And took the stuff that belonged to both people.

TAPPE: Some would not allow the partners to attend the services.

DOYLE: Yes, there are some obituaries I found where the family said friends are not invited to this service.

TAPPE: Really?

DOYLE: Yes.
TAPPE: Oh, my gosh. I’ve never seen it in writing.

DOYLE: Yes. I think I can find that obituary.

TAPPE: Those would be the ones in the *Chronicle* or the *Post* at that time?

DOYLE: Or the *Montrose Voice*, even.

TAPPE: Really?

DOYLE: Yes.

TAPPE: I don’t remember that. You’re going to pull one up for me?

DOYLE: I think so [using computer].

TAPPE: You have Wes in there, I’m assuming?

DOYLE: Oh, yes.

TAPPE: May I ask his last name so I can pull him up?

DOYLE: Wes Gregson.

   This guy, I remember his obituary. I remember his name. Eddie Turner.

   Out of 7,000 obituaries, I remembered the one I’m telling you about was Eddie Turner, who died in 1978, so this was pre-AIDS. [Reading document] “Eddie Turner, 27, long time resident of this city despite stays on the West Coast, died November 3 in the Southeast Houston home he shared with his parents of unknown causes. His parents requested that his friends not attend the memorial services!”

TAPPE: Oh, my gosh.

DOYLE: Yes.

TAPPE: He’s gay, or was gay.


TAPPE: But it was pre-AIDS as far as we know.
DOYLE: The obituary was in a gay newspaper. It was in the paper *Upfront*, 1978.

TAPPE: I guess they were afraid of a spectacle of some sort.

DOYLE: They didn’t want to be contaminated.

TAPPE: That’s pretty good. Out of 7,000, remembering who that is.

DOYLE: I posted about that on Facebook, so that helped me remember.

TAPPE: When you mentioned the loss of Wes, you said that’s the relationship that felt like a dream. Explain that.

DOYLE: It’s like I felt, did I have a lover? Was this real? Because it was over so quick and he was gone, it really felt surreal.

TAPPE: Do you remember your grieving process?

DOYLE: Oh, it was terrible. I got a call from the hospital at 3:00 in the morning, and they wanted to know the phone number for his parents. I had checked Wes into the hospital, so they had my phone number. They wanted to know his parents’ phone number, which I had or could look it up in Wes’ stuff. I had the composure to look up the phone number and give it to them before I freaked out, hung up, and just went hysterical.

I called up my best friend, Ron, who lived in the same complex. “I need you over here,” and he did. My immediate group of friends took care of me for the next few days. Yes, I remember that.

TAPPE: It’s a long process.

DOYLE: Yes. I remember my mom commenting on it. She came down to visit for the funeral, and she said, “This is probably the worst day in his life,” my life. Yes, I would say so.

TAPPE: She was right. Did your family overall offer you support?
DOYLE: Dad was the silent parent. When I came out to them, which was in a letter, within the first year of coming out living in Norfolk, they called me up right away when they got the letter and said, “We got your letter. We love you. It doesn’t matter,” blah, blah, blah. There was that conversation, but he would not really bring it up after that.

I hadn’t thought of this in a while. When Wes died, it was mostly my mom and I on the phone, and he got on the phone and said, “I’m sorry about your friend,” five words.

TAPPE: That’s all he could do.

DOYLE: Yes, I guess. My mom was very supportive. She came down for a few days, stayed with me.

TAPPE: Did she ever talk about your dad? Do you recall? Or it was really mostly just supporting you? In terms of your relationship, I mean.

DOYLE: No, and he died in 2003, I think. I should know that better, but I don’t. She’s in a nursing home. She’s almost 93.

TAPPE: You have a brother. How was the support from him?

DOYLE: It was amazingly good. I have to jump ahead in time. I had another partner from 1995 to 2007, named Jeff, and we lived together and so forth. Jeff and I went to visit my parents in Ohio in 2006, so my mother and brother met Jeff. Jeff was a charmer, and so they liked Jeff.

My brother Mike was supportive, and I don’t think he had ever had much exposure to gay people, but he was supportive. He would send me an email on the anniversary of Jeff’s death and so forth, so that was nice that he would think of that, but we were never close. He was 10 years younger than me, and I had
moved away by the time he got out of being a kid, so we were not close.

TAPPE: But there was never any animosity about your life, in that sense?

DOYLE: No friction, no. No, I had a life. He didn’t, really.

TAPPE: Is he still alive?

DOYLE: Yes. Surprise, surprise, four years ago, he got married. Had never dated anybody for decades, period. Who saw that coming?

TAPPE: Is this his first marriage?

DOYLE: Yes.

TAPPE: I hope he’s happy.

I want to ask you a little bit more about the AIDS epidemic that went on in the 1980s and 1990s and what’s happening in today’s world. As you recall and from all of your archives, you saw articles and educational material about HIV/AIDS. You mentioned earlier about safer sex practices and that sort of thing. There were billboards, flyers, everything in the bars back then. I don’t see that now. I know that there is still some education going on. We have medications that were never available then.

DOYLE: I’m afraid kids now think, “Oh, well, I could just take a pill for that.”

TAPPE: That’s my question to you because that is, from what I have learned through this whole project, very much the attitude. That concerns me because HIV is on the rise.

DOYLE: “You don’t die from that anymore. You don’t die from polio anymore.”

TAPPE: They look at it as manageable, kind of a chronic disease like diabetes or something.

DOYLE: Yes, manageable disease.
TAPPE: Do you have concerns about that?

DOYLE: Of course. Our generation — I’m talking my generation — we lost a whole generation of not just, quote, gay people, but creative gay people, leaders, people who wrote books, people who did art, people who wrote articles, people who led organizations. The talent that we lost, you could not replace, ever.

TAPPE: It’s a whole generation of young men.

DOYLE: I did a music special on my *Queer Music Heritage* show on AIDS, and I covered songs that covered the grief, the denial, the anger, the mourning, the different aspects of it through music, with interviews.

TAPPE: Did you go to the Quilt Project?

DOYLE: I flew to Washington to go to the Project.

TAPPE: What year was that?

DOYLE: In 1988. I went with three friends because Wes’ panel was going to be in that showing in Washington in October of 1988. I remember I could not bring myself to help make the panel, but I could sort of supervise his friends doing it, like, “Let’s put a bird of paradise over here,” “Let’s attach a teddy bear here,” and, “Let’s do this to reflect his personality,” but I just couldn’t make myself do it myself.

My friends and I got to the showing, and we walked around, and they were ready to — “Well, we’re going to go to the Smithsonian and go look at that.” I could not leave his group of panels. I stayed for hours right there.

TAPPE: With his panel?

DOYLE: With his panel.

TAPPE: You mentioned the Smithsonian. You have an honor from them. Tell me about
DOYLE: It’s the Library of Congress.

TAPPE: I’m sorry. You’re right, the Library of Congress. Tell me about that.

DOYLE: This was really unexpected. I got an email in May from the Library of Congress wanting permission to — I forget the word they use. Trolling a site makes it sound evil, but it’s not. It means that they’re harvesting information from a website as part of their digital preservation project, and they had chosen my websites to do that with, which is a big honor. It’s not something you apply for. You don’t turn in a name and say, “Hey, will you do mine?”

It just happens that the woman who selected my sites — as an aside, Brandon Wolf wrote an article about this for OutSmart and dug into it and tracked down the woman who actually made the decision. She turned out to be on my Facebook friend list because she had found mostly my Queer Music Heritage website at first, and she was really impressed with what I included. This was a music site, so I also had a section on women’s journals because I felt it was important, not because it was music, because I thought the stuff should be available, so I did. That’s the way I operated.

I had gone to the ONE Institute in L.A. and xeroxed the entire run of a publication called Vice Versa, the first lesbian publication, the first gay publication, period, in 1947, which a woman who was working as a secretary for a studio exec wrote this during the day because he didn’t give her much to do, so he said, “Just keep busy.” So she wrote this publication, called it Vice Versa, didn’t use her real name on it. She used Lisa Ben, which you could anagram into lesbian.
TAPPE: It’s like her drag name.

DOYLE: I felt this was important, so I xeroxed it at the ONE Institute, and they were okay with me doing that, and I put it on my website so people could find it. This woman from the Library of Congress found it and said she started crying when she saw what I had done.

TAPPE: Is that right?

DOYLE: Because she knew people who would go several hundred miles to have access to this and spend several hundred dollars to do so, and I was making sure it was available because that’s what I do.

TAPPE: That’s great.

DOYLE: She was already a fan.

TAPPE: With the Library of Congress, does this include your entire archives, or how does that work?

DOYLE: I have not gotten a firm answer from her. I wrote her once and didn’t really get a reply to my direct question. Supposedly it will catch everything I link to, which like, “Really?” I link to a lot of stuff, including stuff that’s not mine. I have a video channel on YouTube. I guess it will include that. I had a blog, which I now don’t work on, on WordPress. I guess it grabs that, too. But they specifically asked me for permission for the music site and JD Doyle Archives. The JD Doyle Archives domain is really just one page with an explanation of all the other stuff I do and how to get there.

TAPPE: But all your links are on there?

DOYLE: All my links are on there.
TAPPE: So that would include everything you’ve done?

DOYLE: Everything. Everything I do, yes.

TAPPE: The Banner Project?

DOYLE: Yes, The Banner Project, Audiofile, the drag section of my music site. I have a large section on drag, female impersonation, mostly pre-1970, and it’s probably by default the best in the world because who else is doing it?

TAPPE: Nobody.

DOYLE: There’s nobody. So I collected all this stuff and found a place for it, so it’s not probably logical for it to be on a music site. There are some tie-ins. I did a show on singing drag queens once because mostly they didn’t sing, they lip-synched, but earlier on, they did, so I would find ways to tie it in.

TAPPE: The ones I always saw were lip-synching. And not very well, either.

DOYLE: Right.

TAPPE: But they were fun. That’s an incredible honor for you from the Library of Congress.

DOYLE: Yes, I was very delighted.

TAPPE: That must be something that is certainly very gratifying to you, but also it’s like, “My stuff is really going to continue to stay up there.”

DOYLE: Yes, and I posted about it on Facebook and got a huge number of likes and shares on this post because mostly people get it. They get what this does. The artists I’m still Facebook friends with, even though I no longer do radio, the artists I played realize, “Hey, my song is on his show that’s going to be on an archive continuing on for X number of years.”

TAPPE: It’s a big deal.
DOYLE: Yeah.

TAPPE: The fingers that go out from that, so many connections. I mean, literally I would say thousands, wouldn’t you say, of connections?

DOYLE: Easily. I’m bringing it up on the computer, my Archives page. It’s got the three main sites. It’s got a section on female impersonation. It’s got Queer Music History 101, which was a lesson I designed for use in colleges and universities on the history of gay music because a class on gay studies in Portland would probably not include music, because where would they get the information? They wouldn’t.

TAPPE: Right there.

DOYLE: They wouldn’t. But this lesson which I designed in lesson format, 10 sections of like 12 minutes a section, you can listen to in small chunks or, of course, all at once. I even built in questions into the lessons. I didn’t give them answers, but I would build in questions. One that stands out is, “Why do you suppose there was a women’s music movement and not a men’s music movement?” Why, Renée?

TAPPE: I'm guessing because men’s music has always been out there.

DOYLE: That’s a generalization.

TAPPE: It is.

DOYLE: It’s always been a men’s world. But as far as lesbians’ music, that was a movement. There’s no gay male music movement. Why not?

TAPPE: Oh, that’s true. I don’t know.

DOYLE: I think it’s because the women were better organized. The women already were working on the women’s movement, so they had those organizational ties already and were building those ties, so they could start a women’s music label
and explore distribution of those records at women’s conferences. Not lesbian
conferences. Women’s conferences. They had some networking that they were
already establishing. The men didn’t do that, the gay men musicians. Because
they didn’t need to? I don’t know.

TAPPE: But I clearly see the connection, though, what you’re saying, with the overall
women’s movement.

DOYLE: That’s my idea of it. There were probably more women’s bookstores that
could sell women’s music as opposed to men’s bookstores. The bookstores we
had, like Lobo, Crossroads, very seldom sold GLBT music, very seldom. I guess
it didn’t pay for them to try and sell it, or maybe the distribution was just too hard
to overcome. I would go to different cities and always try to track down the gay
bookstores to find music, and it was always unsatisfactory. Thank goodness the
Internet developed for finding music.

TAPPE: Do you get some of your music from the Internet?

DOYLE: I did. I don’t really collect it anymore. I don’t have a radio outlet, and I’m so
busy with the other projects now that I don’t really think about it.

TAPPE: How are you spending your time now?

DOYLE: Every day I wake up and I do my Facebook history post. I call it my Facebook
outreach. I do like 15 to 20 posts every day.

TAPPE: Yes, they’re fun to see.

DOYLE: A lot of people like it. I’ve been doing it for years, but after the 2016
election — I won’t even mention his name — I decided I needed to beef up the
number of posts to give people something to look at other than the ugly politics,
so I do not post politics. I do not post even commentary, even memes about
politics at all. I just post my history. People seem to like it. It’s a specialized audience, yes, but people seem to like it. I have people all over the world who tell me they enjoy my posts, and they interact with me on my posts. I have regulars that post often, some of them very intelligent posts, some very lame posts.

TAPPE: You’re working with the University of Houston?

DOYLE: I have good connections with the University of Houston. I have given them stuff. I got the Joe Watts collection of posters and videotapes and things. Who knew that he videotaped a lot of his shows? He did. I didn’t know that, and I was working with him at the time. I donated those to U of H, to the LGBT Research Collection, because it’s better to have them there where they will actually digitize the tapes rather than in my closet where I won’t because I’m not good at video. I’m terrible at video. I try to pass along stuff to them.

I, just less than two weeks ago, took them over an external drive of my Queer Music website and files. The “and files” are the important part because there are hundreds of songs that I accumulated over the years that I never got a chance to use, and pictures of artists, and recordings, that I never got a chance to use. What’s going to happen to those after I’m gone? They’re going to be on an external drive. No one is going to know what they are. So I took it over to them. It was three terabytes, I think.

TAPPE: All your history and all your work will be alive and well long after you are gone.

DOYLE: Yes. So I’m trying to plan accordingly. I keep telling myself I need to go around and put little stickers on the back of all these pictures on the wall, what they are and why they are important, why that picture about Gay Pride Week from
1978 is notable. Because it was hanging in Ray Hill’s apartment for decades and is the only poster I have ever seen from the 1978 Gay Pride Week. The first Gay Pride Parade was 1979. This predates that. This mentions Town Meeting I, an historic event for Houston. Who’s going to know why that poster is a treasure?

TAPPE: Do you have anything with when you were Gay Pride Marshal in 2014?

DOYLE: Yes, I’ve got a photo framed, and the card that was used when they read the names of the people.

TAPPE: What was that experience like for you?

DOYLE: That was wonderful. I was stunned that I won. I was surprised to be nominated to run to begin with because I’m not your typical Pride Marshal. I’m not a fundraiser. I’m not an activist. I’m not a politician. Not typical. I wasn’t super social.

TAPPE: You’re out and about a lot.

DOYLE: Through my radio work a lot, I’ve gotten to know lots of people. I now know a lot of people, but I was stunned to win that. I ran twice. John Nechman won the first year. We were the only two running that year, and of course John is very popular and very accomplished. Did you interview him?

TAPPE: I think someone else interviewed him, yes.

DOYLE: He was interviewed?
TAPPE: Yes.

DOYLE: The next year, I ran and happened to be running against John Danielson and Bob Briddick and Lane Lewis. Like whoa, these are three guys that are movers and shakers, very important people in our community, and I won?

TAPPE: Congratulations.

DOYLE: Thank you.

TAPPE: I think it was well deserved.

DOYLE: It’s still a wonder to me. I am very pleased. That’s one of the highlights of my life.

TAPPE: It’s fun, too, that you get together as a group for Gay Pride every now and then. They’ve had a float.

DOYLE: Yes, they’ve done that twice. Once was the 25th anniversary, I think. Of course, I wasn’t a Marshal then. For the 40th anniversary, a year ago, they decided to have a float with all the Pride Marshals they could get together. That was a lot of fun. That was really nice, and it was special and like a reunion, sort of. Although we were from different years, we still knew each other. Again an honor to be in that group, like this is an elite club to be in. I think there were 28 of us. That’s a good number to get together.

TAPPE: It certainly is, all these years later.

DOYLE: Who knows when they’ll do it again? Probably not when I’m living. That same year, they had a Grand Marshal reception at Hamburger Mary’s, and I was instrumental in getting that to happen because I know the owner. I said, “You need to do this.” They used to have these Grand Marshal receptions every year, and it just stopped happening, and it needs to be done again because there needs
to be an event from Pride that is not focused on 20-year-olds.

TAPPE: I was out of town when they did that, but otherwise I would have been there. I think it sounded like a lot of fun.

DOYLE: It was fun, yes, and an opportunity to take a group picture again. The one this year, for some reason they didn’t ask to take a group picture. Like, dummies.

TAPPE: Very unfortunate.

DOYLE: Yes, unfortunate. I will stick my nose in it next year and make sure that that is at least asked.

TAPPE: Dalton will take care of that.

JD, thank you so much for meeting with me. Is there anything you would like to add that I have perhaps overlooked?

DOYLE: I was kind of surprised that I was asked to do this interview because it has the perception of being AIDS-focused, and I was certainly not an AIDS activist. Of course, I lived through those years and lost my immediate group of six friends to AIDS. My only volunteer work that I did wasn’t very successful. I volunteered for the Stone Soup Kitchen around 1990, and it probably doesn’t comment well on me that I lost interest because I didn’t think it was doing what it was supposed to do, the Kitchen. I was helping stock the shelves and helping fill people’s orders. I didn’t see gay people using it. I saw poor people using it, and that’s not who I wanted to volunteer for. I wanted to help gay people. Very charitable, JD.

TAPPE: But that’s what you signed up for.

DOYLE: That’s what I signed up for, and I didn’t see it doing that, so I didn’t last very long.

TAPPE: The work that you have been doing in the gay community for years now will be
around forever. Everyone picks their own little niche, and you have certainly found yours.

DOYLE: Yes, I think I have.

TAPPE: You mentioned doing this particular project, and I’m not sure that we would have done ourselves any kind of service if we didn’t include you. You have a wealth of knowledge about the community. You have been involved, in terms of experience, experiencing the HIV crisis, and you can fill in the blanks about the community. You round it out a bit with your knowledge about the music and the bars.

DOYLE: One of my friends just last night — I went to a cookout, and he was commenting that my history site is the only one like it. That’s almost true. Milwaukee has a pretty good history site, not as large as mine. I told him not as good as mine.

TAPPE: Both, I’m sure.

DOYLE: Both. Where else in the country has anybody done this, and why not? Yes, you could probably find at university sites some digitized publications. That’s not the same thing.

TAPPE: No, you can’t even compare the two.

DOYLE: No. That’s good. I wish there were more of those.

TAPPE: Better than nothing, but you’ve pulled it all together from all different aspects.

DOYLE: And I did it without anybody’s permission. I didn’t ask. It’s my maverick approach. I didn’t ask, “Can I scan these TWTs?” I’m going to do it anyhow. No one has tried to stop me yet.

TAPPE: Your site is fabulous, the work you do is wonderful, and you have served and
continue to serve a wonderful community. Thank you for spending your time with me today.

DOYLE: Always fun. Thank you.

[END OF AUDIO PART 4]

[INTERVIEW CONCLUDED]

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