Oral History

An Interview with
Carmon Brian Keever

Place of interview: Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Renee Tappe
Terms of use: Open
Approved: [Signature]
Date: 7-26-15
AN INTERVIEW WITH CARMON BRIAN KEEVER

RENÉE TAPPE: This is Renée Tappe interviewing Brian Keever for The oH Project, Oral Histories of HIV/AIDS in Houston and Harris County. The interview is taking place on September 26th, 2015 in Houston, Texas. The purpose of this interview is to document Mr. Keever’s recollections concerning the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston.

BRIAN KEEVER: Hello.

RENÉE TAPPE: Hi, Brian.

BRIAN KEEVER: How are you?

RENÉE TAPPE: I’m doing well. How are you?

BRIAN KEEVER: Great.

RENÉE TAPPE: Good. Nice to see you again.

BRIAN KEEVER: Thank you. It’s good to see you.

RENÉE TAPPE: Thank you. Why don’t we get started. Would you please tell me a little bit about your family.

BRIAN KEEVER: Okay. I’m an only child, adopted, from an unincorporated textile mill town in North Carolina in the 1950s, which was not exactly super thrilling, but it was what it was. I was sickly as a child. I was in a hospital. My real parents, or real mother anyway, left me in the hospital, and I spent 33 days in the incubator, until I got up to five pounds. And then they were going to transfer me to an orphanage, which is what they did in the 1950s.

And my parents, my foster parents, were there looking for a child, is what
I’ve been told, and they said, “Well, let’s look and see what’s available,” and they actually took me the day I was supposed to be going to the orphanage.

TAPPE: Oh, my gosh.

KEEVER: So I always say that well, at least my parents chose me as opposed to having to keep whatever showed up.

TAPPE: That’s true. That’s a blessing for both of you.

KEEVER: Yeah. So that was a really good thing for me. And through a few years, my mother would throw that back at me when I would act up.

TAPPE: That’s right. Did you know from early on that you were adopted?

KEEVER: Yes, they made sure that I knew, probably as far back as I can remember.

But my mother always said that she would prefer me knowing so that I wouldn’t try to escape or leave or any of that, and that since I was the only child anyway and they didn’t have any more — and I’m not sure, but I think either my father or my mother was unable to conceive, on one side or the other, so that’s why. So yes.

But my father worked for Cannon Mills, and Mother worked — she had a couple of jobs, but she did housekeeping, not really housekeeping, but a little of that, because my father would yell at her. But she worked in a laundry, in a dry cleaners and stuff. They built their house, so, you know —

TAPPE: Now, during that time women didn’t always work outside the home.

KEEVER: No, that’s why I said she kind of did, because, I mean, where we lived, you kind of had to, because neither one of my parents went to high school. My father had to drop out to go to work, and he went to work in the mill because that’s — owned —
TAPPE: That’s what they did.

KEEVER: — pretty much owned the town. And my mother, I’m not sure, we never
really talked about her early years. She had, I think, six — five others. My father
was one of four brothers, so —

TAPPE: Large families.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: Were you raised in a particular church or religion?

KEEVER: Well, it bounced. My mother’s side of the family didn’t attend regularly. My
father’s side of the family did. And my mother’s mother was Presbyterian, and
my father’s mother was Southern Baptist.

TAPPE: Whoa.

KEEVER: Yes. But when I was really young, we went to Flow Harris Presbyterian, on
my mother’s side. But Mother, for some reason — and then later in years she
always used the excuse that she had to stay home while my father and I went to
church so she could cook Sunday dinner.

TAPPE: Oh, that was her reason for not going. Smart woman.

KEEVER: And so I was, like, oh, okay. We’d go to Sunday school, and then go to
church, and then come home, and she would have Sunday dinner ready at
12:00 —

TAPPE: That’s right. They had early dinners on Sundays.

KEEVER: Yeah, yeah. Well, we did breakfast, lunch — let’s see, breakfast, dinner, and
supper, is what they called it then.

TAPPE: That’s right.

KEEVER: Breakfast, dinner, and supper.
But she went a few times, but not nearly — my father was the one that,
you know, you were going; end of subject.

TAPPE: Right.

KEEVER: So at Shadybrook Baptist Church, it was a very usual Southern Baptist
rural —

TAPPE: Did you stay with that church or within the Baptist church as you grew up?
KEEVER: Not really. We did for a while there.

TAPPE: Well, how about you as an individual as you got older —

KEEVER: Oh, as I got older. I didn’t, Baptist, because I was — like, their fire and
brimstone and all the things that I wasn’t, and I got more of my mother’s side of
kind of joint stuff. She and I would go to gospel singing, jubilees, and things of
that nature, you know, that kind of helped go along as opposed to sitting in the
pew and —

TAPPE: Covered your bases.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: Okay. And what about now as an adult? What is your involvement?

KEEVER: As an adult. Well, I’ve gone through stages. I’ve gone through my agnostic,
my Catholic, my I’m not sure, going to the Unitarian, trying to try this, try that.

But I settled on the Metropolitan Community Churches, which was — oh, what’s
his name? Reverend — gosh, Troy —

TAPPE: Troy Plummer?

KEEVER: Troy Plummer. I had to think. So that really — I got involved in that here in
Houston at MCCR [Metropolitan Community Church of the Resurrection], which
was over in the Sixth Ward, the old historical district, and Reverend Gill and
Carolyn Mobley and Dee and all them. And so I was an usher. I was a holder.

So I was very involved in the 1980s at MCC.

TAPPE: And whenever you’re able or feeling like it, you still have a connection to them?

KEEVER: Yeah. Well, they’re now over at RMCC [Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church], which is over on Ella and —

TAPPE: Is it 19th or —

KEEVER: No, it’s 11th.

TAPPE: 11th.

KEEVER: Gosh, I — senior moment. And it’s a beautiful space over there. I liked the other one better because it was more compact and more —

TAPPE: Intimate, maybe.

KEEVER: Yeah. And it was an old church, and literally you had your basement, and then you went upstairs to — and then the balcony. So it was more traditional, I guess is a better term, of church.

TAPPE: And what you were used to, growing up?

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: Yes. Good.

KEEVER: Yes, as a matter of fact, my father passed away from a massive heart attack in 1979, and I got a phone call from my mother. I was living in Charlotte, and I got a phone call from my mother, where she said, “You need to come home right away. There’s been an issue.” And she wouldn’t expand on that, so we’ll say lovely, and so I threw some stuff in the car and drove up.

TAPPE: Right. Did as you were told.
KEEVER: And right as I got into Kannapolis, I don’t know why, but I ran through the car wash. To this day I have no idea why. Ran through the car wash, got to the house, and saw maybe ten cars in the driveway and around the house. So I’m, like, “Oh, crap.”

TAPPE: Did you know at that time, at that point?

KEEVER: Well, I figured — I said, “Oh, crap. Somebody’s died,” because when you’re in that realm, that’s what you did.

TAPPE: That’s right.

KEEVER: I went over to more than a few neighbors with dishes with my mother’s name taped to the bottom of the dish, so that you went over to console, and that’s just what you did.

TAPPE: That’s exactly right. And then, so at that point you knew?

KEEVER: I knew. I said, “Oh, god.” And so I get out of the car. I come up the driveway, and I open up the door, and there’s Mother. And she jumps up and screams, “Carmon’s dead. What are we going to do?”

I was, like, “Whoa,” so that was, like, a four-day, intense —

TAPPE: Absolutely. Did your mother stay in North Carolina at that point by herself?

KEEVER: Oh, yeah, in the house, and we had neighbors and stuff that — and then one of my father’s brother’s son and his friend, which they never talked about, Larry, would come over and check on her and stuff because he had his own house with his live-in friend, who worked at the mill.

TAPPE: And what year did your mom pass away?

KEEVER: 1986, of cancer. She had throat cancer and more down into the chest. She was a heavy smoker. I mean, North Carolina, tobacco, R.J. Reynolds.
TAPPE: That’s right. Well, and it was that time too. I mean, everybody smoked.

KEEVER: Yeah. But see, my mother smoked. My father didn’t. And she was not allowed to smoke with him when we were in public. She could smoke at home. She could smoke outside. She could smoke with her sisters or other family members, but if my father was in the car or at a restaurant, she was not allowed.

TAPPE: Well, that’s interesting. And that was not a health issue? It was because of the appearance and a female smoking?

KEEVER: Yeah, and he didn’t like that. He didn’t like it. That was not something you did.

TAPPE: Right. And that was the mind-set of a lot of people, especially, I think, in your more conservative areas.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: When you were young, as you mentioned, you were in a small town in North Carolina. Tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up, in terms of school, how you were treated, your activities. What was that like?

KEEVER: I went to Charles B. Aycock Elementary School. And since I was sickly as a child — I was allergic to milk as a baby, so I had a severe calcium deficiency, and we were at a doctor’s a lot as a child, a lot. My parents spent, pardon the expression, a hell of a lot of money keeping me alive, keeping me healthy, keeping me going. Another reason that I think they only had one child, because, I mean —

TAPPE: The expense.

KEEVER: The expense. And I had doctor visits regularly, I mean, from the time I was not even a year old up to probably until I was seven or eight. There were no kids
around where I grew up except for Jeri Kimmer, who was this little girl who lived a block away, and Jeri’s mother and my mother were good friends. So Jeri would come over, and we’d play in the yard. Of course, then you played in the yard. You didn’t have anything we have today. We would dig holes. You name it, we’d do it outside. But she and I were partners as far as playing all this stuff. We had one little guy, he was probably two years older than me, that moved in and moved out within 18 months. I’m never sure why. I never heard. I didn’t have a lot of brother-sister gang, the whole bit, until the first grade, but I was always different.

TAPPE: How do you mean?

KEEVER: I love my mother to death. She’s the best thing that ever happened to me.

My mother was a little overprotective.

TAPPE: Okay. Was that in her nature, or did she feel you needed protection?

KEEVER: Yes, well, both. Both. Since I had all these issues and all —

TAPPE: All your health issues.

KEEVER: Right. I didn’t play a lot of sports. Until I was probably ten years old, there wasn’t a basketball hoop or anything in the yard. No football, none of that. I didn’t play sports. I was excused medically from P.E.

TAPPE: Which made you very different from other kids.

KEEVER: Uh-huh, yeah. In third grade, my mother would come to school and chat.

She was kind of just — I don’t want to say daubing, but she would come. I would get brought to school. I didn’t ride the bus. Mother would get up and get dressed and drive me to school, which wasn’t that far. I mean, it was a couple miles. But I mean, in the grand scheme of things — and we really didn’t have buses like they
do now. You had a bus. I guess it was third grade or fourth grade. I was getting picked on and different things from the butch guys because I didn’t play sports and I was very — I preferred doing the library or things that — other than sports.

TAPPE: Other than physical.

KEEVER: When I was out there, when we had — they didn’t call it P.E., but whatever it was called, I would congregate more toward the girls. And a couple of guys would get upset because they thought I was trying to get their girlfriends and all, when they were in elementary school, and all this stuff.

TAPPE: Was that your intent?

KEEVER: No, not at all, but I didn’t know it.

TAPPE: That’s right.

KEEVER: So Mother came to school one day, and I guess she talked to a teacher or something and chased these two little boys around the playground, threatening them if they beat me up.

TAPPE: Your mother did that?

KEEVER: Uh-huh.

TAPPE: Physically chased them around?

KEEVER: Physically chased them around the playground.

TAPPE: Oh, my goodness. Oh, wow. Yeah, she was protective.

How did they respond to that? Did they pick on you more, or did they finally leave you alone?

KEEVER: Oh, no, huh-uh. Nowadays I look back when I’m an adult and realize what was going on. I was pretty much the town fag. They didn’t call it that then. But I was an only child. I wasn’t sports up one side and down the other.
TAPPE: Right.

KEEVER: My father worked for the mill, so he wasn’t sports-minded. My mother was a little overprotective. Just all this stuff.

TAPPE: All that stereotypical stuff.


TAPPE: That’s right. No wonder you were picked on or whatever, because you — yeah, as I listen to you, that’s a very stereotypical thing. It’s like if you’re not involved with sports, there must be a problem, that sort of thing; that that’s real —

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: — in terms of their perception, the kids’ perception.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: Now, did that continue on through high school, same thing?

KEEVER: Oh, yeah. I knew I liked men, but I didn’t know why and I didn’t — what’s the term you use? Okay. Example. Junior high school, J.W. Cannon Junior High School. Eighth grade. My bedroom, I had posters on the wall, but I had men’s posters on the wall. I had, I want to say, like, Bobby Sherman, just different things that — I didn’t have, for lack of a better term, Hulk Hogan or any of the sports figures. My father didn’t play sports. My mother played softball.

TAPPE: [Laughter]

KEEVER: And it was a comedy of errors, so yeah, I —

TAPPE: But you were not idolizing sports figures. You would maybe go with more of the artist type of male?

KEEVER: Right. And TV, just like Bobby Sherman, I think he was on some show.
TAPPE: Yes, he was.

KEEVER: I can’t remember, but —

TAPPE: I can’t either, but yes, he was.

KEEVER: And just little stuff like that, and comic books. I was big into comic books.

My father would take me every payday — he got paid every other. Back then they were 12 cents. So I would get, like, five comic books to buy, and that was my gift. I read comic books.

TAPPE: Right. I remember comic books. I liked them a lot, myself.

KEEVER: For me that was fun. I enjoyed that.

TAPPE: Were you involved with any kinds of clubs or anything in high school, or was it mostly just surviving?

KEEVER: Yeah, pretty much. I didn’t date, never dated in high school, never went to a prom, never — the only thing coming close to a girlfriend was this girl I knew, her name was Rhonda, and she had dark hair, very — I laugh today, thinking back, going — she was very olive complexed, and I’m going, she must have been Italian or something, because we didn’t have Hispanics. And especially in Kannapolis, the whites lived on this side, the blacks lived on this side. You had Carver Town, which was the African-American side, and then you had our side, and they didn’t mix when I was a kid.

TAPPE: Your school was not integrated?

KEEVER: Nope.
TAPPE: Is that right?

KEEVER: Not until I was a sophomore in high school, and that was a big — I mean, that, you know —

TAPPE: It really took the focus off of you?

KEEVER: Well, yeah — for goodness. But it was definitely, you know —

TAPPE: That would be tough.

KEEVER: And I laugh. I’m going — it was so bizarre. My father didn’t play sports. He didn’t cuss. He didn’t drink. We lived in a dry county. Just pretty much comedy of [indicating] —

TAPPE: Straight arrow, right.

KEEVER: And my mother smoked like a chimney, cussed like a sailor. When she was around Gladys and Lucille, her sisters, Gladys drank heavily. Just total —

TAPPE: Opposites.

KEEVER: — opposites.

TAPPE: But it worked out?

KEEVER: But it worked out. They got married, they lived together, the whole bit.

TAPPE: Good. Well, when you did graduate from high school, now, was that 19- —


KEEVER: Yes. I always laugh. Oh, that’s right, you asked. Okay. My father’s name
was Carmon Calton Keever. My mother’s name was Johnsie, J-o-h-n-s-i-e, Johnsie, which I’ve never heard anyone else in my entire life with that name. She was Johnsie Aldmon Keever because her maiden name was Aldmon. My father’s name Carmon, C-a-r-m-o-n, was a different spelling than what everyone uses today, of m-e-n. And Carmon nowadays is more of a woman’s name than a man’s name, so lots of times I get phone calls or letters addressed to M-s. Carmon Keever.

TAPPE: Right. Yeah, and that makes sense now. Back then when you were younger, was Carmon also considered a girl’s name?

KEEVER: Huh-uh.

TAPPE: It wasn’t. So you didn’t really have much teasing about that particularly?

KEEVER: No. And see, I never really used my father’s name when I was young. You used your middle name.

TAPPE: Okay. So you just went as Brian Keever?

KEEVER: Or Gregory.

TAPPE: Or Gregory.

KEEVER: That was my mother’s portion of it, because for some reason there was this, I guess, car dealership or something, Gregory Motor Company or something, because when you’re from, not really Appalachia, but when you’re from that area, you have four names, kind of like Billie Jo, Bobbie Joe, Betty Jo. Petticoat Junction.

TAPPE: Right, good point.

KEEVER: An offshoot of that, my mother was actually friends with Aunt Bee.

TAPPE: The real Aunt Bee?
KEEVER: The real Aunt Bee.

TAPPE: Oh, wow. How interesting.

KEEVER: Because that was filmed in North Carolina. And they used to go to Pilot

Mountain; there’s a real Mount Pilot, North Carolina. And a couple of the other

names, they just reversed them, to be in the TV show.

TAPPE: I see. Right.

KEEVER: And so the two different people that my mother knew that actually became

somebody was Aunt Bee and Vestal Goodman from The Happy Goodman

Family, which was a gospel singing group.

TAPPE: Okay. I’m not familiar with that, but I know Aunt Bee.

KEEVER: Yeah. And so it’s just so funny. I laugh. I’m going, you know, but —

TAPPE: Right. That’s funny.

KEEVER: I mean, it was North Carolina.

TAPPE: That’s right. And you wanted to get out of there after you graduated; is that

correct?

KEEVER: I wanted to get out of Kannapolis, out of where I was born and raised,

because I was the fag. I was the gay, the queer, the odd — all that stuff. And

when I was in junior high school, I didn’t know. I mean, I had no clue. All I

knew is what — I liked this; I liked that. And I had two or three girlfriends that

were girlfriends, and we’d talk about some of the boys. We’d talk about different

things that I thought was just normal —

TAPPE: Girl talk.

KEEVER: — normal talk that everyone talked about.

TAPPE: Sure.
KEEVER: I didn’t have boys come over to the house. I didn’t even get a bicycle until I was 11. Yeah, I was 11 before I was allowed to even get a bicycle. So I didn’t ride a bike. All those things, when you were younger, that everybody did.

TAPPE: That’s right. Where did you go when you left Kannapolis?

KEEVER: I went to Charlotte, North Carolina, which was kind of like the biggest — which it was big then — the larger area that I was hoping to find more people that I fit in with and partied with.

TAPPE: Did you realize at that point when you left high school that you were gay?

KEEVER: Pretty much, yeah.

TAPPE: Okay. You could formalize that thought?

KEEVER: I had realized that, especially in high school, that I really enjoyed looking at men and fantasizing and all the above, but I couldn’t do anything about it, even when I mentioned it a couple of times to a couple of people, and then they would start picking on me, saying, “Oh, yeah, he’s going to get you, yeah,” and stuff.

I had two friends — because during the summertime we would go to this campground that was somewhere near Lake Norman, man-made lake, so my parents had a little camper that we had it and they built a little shed out in front. So every summer the mill shut down for 30 days in the summertime because it was too hot. It was the 1960s. They didn’t have air-conditioning.

TAPPE: Pre air-conditioning, uh-huh.

KEEVER: We never had air-conditioning in my parents’ home, ever. We had an attic fan that you raised the windows, flipped on the attic fan, and that was your air. The house had no door shuts except for my father’s bedroom. They had the living room, what became the dining room shut off, and didn’t use it until I was much
older. And so we had the kitchen, my room, which was the living room — my room, living room, bathroom, and bedroom, and that was it, and lots of time outside.

TAPPE: A lot of time outside. Well, when you left Kannapolis, you went to Charlotte.

KEEVER: Right. I went with —

TAPPE: Did you meet some friends?

KEEVER: I wondered where I was going with this.

I had two friends that we would swim together and ski and all this stuff. Jerome and somebody, his brother. Well, Jerome was a year older than me, and he decided he wanted to move to Charlotte, and he asked me if I wanted to come and share an apartment, and I was, like, “Yes, I’d love to do that.” I had no idea what I was going to do. And then I actually found out that there was Central Piedmont Community College, and I was, like, “Oh, I could go to community college.” I was going to go to community college.

Well, I did. I moved to Charlotte, enrolled in CPCC under their fine arts department, and took drama, theatre. I mean, just all that. And I was going to be a drama teacher, because I loved drama. Go figure.

TAPPE: Right. Yeah, exactly.

KEEVER: It was just — you look back now, going “Really?”

TAPPE: Well, no sports, but the drama, yeah. That’s right.

So did you go for a year or a semester or —

KEEVER: I went for two years, but dropped out, because I got involved in the gay community there, and I just loved it. I finally was, like, “Oh.”

TAPPE: So the partyer took over —
KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: — from the scholastic part?

Okay. So were you working at that time?

KEEVER: I was working, oh, yeah. I was working part-time. So yeah, I decided, oh, okay. Well, I did a few musicals. I did this. I did that. I said, “Well, I can do both.”

TAPPE: “Do both” meaning school and play?

KEEVER: Uh-huh. Well, that didn’t last.

TAPPE: Yeah, it got the best of you, I guess.

KEEVER: Yeah, it didn’t last. Sorry.

TAPPE: That’s okay. And so you lived in the Charlotte area. Did you move out of Charlotte?

KEEVER: I would do little adventure trips where I spent nine months here and six months there, but I always came back to Charlotte as the hub. I always had friends in Charlotte. I always kept stuff in Charlotte. So Charlotte was kind of like the —

TAPPE: Your home base?

KEEVER: Yeah. I visited friends and stayed with them in Atlanta and in Greenville, South Carolina. Let’s see, where else, early. A couple of other small little places. But I would go, you know, and go, “Oh, I like this.”

TAPPE: Right, right. Well, you were adventuresome.

KEEVER: But I would always come back to Charlotte, because Charlotte was close enough that I could get on the road and drive back to see Mother, so I wouldn’t have to get on a bus or a train or a plane or any of that stuff.
TAPPE: Got it. Still in the neighborhood.

KEEVER: Yeah, theoretically. And then back then, it was an hour and a half. Well, then, that was a long time, an hour and a half.

TAPPE: Now it takes that long to get across town in Houston.

KEEVER: At the time, it was four hours to go to Atlanta, four hours to go to D.C. Now, four hours, you’re still in Texas.

TAPPE: That’s right. That’s right. Well, how did you end up coming to Houston?

KEEVER: Of all people, a gentleman that we had been roommates in Charlotte, and he was a former Catholic brother. His name was Panar Loren Maria Laureano.

TAPPE: That’s a mouthful.

KEEVER: Uh-huh. And we lived together in Charlotte, and there wasn’t a lot of browns in the 1970s. That’s not being racial. That’s just — that was his term. “There’s not a lot of me here. I want to move to where I fit in more.”

“Oh, okay.”

TAPPE: For the same reason you wanted to move to Charlotte. You thought you would fit in better, yeah.

KEEVER: Yeah. So he went ahead and moved here, and I was, like, “I ain’t moving out there in the middle of nowhere,” just like everybody else said, in the 1970s, so, but —

TAPPE: You mean, “in the middle of nowhere,” to Texas or Houston? That was the image of that time?

KEEVER: Uh-huh. And just like my mother had the same reaction. “Are you going to move over there? Horses and all that stuff?”

TAPPE: Right.
KEEVER: And I had been working in clubs. I worked in gay clubs in the 1970s. I was out-gay in Charlotte in the early 1970s, mid-1970s, so, you know —

TAPPE: Well, did you end up visiting your friend here? Is that how you —

KEEVER: Yeah. I actually came with a little entourage group. It was, like, six of us, and we came here to visit. I stayed with Loren and his friend at their apartment, and we did Gay Pride in 1980, and I was, like [indicating] —

TAPPE: Talk about another world, huh? I wish people could see your face right now.

KEEVER: Yeah. It was just, you know — but so, we drove back through Atlanta, dropped off a couple of friends, and then on back to Charlotte. And I was working for a lady, Marion Tyson, at the Scorpio Disco, and I told her, I said, “Gosh, that’s so beautiful. It’s so wonderful. There’s so many gays. Oh, my god.”

And she was, like, “Uh-huh, sure.”

So, I was, like, “I want to move there.”

“Sure you do, honey. You’ll be okay.”

And a few months later, I just kept on thinking about it and going, and went and told Mother, and Mother was not overly happy, but she goes, “Well, if you’ve got to do it, run off and leave me.”

TAPPE: Yeah, the guilt thing.

KEEVER: So I moved here in 1981. I told Jenaro I’m going to move out there. And I said, “I’m not sure I’m going to stay.” I said, “I might go ahead and” — because I had two friends that were coming here and then going on to San Francisco, the mother country, and I was, like, “Okay. And then we’ll see,” and so I came here. It was right at the end of August, and it was hotter than you know what. And I
was, like, “This is” — “oh, no, huh-uh, huh-uh.”

TAPPE: “What have I done?”

KEEVER: “What have I done?” It is 110 in the shade. Of course, it was August. And September came, and I was, like, “Oh, I’m not so sure.” I said, “I’ll give it until Christmas.” And Jenaro — Loren — and his friend decided they were moving; that I could have the apartment.

I was, like, “Oh, well, okay. Now I have to make a decision.”

TAPPE: Were you staying with them at that time?

KEEVER: Yes.

TAPPE: Okay.

KEEVER: Am I going to take over the apartment? Am I going to go with my two friends to the West Coast? Am I going to go back to Atlanta or Charlotte or where?

TAPPE: Right.

KEEVER: And I made the decision to stay here through the end of the lease, and then I’d go visit my friends in San Francisco. Well, I didn’t end up visiting my friends in San Francisco until years later.

TAPPE: Is that right?

KEEVER: And I just fell in love with living here.

TAPPE: Good. And how old were you at the time? That was 1981, did you say?

KEEVER: Yeah, 1981.

TAPPE: Okay. And you were born in 1952?

KEEVER: Was I? I can’t —

TAPPE: Okay, Brian. You were telling me that you had moved to Houston, you had worked at gay bars in North Carolina, you were thinking about going to the West Coast. At that point you knew you were gay, and you were active in the gay community.

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: Did your parents know? And if they did, how did they react to that?

KEEVER: Very differently. My father — when I was young, I mean, it was obvious, and it was a — everyone knew, because my parents’ car got egged half a dozen times. I couldn’t really ride the bus to school, because if I rode the bus to school there was a chance I was going to get thrown down in the floor or just various things from the butch, macho whatevers. And so it just — I was outing before I knew what outing was. And so we — I don’t remember really some of it. I think I just pushed it out of my head, not wanting to remember it. So it was — they knew, and my father was uncomfortable with it for whatever reason; that I wasn’t the butch person that he wanted me to be because he wasn’t. He didn’t like sports either, but I should.

And I always gravitated more to my mother than my father anyway because my mother — I helped my mother cook because that’s what women did. That was my father’s exact wording. “I cooked in the Air Force in World War II because I had to. I don’t do that anymore. Your mother does. Now get in there and help your mother cook.”

TAPPE: Oh, wow. There’s a message.
KEEVER: As I got older, of course, my mother — it was funny. When I was living in Charlotte, I would have roommates, and my mother would call me on the phone and go, “Hey, how are you doing? What’s going on? How’s Joe?” or “How’s John?” things like that, and we would chat and talk. And I was working in gay clubs. She knew I was working in bars; that I was working in men bars. But the term “gay” was never used. I was working in a man’s bar.

TAPPE: Was the term “gay” even used at that time, or was it more the term “homosexual”?

KEEVER: No, it was “queer.” “You’re nothing but a queer.” To this day, I hate that word. I took back the word “fag” because I liked it, and when I was — god, I don’t remember what age. There was a T-shirt I found somewhere, I don’t remember where, that it had an embroidery on it that said “That’s Mr. Fag to you.” And so I bought it and wore it, and wore it in Charlotte, and I would get different — people would read it, and some would go, “Oh,” you know, like “Okay. He did not just do that.”

Or I would get, “Oh,” so different —

But Mother would say, “Now, there’s a chance that Carmon and I might try to come visit. If there’s anything that you need to do before we get there” —

TAPPE: Is that right?

KEEVER: So it was the double entendres, and so, you know, mind-set. My mother was comfortable and knew, as far as I could tell. My father, of course, was not, and so — or I would come home and — who was it at the time? David. David would come home. He’d be on the phone. I’d say, “Who are you talking to?”

“Your mother.”
“Excuse me? Give me that phone.”

“Mother, why are you calling?”

“Oh, I just called to say hi and chat, and he answered the phone, so we were talking.”

TAPPE: So it was very obvious that both of them knew, especially your mother, but it was never formally acknowledged from you or from them?

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: It was just there? Which is, I think, pretty common.

KEEVER: It was one of those “I know and” —

TAPPE: It was an understanding.

KEEVER: “I know and you know, and you know that I know, but as long as we don’t mention it, we don’t have to deal with it” scenario.

TAPPE: Okay. Yes.

KEEVER: And the fact that a lot of people called me names, a lot of people. I didn’t go to any of the proms; I didn’t go to any of the dances. My father called square dancing at the VFW. So I mean, it wasn’t exactly — but my friend Rhonda — and then I had friends out at the lakes. I mean, all that.

TAPPE: You had friends, but you weren’t doing what one might consider the typical teenage dating type of thing?

KEEVER: Right. So I mean, and then it was just — that’s just what it was.

TAPPE: That’s right. That’s the way it was.

KEEVER: So I look back and go, “Well, it was just” — she was more comfortable with it, but at the same time, I guess in — I don’t want to say honor, but in — so that it didn’t upset my father, it was not brought up.
TAPPE: Uh-huh. Out of respect, right.

KEEVER: Yeah, respect. That would be a good term to use. It just, you know —

TAPPE: Right. It’s understandable, I think. That happens even today.

KEEVER: So it’s, like, people ask me to this day, “When did you come out?” and I go, “Honey, I was never in.”

TAPPE: Good response.

KEEVER: For lack of a better term, I was the town fag. I said every town had to have one. I was just it. I said you hear about that from various people, “Oh, he’s the town queer.” “She’s the town dyke.”

“Oh, those two women. Oh, yeah, well, they live together.”

TAPPE: That’s right. Or an understandable nod.

KEEVER: So I always just go, “Well, I was never in. My closet door had louvers.”

TAPPE: I like that line.

Now, there’s a woman in your life named Damita Jo.

KEEVER: Oh, yes.

TAPPE: And I want you to tell me —

KEEVER: She visits.

TAPPE: I want you to tell me about Damita Jo. Where she came from. What purpose or role she plays in your life. When she came about. When you were introduced to her.
KEEVER: Yes. Damita Jo came out of — here in Houston, Texas in the 1980s, I was involved in the gay community fairly heavily through different and various sundries, and I had done entertaining as a female impersonator in North Carolina briefly. And when I moved to Texas, I was, like, “Oh, I ain’t doing that again, huh-uh.” This is cowboys and all the butch stuff. Well, sure.

But one of my friends was an entertainer, and she was, like, “I know you’ve done it before. I saw the picture.”

And I went, “Yeah, that was before.” I said, “No.”

“Well, I need help, and we need to do this, and we need to do this. And if it raised some money, would you help?”

And I went, “Okay.” I said, “What are we doing, and why are we doing it?”

TAPPE: And what is the answer to that? What were you doing? Do you remember your first — or early on, what the —

KEEVER: I want to say it was not really homeless, but for, like, we were — you got tipped a dollar at a time. At the time, I think the money was going to help people — or homeless or something.

TAPPE: Or lower income or something like that?

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: So this was or was not related directly to the gay community initially?

KEEVER: It was related to the — there were some guys and some girls that I think had mutual friends that were on hard times and just didn’t have a lot and all, and they wanted to help out.

TAPPE: Was this held in a gay bar?
KEEVER: It was held in gay bars, oh, yeah. One of the first ones that I remember helping with was E.J.’s, which was at the time over on Richmond Avenue. Ed and Jeff, who ended up being close personal friends for the entire time I knew them until — they’re both passed. That club and the current club that closed. It went out of business. I used to help. As a matter of fact, I ended up working for them doing shows and raising money for HIV and for just in general things. Buy someone a pair of shoes. Just anything. But it was more of a dare and more of a “Oh, you’re kidding. You’re going to do what?” And I went, “Well, you know,” so —

TAPPE: And this was — if I’m understanding you correctly, your initial Damita Jo performances in Houston were not related to HIV/AIDS fundraising at the very beginning?

KEEVER: Not at the beginning. Not at the very beginning, but quickly turned to that issue because this was in, like, 1983, and that was right at the, like, embryo stage of what’s going on, when it was still the gay cancer and it only affected men, and you had to be — you got KS [Kaposi sarcoma] and you wasted away and you’re gone, so —

TAPPE: Now, I want to stay with Damita Jo to a certain extent, but I would like for you to tie that in a little bit with what you were just saying about the first recognition,
your first recognition of HIV/AIDS, the impact, what you remember.

KEEVER: Okay. It was scary because I was not super political, but I got involved when I moved here with GPC, which at the time was the Gay Political Caucus, because they were endorsing a woman to be mayor of the city of Houston, Kathryn J. Whitmire.

TAPPE: I remember her.

KEEVER: And so I helped hold signs at the corner of Montrose and Westheimer that said “Vote for Kathy Whitmire” for hours. I would do that with two or three other friends. And so that kind of got me started, and I knew some of the original people that helped with the Mac McAdory and all the original, like — long before the Montrose Clinic, long before the current AIDS Foundation Houston, it was just a group of people coming together, going, “Oh, my god, we’ve got people we need to help out.”

And I was, like, “Okay. What do we do?”

And that’s, you know — trying to think of names. The McAdory House was the first place I remember because that was where those AIDS guys went, and it was over here on California. And people would not even — gay, young, white male men would not go over there because they were afraid, just like everybody else. And so me, Ray, Bruce —

TAPPE: Ray —

KEEVER: Ray Hill. Ray — what was Kent’s last name? Kent, Kent Noz. A couple others. We were going over to bring, like, canned foods and just different things for them over there because I was told that that’s what we needed to do.

TAPPE: That was at the McAdory House?
KEEVER: Right, yeah. And that was — god, it was just so — thinking back, it was just so surreal to — I was nervous, but going, “I don’t know what this is, what’s really going on, but I see people very sick, and they’re saying we need to help, so, okay,” you know, for lack of a better — and at the time, I didn’t have — I wasn’t, quote-unquote — I didn’t have a lover. I wasn’t seriously dating someone, so I had plenty of time. And I just figured okay, why not?

And then — because at the time, Mary’s was a super place, Mary’s Bar on Westheimer, where movers and shakers in the community met. You know, people nowadays, of course, would have a totally different idea or version of that, but I mean, that’s where you got a drink and went to the patio and sat around and talked and would hear what’s happening here, what’s happening there, just — prime example: Pokey Anderson, who was not that fond of Mary’s —

TAPPE: I’m quite sure.

KEEVER: — but would come to the patio to chat and talk about issues. And there was that patio door, where it was kind of like a speak easy-type thing where they push open your — some people would come in, so that way they wouldn’t have to actually go through Mary’s at the time.

TAPPE: Right, kind of a side entrance.

KEEVER: Which nowadays I think of that in life and go, “Oh, my god.”

But a friend of mine, Brucella, who also did shows, and I cannot for the life of me remember the other drag queen’s name who said, “Well, you need a name. What was your name in Charlotte?”

And I went, “I ain’t using that here.”

And they says, “Well, who do you want to be?”
And I went, “I don’t know.”

“Well, what type of entertainment did you do?”

I said, “Well, I did comedy.” I said, “Believe it or not, I did country and western.” I said, “In Charlotte and Atlanta both.” I said, “Because I didn’t try to be the pretty girl.”

You know, I would do comedy. I would do, you know, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, things that — for lack of a better term, filler for — the star would do her number, get off stage, go back to change and all, and I would go on and do my number. I would have a good time. I mean, I wasn’t trying to be the star of the show. I just enjoyed it, and that’s what I did.

“Oh, okay. So you’re more a lounge-type singer-ish.”

And I went, “Well, yeah, I guess.” I mean, I knew I wasn’t going to be number one or something like that, I said. But there’s always a time when they need you.

And so she just — “Well, you sound a lot like this person that I’ve been listening to,” and all this stuff, “and she’s just great. And you need to listen to her.”

And I went, “Okay.”

And so I went over to Bruce’s house, and we were listening to her, and there’s a real woman who was a lounge singer, and her name was Damita Jo, and no last name, just Damita Jo. And I laughed, and I said, “I kind of like her.”

And they says, “Oh, well, cool. Let’s do that.”

TAPPE: And that was the beginning?

KEEVER: And that was it. It was, like, “Okay.” And so, it was, like, early — well, by
this time it was 1983, 1984, I mean. There was Cher, and there’s different people that just have one name, so I said, “It doesn’t need to be Damita Jo Keever or Damita Jo, you know, blow, blow, whatever.” I said, “Just Damita Jo.”

So that’s how she came to be, and that’s how I started raising my name and doing things and figuring out what’s going on and just — I always laugh. I’m going, “Well, that’s what kept me going and kept me kind of just figuring out who, what, where, when, why,” is always out there doing something.

TAPPE: So Damita Jo, if I hear you correctly, was an avenue for you to stay very connected to the gay community?

KEEVER: Right, because Brian was very active politically. I was going down the avenue that I wanted to eventually be elected to something, but things happened that were not going to make it easy for that. And then I started getting ill, and I didn’t admit that I was getting ill at first, going, “Oh, it’s just I’ve been doing too much,” and I started getting skinnier and all. And so it was just, like, “Okay. Oh, what happens to everybody else, it doesn’t happen to me,” just like other young — I wasn’t that young, but mind-set. “I don’t have time for that.”

TAPPE: So when you realized that you were losing weight and maybe you were thinking you were overdoing and stressing and that sort of thing, what took you to the next level of actually visiting a doctor?


“Well, I know. I need to calm down and just stay home.”
“No, no, no, no.”

So I was, like, “Whatever.” I was, like, “Okay. I’ll go to a doctor.” Well, at the time, I was not going to a doctor because I was, like, “I don’t have time for that.”

TAPPE: You mean for just regular checkups and —

KEEVER: Right, yeah. And so — because I had done it all my life. I had done it as a kid. So I didn’t want to do that. And so they said, “Well” — and we didn’t have a lot of money, so it’s — like, you know, wasn’t exactly rolling in dough, so they said, “Well, let’s go see Patsy.”

TAPPE: Patsy —


They went, “Well,” pardon the expression, “let me give you her official name. Dr. Patricia Salvato.”

And I went, “Oh. Oh, it’s a doctor.”

And so I went with a couple of friends, and I went to go see her. And she goes, “You need to make an appointment with me. I need to do a full workup on you.”


“Well, we’ll discuss it.”

I went, “Okay.”

So we put together an appointment. I left and, I guess, went to a club or something. I don’t remember. But it was, like, a two-week period before I actually went. And at the time, I was 130 pounds. I had a 28-inch waist. I’d kill for that today.
TAPPE: Wouldn’t we all?

KEEVER: So, I mean, I was getting there pretty thin, and she did tests and all, and she was also helping out at a new organization called the Montrose Clinic. She was a volunteer doctor. And she goes, “We need to go over there and all the above.”

And I was, like, “Okay.” I’m thinking that I had VD or one of those communicable diseases.

TAPPE: Right, yeah. STD [sexually transmitted disease] of some sort.

KEEVER: Yeah. And no, I didn’t.

And she goes, “Okay.” She goes, “You’re having some serious issues here. We need to have a sit-down talk.” And she goes, “I want to be honest.”

And I went, “I prefer it.”

And she goes, “You’ve got some issues. You’ve got some problems, and you can’t afford and I can’t afford — you can’t afford me, and I can’t afford to give away what is really needed.” She goes, “What we need to do is, I need to send you over to M.D. Anderson and get you — send you though the, not really emergency, but urgent care-type thing to get you in the system over there so that they can help out and take care of what’s coming.”

And I went, “Oh.”

TAPPE: “Of what’s coming,” did you say?

KEEVER: Uh-huh. That’s what she said.

TAPPE: Okay.

KEEVER: And so, I went, “Okay. Whatever.”

And I got in to M.D. Anderson at Station 10. Station 10 was the area where they were keeping the gay-cancer people, and there was Dr. Gary Brewton,
Dr. Crofoot? No, not Crofoot. Dr. Peter Mansell, and Doctor — he was from Colombia. I can’t remember now. But anyway, and that was for — you went, and you showed up at 8:00 o’clock in the morning and signed in and waited for them to get to you because that’s the only three doctors that would see those patients.

TAPPE: Was this Station 10, was it dedicated strictly to the gay-cancer issue, as they were calling it at that time?

KEEVER: Yes, right, right. Yeah, KS.

TAPPE: So that KS was actually part of their diagnosis, which is why you were at Anderson, I guess? Okay. But that’s all they saw, were —

KEEVER: Yeah. I would think they may have seen a couple other people at other times, but from what I remember, that was the only place that would accept and see, because of all the fear and all the anxiety and unknowns, because still it was very unknown. You know, it happened on the East Coast and the West Coast, but here on the Third Coast, there wasn’t a lot of knowledge and a lot of knowing what was going on, I guess, is —

TAPPE: Right. Well, it was all so new everywhere.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: Do you remember what it was like being there, in terms of how the hospital personnel treated you? Were they protective physically with —

KEEVER: Yeah, it was. But I personally, since I had grown up like that, seeing a person wearing a gown and gloves, not glove gloves, but, you know — and having the mask was just normal. I don’t know how other people saw it, but it was very taxing just sitting there and reading because they didn’t have TV screens and all
that stuff up there at first. You either brought your newspaper, brought your magazine, brought whatever, and sat there and waited. And you could be there all day; and most of the time, you were. But, yeah, it was, you know — and I became a client at the original Montrose Clinic.

TAPPE: And that was located where?

KEEVER: Well, the first one was located in the 100 block of Westheimer, in an old house. But they moved — from there, it went to a house — yeah, a house over on Hawthorne. And then from there, over to Richmond Avenue, to a low, one-story building that didn’t look overly inviting, but it was what it was. And then from there, I think went to 215, when they took over an old hotel that was a pay-by-the-hour hotel, and that was the first Montrose Clinic that was a real clinic.

But a mutual friend of mine with some people was Thomas Audet, who was acting as running the place because they really couldn’t pay a lot, because most of the people that were there were volunteers. It was only open in the evenings. It wasn’t open during the day. And so you would go and, you know — it was STDs and —

TAPPE: Wasn’t that really initially the basic purpose of Montrose Clinic, were the STDs in the community, basically?

KEEVER: STDs, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Right. Because it was something that they didn’t want to go to their regular doctor, so that was the original intent of —

TAPPE: And then this other issue came up, and it was a natural progression, I guess, for them to get involved, obviously, for them to get involved with that?

KEEVER: Yeah. And I guess more out of “Oh, my god, we’ve got to do this.” And I
wasn’t part of that original group. I knew people, but I wasn’t part of that. That wasn’t anywhere even in my peripherals.

TAPPE: You mean in terms of the clinic and setting it up and that sort of thing?

KEEVER: Yeah, right. Yeah, that wasn’t even — I was over here and joined the GPC political and all that stuff, and then over here was the medical, and that usually didn’t come together, and I was helping with the Pride committee and helping with the parade and helping with this and everything except that.

TAPPE: Was there a particular moment that triggered your activism? So what I’m hearing you say right now is, you were doing some fundraisers for low income and these good socio-economic issues.

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: And you were also involved at this point already with some of the political things, you know, being a gay man and, as you said earlier, why not, and I want this person elected, and that sort of thing. But what is it, and maybe it was just a natural progression, but was there anything that really triggered an activist in you? Because you have been incredibly involved.

KEEVER: Well, I always say I was married to the movement. But of course, back in the late 1970s, or 1977, 1978, somewhere back in there, when that lovely Florida juice lady Anita Bryant, and was just hideous — and one thing I forgot to mention was 1979, they had a March on Washington, and the very first one, and Loren and myself and a couple of other people organized a contingent from the gay bars there in Charlotte with a banner and all, and we drove to D.C., and we had taken a sheet and wrapped it around two poles and spray painted on it “Charlotte, North Carolina, the Queen’s City of the South,” which was officially what — Charlotte
is known as the Queen City of the South, from Queen Charlotte, but we added the apostrophe S.

And so we marched in the parade in 1979 from Charlotte, North Carolina, and the microphone — I remember it vividly, the microphone welcoming this group and that group, and then they went “Oh, my god. We have a group from the Queens of the South, Charlotte, North Carolina. Well, okay. Welcome.” And I don’t even remember who was on the microphone. It could have been Robin Tyler, for all I know. But that was — and there wasn’t that many of us, but I mean, it was just Loren and I and a couple of other people just spraying on a sheet and —

TAPPE: You got their attention. And that was strictly for a gay rights issue at that time?

KEEVER: Right, oh yeah.

TAPPE: Because that was 1979.

KEEVER: Was it? I was trying to remember, seventy- —

TAPPE: I thought you said 1979, but I thought your pin was —

KEEVER: Yeah. 1979, that was the March on Washington, was in 1979, the original.

TAPPE: That’s right.

KEEVER: And see, that’s history. That’s when Phyllis Frye and a bunch of people from here went to it and carried the Texas flags and the American Texas and all that stuff. And they were on — Phyllis and them were on the front cover of some magazine. I don’t remember which one, but I remember seeing that and going, “Oh, wow, that’s a lot,” thinking to myself in 1979, because we were like this [indicating]. That was kind of like a seed at the time, because I was going, “Well, I might as well. Why not?” That kind of got when I was here.
TAPPE: Okay, Brian. We were talking about Damita Jo a little bit earlier, and I understand how she came about and how she’s been introduced to the public back before you were even in Houston. Since you’ve been in Houston, from what I could gather, she has played a very large role in your life in terms of fundraising for initially perhaps some lower-income issues, and then on to the HIV/AIDS funds raisers. Is she still around?

KEEVER: Yes, she is. She disappears from time to time. My favorite line is, “I’m sorry. Damita is visiting a fat farm in the south of France. She’ll be back sometime. I’ll give her your love.”

And people always pick on me when I talk about Damita, and they go, “That’s you.”

And I go, “Yes, but no,” I said.

It’s quite amazing when you do this and transform your person into a persona. For me, I always made sure that I painted — that’s the term we use. I would paint either at home or at the bar, but I would always walk in as Brian and walk out as Brian, and Damita stayed in, wherever I was. Or if I was performing during coronations and various things like that, I would come in as Damita and leave as Damita. I never intertwined the two because it’s — it’s a — persona, it’s about the word I can use, it’s — if you’re seriously doing it, you don’t, like, take half your makeup off, throw a baseball cap on, and go sit and grab a Bud. You just don’t do that. I know there are people that do that. That is fine with them. It’s not fine with me. I would never do that. You either are or you aren’t.
TAPPE: One or the other. Black or white, right.

KEEVER: Over the years, I’ve got where I would say, “Okay,” because we got to the point where we were in various organizations and various avenues, so I would travel when I was in the court system very heavily because there were other cities in the state of Texas plus other cities across the United States and Mexico and Canada that are part of the Imperial Court System, which is —

TAPPE: So when you say — excuse me. When you say Court System, you don’t mean the legal court system?

KEEVER: No, I mean the, like, kings and queens, and princes and princesses. The Court. Their majesties and, you know, just like the Queen of England or the Emperor of Russia or things of that caliber.

TAPPE: How many years have you been involved with that?

KEEVER: 25-plus.

TAPPE: And one of your awards? Tell me about that.

KEEVER: Well, through the years, you raise money and you go to different things. The United Courts of Texas, you go to — when you’re reigning in your city, you are asked and expected to visit the other courts inside the state of Texas to help them, as they come and help you. And then at the end of your reign, they come to your
city for your stepping down and pay to come to the court for the luncheon, for the
breakfast, just various things. And that money goes back to charity. And so the
year that I was empress, I did all the courts in Texas, which was Dallas, Fort
Worth, Corpus Christi, Waco, Austin. I think that was it then.

But what I enjoyed was traveling outside the state of Texas. And one of
the funnier ones was, back years ago we always loved to go to Denver. Denver
has a fabulous coronation, and they’re one of the top fundraising organizations in
the city, or was then, and they would sometimes be lucky enough to have elected
officials come to their coronation. Once they had the mayor of Denver. They had
a city council person of Denver come to a group of drag queens and very less than
your button-down, professional, three-piece-suit individual.

So there were, like, four of us traveling, and I think at the time it was
Continental, and you go through where they X-ray, and we’re all in our Brian
attire. And the lady, she sees one, okay; two, she brings it back, goes through;
three, brings it back. By the time she gets to four, she’s going, “What are you-all
doing? Are those crowns or what?”

And one of my more flamboyant friends goes, “Well, of course it is.
We’re going to a pageant.”

And I’m, like, “Oh, my god.”

But we just grinned and went, “We’re going to Denver.”

“Oh, okay,” and we went on.

But I always remember that, because there were four people, four sets of
luggage that each had a crown and hair and things, and when it’s being X-rayed,
you know —
TAPPE: You’re outed.

KEEVER: But at the same time, this was long, long, many years before 9-11, so it’s —

TAPPE: Your crowns may not make it through now without a hand check.

KEEVER: Well, we’ll see.

TAPPE: Keep that in mind when you go to Portland.

KEEVER: So that was very good. I got to go to — I did Denver. I did Colorado Springs. I did San Francisco, the mother court. I did San Diego, where I got to — that was in 1994. San Diego, we had their coronation. But the Friday before coronation, which is always on a Saturday night, we hopped on a bus and went to Tijuana just across the border of the United States and Mexico, and this was in —

TAPPE: In full regalia?

KEEVER: No, no, no. As boys. But we brought a small thing with us, and we went and went to a gay bar in Tijuana, Mexico, and painted and did a drag show for the Tijuana AIDS project in Tijuana to help raise money for them down there. And so I laugh, am going, you know, I performed in the United States and Mexico.

TAPPE: That’s exactly right.

KEEVER: And I said, “I don’t know a lot of people that can say that.” And then we went shopping with one of the monarchs, who is Hispanic, and in total Spanish and everything, and bought jewels and bought other things, and then got back on the bus and went back into San Diego. So we spent the day doing that, which was — at first, I was going, “Oh, my god, we’re going to get killed” type situation.

TAPPE: Right, sure. Fair enough.

But from time to time, my mind wanders as far as dates.

TAPPE: That’s okay.

KEEVER: But, so, I mean, that was — and I got to go to New York City for their ceremonies, and they always have theirs, it’s called Night of a Thousand Gowns, and it’s in the Waldorf Astoria. Really, really expensive, but it’s — I only did it once, because you can only afford to do that once. But they actually — the doors open, they announce you, and you come down, and it’s just —

TAPPE: That’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

KEEVER: Yeah. That was then. I don’t know, now. But I just laugh. And so you travel and you represent — I represented Houston, represented Texas and other, you know, so — and then you’re raising money, each city you go to.

TAPPE: Right. Now, the money that is raised, you say goes to charity. Is that an HIV/AIDS — or that’s HIV/AIDS charities, or are they varied?

KEEVER: It varies, but I have my program from Coronation 11, when I was stepping down, and it was January the 28th, 1995, and at the time it was at the Holiday Inn Medical Center, which is not there anymore. It’s now a hospital.
But “Through dedications and community support, Reign 10 raised $12,493 for the following charities.”

TAPPE: Oh, okay. Oh, I see.

KEEVER: And then, “In addition, the Reign of 9 donated $4,600 to the Colt 45’s general charities fund, Stonewall 25, and the Houston Gay and Lesbian Switchboard.”

TAPPE: Right. Let me see those.

KEEVER: But these are all the organizations throughout the year that we raised money for, and —

TAPPE: Well, this is an interesting and wide variety, but a lot of them HIV/AIDS assistance, and some of the gay history, and some just fun.

KEEVER: Right, and some just fun. And we both got to pick a favorite charity to specifically raise money for. The emperor gets to have his pet project, and I got to have my pet project. Well, the funny part is, my project that I wanted to raise money for was an organization that was starting back then, with a couple of other people, called the Pet Patrol, and Tori Williams, who was a good friend, and I, and a few others. But we did things like Going to the Dogs, for Pet Patrol; a Bear Auction, for Pet Patrol; this for Pet Patrol.

And so each year they get to pick who they want. A majority of them will pick, like, the Montrose Counseling Center or the Montrose Clinic, Legacy, AssistHers, whatever. But a few will go off and grab other, different ones.

And I wanted — because that was our tenth year, and I wanted to specify Pet Patrol and stuff to go there. And it was the first time, from what I remembered, that that happened; that it wasn’t just for men and women, it was for pets. I’m very proud of that, the fact that —
TAPPE: You should be. It’s a wonderful organization, and they take care of our babies.

KEEVER: And they take care of people living with HIV who can’t afford their babies and can’t afford to take them to the doctor or take them for walks and things, so I’ve always been an avid supporter. And major help is what they do for the community, and I’m very glad they’re still around.

TAPPE: They certainly are, with a fundraiser tomorrow, as a matter of fact.

KEEVER: Pennies.

TAPPE: That’s right. Tell me, Brian, a little bit about the jobs that you’ve had since you’ve been in Houston. I know you’ve had a couple major ones, so why don’t you fill me in and get me up to date.

KEEVER: When I first moved here, I didn’t want to work in the clubs again. I was, like, “Okay. I need to refocus,” and so something I had always wanted to do but was too afraid to do it was work as a florist, so I took a job with Hannah Niday Flowers.

TAPPE: Why were you afraid?

KEEVER: Well, for two reasons. For one, in The Carolinas, that was such a stereotypical thing to do. If you’re gay, you’re either a hairdresser or a florist, things like that. And I sure couldn’t do hair on a human being, so it’s, like, “No.” And I enjoyed flowers. I enjoyed it because I did that as a kid. And so I said, “I know. I’ll be a florist. So that’s cool.” So I started working. I worked for Blanton Flowers. I worked for Hannah Niday Flowers. Hannah Niday was a very upscale florist for the time in the 1980s, and they had contacts. We did all the flowers for the Petroleum Club, which was on top of the Exxon Building, where we had to do the little, for lack of a better term, roundy-moundies that went on the
tables for their luncheons. That was a five-day-a-week position. Fortunately or
unfortunately, we did a lot of funerals. A few weddings. But yeah, it was — and
Hannah Niday was a brand name, and so I —

TAPPE: And you enjoyed that?

KEEVER: I enjoyed that. That was really, really good. And it helped me expand “who,
what I am” and all this stuff. I went through that. And then I started getting back
involved in the community more and not having the, quote-unquote, straight jobs,
but I worked — I did some work doing restaurant work, but not really. I mean, it
was, like, well, I’ll do that briefly, but definitely not something I wanted to
continue. Waiting is good, but it’s very stressful, and you have to really be good.
And fortunately, some of them today really are. But I enjoyed that, so I did that.

And I went to work for these two men that I had met, Chuck Patrick and
Jim Veteto, and they were — Jim was the executive sales manager and Chuck
was the editor and publisher for This Week in Texas Magazine. Everybody else
knew it as TWT, which was the original gay publication. And it was a statewide
entertainment publication. And Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin were
the four cities that were the major cities. And I got involved as a reporter for
Chuck and J.V. and started going around, talking to people and doing interviews
with people, and just snapping photos, things of that nature. And they were at
2205 Montrose Boulevard at the time, so it was close, it was in Montrose, and I
enjoyed it. It was wonderful. This Week in Texas was the, for lack of a better
term, the gay bible, the gay what everyone rushed to pick up every Friday to see
their horoscope, to see if their picture was in the Hot Tea column. And then later
in the years, late 1980s, 1990s, they would pick it up and look in the back to see
who we lost and who friends weren’t with us anymore. But it was very good and a very thick publication, perfect bound and full color.

It was the publication of the day, and people would have *TWT* bumper stickers that were black and silver long before there was a Gay Pride. Long before HRC and all the other symbols that we have today, there was a *TWT* sticker, and you put it on the bumper of your car so people would know, or not know.

And then we would run a contest where we would take a snapshot of a person’s license plate that had a *TWT* sticker on it, and we would publish the license plate, saying you had until the following Friday to contact us, and you got either your age or your weight or something like that in cash for celebrating that you had a *TWT* sticker.

So I actually worked for *This Week in Texas Magazine* for 11-plus years in various roles, responsibilities and all, through two ownership changes, and through the unfortunate ending of the magazine in 1999. So it was a very wonderful, exciting job and avenue for the GLBT community.

TAPPE: And that kept you as an individual, I would assume, very visible?

KEEVER: Very visible, very active. Traveling as Brian to the other cities, I helped deliver. At one point I was the office manager. I was in charge of the classifieds, I was in charge of distribution, just different things throughout the years, and ended up being more of a twit, for lack of a better term, to go into the clubs to take the pictures for the drag queens and entertainers, and go to different political events, have my City-issued press pass, where we had to go down to the City and apply and take your picture and have a badge. Just like the *Chronicle* or *Houston
Press or any of those other publications, you had a press pass so you could go places that other people couldn’t.

But from the gay standpoint, everyone knew who you were. You couldn’t exactly go in and hide.

TAPPE: That’s right. “Here comes Brian.”

KEEVER: Yeah, they were, “Oh, look, TWT’s here.” So it was a good thing and a bad thing at the same time, but it was a wonderful part of that point in the gay/lesbian community.

TAPPE: Well, it was huge, I would think, because I certainly remember it.

KEEVER: Yeah. So that was fun. That was great. And there hasn’t been another publication similar to TWT that’s really happened. My favorite at present is still OutSmart. Greg and his crew are just fabulous. They really are.

There are ones that have come and gone. There was even a try of a second TWiT through, I think, San Antonio, or somewhere, but it was T-W-i-T, and it lasted a year. And unfortunately, just like everything that’s print, is subject to the whims of what we do nowadays.

TAPPE: That’s right. The market.

Did you see a change in TWT from when it first started and then as this HIV/AIDS issue came along?

KEEVER: Yes.

TAPPE: Did you see a difference in what they talked about? I understand the obituaries, as you mentioned, in the back. But beyond that, in terms of their stories?

KEEVER: Oh, yeah, definitely, because I got to go to conferences and got to go to meetings and got to go to events as a double fold. I went as a reporter taking
notes and taking pictures of going to HIV Planning Council meetings at Red Cross, Houston/Harris County Panel on AIDS, just different places. Going to Austin, being able to be there. Going to Dallas.

So I mean, and we would run reports in the news section, because it wasn’t just about being in a gay bar. The TWT did hard news. We did sports, like the gay football league and the women’s, the tennis and the pool, where you’re shooting pool. I mean, so we were a well-rounded entertainment magazine that also covered everything in the bars and the drag shows and the events and letting people know the events happening in the AIDS/HIV other avenues.

And unfortunately, it became very much of an issue to put your lover’s obituary in the magazine to let other people know and to — it was kind of like instead of putting it in the Chronicle, you put it in the TWT, both men and women. And it got to be, at the point — at one point, we had four, six pages every week.

TAPPE: Of obituaries?

KEEVER: Of obituaries.

TAPPE: Every week?

KEEVER: Every week. And the hard part was, people actually had to show up at our office to give us the picture of their lover who had passed and to write what they wanted, what we print and what they want to say. And so you ended up being kind of like consoling and understanding and trying to say it’s okay for them to do that. And nine times out of ten, I’d end up doing it, which helped me know more people in that community. So it was a double-edged sword.

TAPPE: Right. And you became, in a sense, support for them.

KEEVER: Right.
TAPPE: Yeah, because that was right after their partner’s death.

KEEVER: Right. And they would come in and say, “Here’s Debbie,” “Here’s Don,” “Here’s” whoever, “and here’s the picture I want you to run,” and we would have to scan it, not digital like they do today, but back then. And we’d typeset and all the stuff that you did. And then they would come back to get the picture after it’s already been published and pick up their copies. So that’s the way —

TAPPE: That’s how it was done.

KEEVER: That’s the way it was done. And so that also was an avenue of interesting and sadness at the same time, of them thinking of our magazine good enough to be able to come in and share their life partner’s passing, to put it in the magazine.

TAPPE: Well, that speaks well for TWT and the transition from initially more of an entertainment —

KEEVER: Bar magazine.

TAPPE: — publication to what it evolved to is pretty striking. And you should be very proud, I think, to have been a part of that, a part of that growth.

KEEVER: Yeah. And unfortunately, a majority of the people who were in that publication and running it are not with us anymore. It’s a very kind of bizarre situation, especially from my point.

TAPPE: Right, that not very many people are still alive.

KEEVER: Right. There’s a couple I know of, but one is a fellow entertainer who was one of the people that put all the pictures and the typing and all that stuff together, and very good, very good. And another I know that’s living in another city. But there’s not that many, even the older ones. The one that’s still around, that’s still working over at the OutSmart, is Blase, Blase DiStefano. And Blase was one of
the managers for TWT before he went over to OutSmart.

TAPPE: To OutSmart, that’s right.

Tell me a little bit about what you’re doing now. I know you’re working with Legacy Community Health Services.

KEEVER: Right, yeah. I actually started out volunteering there. As a patient, I became a volunteer, and then over the years I’ve become an employee. At first I was just a part-time employee because my health wasn’t that great and I had no insurance, so I was on the Ryan White, so — because I was supposed to be gone. And so, yeah, well —

TAPPE: Here you are, 63 years old.

KEEVER: Yeah. And if I’d have known then what I know now. How many times have we said that?

TAPPE: That’s right.

KEEVER: But it’s challenging, but it’s something that I enjoy doing because it helps a lot. Well, my original part of it was, I was helping other people living with HIV in healthcare. I was making sure that there was an avenue, a venue that you showed up. Even if you were sick as a dog and didn’t have a penny to your name, you could show up, get in there, they would see you, you would get medicine and get better, which is still the issue today. Even though we are a federally funded healthcare clinic, we’re a home care. We do everything now.

There’s still a part of the clinic that’s devoted to underinsured and no-insured, and it’s expanded past the GLBT community to everybody, including dental, vision, ob/gyn, pedi, behavioral health. We are a one-stop shopping for health and —
TAPPE: Not necessarily HIV/AIDS related?

KEEVER: No, not at all.

TAPPE: So this has expanded so beyond that?

KEEVER: Right. But it’s still — that’s the core, but you have to be able to expand and help people, because myself, I’ve lived long enough to have, pardon the expression, old men diseases, where you have HIV and you’ve got that under control and it’s dormant and you’re taking your pills, but now your heart, or you’ve got other issues going on in your life, where “Oh, okay. Well, my cholesterol is up. I have a heart condition.” There are some people that have become diabetic. There are some people that they can’t handle issues, so they come in for psychiatric, and just things like that.

But also, at the same time, healthcare is everybody’s issue, and there are more and more people of the women’s side, children, and a lot of Hispanic and Asian and African-American women that are coming in and getting care. And so there are some portions that are still going to be — have to have care. And so, there are other organizations that help out, and that’s fabulous and wonderful, but at the same time there’s always going to be — unfortunately, there’s always going to be a need, and so fortunately, hopefully, there will always be somebody there.

TAPPE: Now, when Legacy started, was — tell me its beginnings. The Montrose Clinic?

KEEVER: Yes. Legacy became Legacy because of outgrowing — Montrose Clinic was started as an STD and kind of like a place as an offshoot of going to the health department or going to your family doctor, especially in the GLBT community. And so there were doctors and women that were in our community or friends of
our community that wanted to help out and volunteered their hours and all to come and help out.

And then it got to the point where we could actually afford to hire people and all. I’m saying that it’s me, but this was the other people that actually put it all together. And so I’m lucky enough to know most of the history of the healthcare of Montrose Clinic into Legacy, because we purchased — as the Montrose Clinic, we took over the Assistance Fund, which was another organization that helped people without insurance pay for their medications and all.

So they tried to figure out what name to use, being the Montrose Assistance or the Montrose Fund, or whatever. And so they came up with the wordage that, well, we want to be able to leave a legacy of people and all, so they came up with the word Legacy, Legacy Community Health Services. And nowadays that’s even shortened. We’re just Legacy Community Health. And there are multiple locations in multiple areas, even — we have three locations in Beaumont, we have Baytown, we have Southwest, we have Baker-Ripley, we have Lyons, we have Santa Clara, we have Bissonnet. And they all say Legacy Community Health. We even have two in Baytown. One is at the Methodist Hospital in Baytown that has a Legacy there.

TAPPE: Well, that’s pretty amazing.

KEEVER: Legacy has become just pretty much healthcare, period.

TAPPE: That’s right. Let me ask you a question: Do you feel that if — okay. Montrose Clinic was for STDs, for the most part. And then the change came with HIV/AIDS and the gay cancer early on and this sort of thing. Do you feel that
this big explosion in terms of the healthcare system that led to Legacy would have happened if it had not been for the change with this —

KEEVER: Unfortunately, I don’t think so. And that’s not a good thing to say, but —

TAPPE: No, I’m just curious how much — if that was the biggest impact.

KEEVER: Yeah, I’m just saying, I think, given everything that I know and all that I’ve experienced and done, and some of it I shouldn’t have, but healthcare was not number one on most gay men’s minds in the 1970s and early 1980s. We were still trying to be who we were, and that was the last thing that we were worried about. And I can’t talk a lot about the lesbian/women’s movement and all, but I would imagine a lot of the same; because a lot of lesbians had to care for and help out gay men because gay men were ostracized by their family on two fronts: One, because you were gay; and two, you got sick, and they didn’t want to have anything to do with you. And so you were just there. And it wasn’t, like, everybody, but there was enough interaction of people that went, “Okay. No one’s going to help us but ourselves, so let’s do it.”

TAPPE: Right. Well, you saw men helping men, but you also saw some women coming in to help?

KEEVER: Right. And at first, it was not as many, because there’s always been, and to this day I think it’s still — not fighting for the same piece of pie, but their issues and our issues as a gay man are usually fifty-fifty. They have issues that strictly are theirs, and we have issues that are strictly ours. They have breast cancer and all this stuff. Men do get breast cancer, but it’s mainly a women’s issue. Ours is the prostate or things of that nature. But I would say in general, I — excuse me, to throw another turn in the wheel, I’m also very active, well, not as much
anymore, but with Planned Parenthood and with Houston Area Women’s Center. Speaking of politics, I also served volunteering for Nikki Van Hightower when she was running for political office.

TAPPE: I remember her.

KEEVER: And some people remember who she is, but she was in charge of the Women’s Center and all. So I mean, through the years, two very, very, very good friends of mine used to own a lesbian bookstore called Inklings over on Richmond Avenue, which just happened to be owned by Pokey Anderson and Annise Parker, who happens to be our mayor.

TAPPE: That’s right, thank goodness.

KEEVER: Through the years, we’ve just helped each other out and worked together, didn’t work together, so yeah. And I think the healthcare would not have worked as well and we wouldn’t have done as much as we did, had this issue not popped up. You know, the woulda, coulda, shoulda. And I love to say Houston stepped forward a lot in the early days when a lot of other areas of the country went screaming the other way. I mean, you had New York and you had San Francisco, but other areas just didn’t want to deal with it, talk about it. It didn’t exist. That’s a New York and San Francisco problem. And AFH, if I’m not mistaken, was started before even some of the organizations in California or in L.A. and —

TAPPE: Tell me, AFH.

KEEVER: AIDS Foundation Houston, sorry, acronyms.

TAPPE: Yes.

KEEVER: And I was a volunteer over there. I had friends over there. Former City Councilwoman Sue Lovell and I were over there and just different things. That’s
where we started the PWA [People With AIDS] Coalition of Houston. That’s where they started two or three organizations out of volunteering for AFH and for the clinic. So a lot of things that got started came from all of a little, small group of people saying, “Oh, god, what can we do?”

TAPPE: Becoming active and caring enough.

KEEVER: Yeah. And so —

TAPPE: And you were obviously one of those people.

KEEVER: And I laugh. I’m going, at the time it was exciting and scary at the same time. And another reason is, I wasn’t married. I didn’t have a husband. I didn’t own a home, so I wasn’t settled. I wasn’t a banker. I wasn’t a doctor. I wasn’t a lawyer. So I had the time and the energy and the will to do this where some people couldn’t, because of their position or their role in life, that they couldn’t. So I was very pleased that at the time I was able to do what I did, because I wasn’t expecting to be here.

TAPPE: That’s right. Let me ask you one more question along that line, and then we’ll bring this to a close for today. Why do you think you have been such a long-term survivor?

KEEVER: Well, there’s debate on that issue. This may sound really bad, but I was not married. I was not — I didn’t have 15 different boyfriends. From time to time, I’ve always said I wish I could have had a lover, settled down, had two dogs, three cats, and goldfish, and all the stuff that happened, but then I wouldn’t have been able to do what I did, and there wasn’t a lot of people to do that. I was married to the movement. I was on all these different boards, and I’m not saying that to make myself sound good. It’s just what it was. If you had a nice
nine-to-five day job and either a woman or a man at home waiting on you, and pets and all the other, that’s what you did. If you didn’t, you went to board meetings, you went to fundraisers, you went to picket in front of Circle K, picket in front of Randalls, just different things that you did, that if you’d have been up there, you wouldn’t have done it because you would have said, “I ain’t going to do that.” So there had to be some people that did that. And I’m very happy that I was able to do that.

TAPPE: Do you think the way you have led your life in terms of focusing has helped you be a survivor physically?

KEEVER: Oh, yes. Well, also, as much as I hate it, I take my medicine. I do the things I’m supposed to do. I make my doctor appointments. I make my — you know, make sure I’m in to get my labs done, follow-ups. Just different things. Yes, I’ve partied like the best of them, but I’ve come back and said, “Okay. I need to chill” and things. And different medications that I’ve been on and different regimens I’ve been on I think have helped me through different avenues because in the 1980s also, late 1980s, there was a group of us that were always sick. I was always sick right after Pride. I was always sick right around the holidays. And back then there was a hospital called Twelve Oaks that a lot of us went to. There were two hospitals that were AIDS friendly, for lack of what to call it. As a matter of fact, Park Plaza had two floors, 7 and 8, that were the AIDS floors, and we actually, through people that had money and insurance, helped remodel those floors and get them nice money and all this stuff. And Twelve Oaks, we would laugh, Doug and Tom and Tim and I and others, we would go see each other in the hospital.
“Well, no, it’s your turn.”

“No, it’s your turn.”

“I’ve been in that room.”

“I was in every room.”

You know, just things of that nature, where you’re walking with your IV pole down the hall to go visit other friends that were in the hospital for the same reason you were in, or not. We had people in groups that would come around and bring little stuffed animals or just to come by to see you, to see if anyone has come by to see you. And there were organizations that did that.

TAPPE: That’s right. Hospital visits and, like, the little care teams, uh-huh.

KEEVER: Yes, which was great. And both the GLBT communities, all of them, men, women, everybody, you would go visit. “Okay. I’m going to Park Plaza today on this floor to see these people.”

And then someone else would say, “Well, I’m going over to Twelve Oaks to do this,” and just that was —

TAPPE: And you didn’t necessarily have to know the person. You just knew they were in there.

KEEVER: Right. You just knew they were in there, and you knew the reason they were in there, and you weren’t sure if they had relatives or loved ones, and you wanted to make sure that they weren’t in there alone and no one cared.

TAPPE: Very kind. Very kind.

KEEVER: And it was almost a running joke with the various rooms. And a lot of the staff, especially at Twelve Oaks, knew you. And the nurses and the doctors that were on that floor, were on that floor for a reason, because some people didn’t
TAPPE: But they wanted to be there.

KEEVER: Right.

[END OF AUDIO PART 3]

TAPPE: And so your interactions with them were positive.

KEEVER: Most of the time. There were a few. If you’re a screaming queen and you come out and you go, “Why is he — he didn’t eat his” — or other things like that. But I mean, in a majority, you — in the early days, outside the rooms was a table. You put on your gloves, you put on your mask and all. That’s just what you had to do. The hospital required you had to do it. Once you got in the room and shut the door, most people took them down anyway, but hospital protocol said you had to do that, so you did. And you hand-sanitized yourself before and after, because you could give them something.

TAPPE: Yeah, for their safety as well.

KEEVER: For their safety as well as your safety.

TAPPE: That’s right. That’s right. Okay.

You’re 63 years old.

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: Are you considered one of the longer survivors in the city of Houston?

KEEVER: Yes. Well, I don’t know about the whole city, but there’s — I went through the entire black book of friends. I went through more than a few people that I cared about a lot and took care of and lived with and all, that are gone. And I laugh when I go, “Well, if I’d have been just a little badder, I could have partied,
and wouldn’t be here.” But I am, and I’m also very — I always laugh. It upsets some people when I go, “I’m a gay Christian.”

And they go, “What?”

And I go, “Yeah.” I said, “Honey, for whatever reason, whatever your idea and everything is, it’s okay with me, but you have to realize that I’m going to tell you that I’m a gay Christian. It’s that simple.”

And some people don’t like that. Some people do. You know, some people say, “Oh, the church is horrible to us, and fire and brimstone.”

I said, “Well, yes, there are people like that.”

But there are also people that like you and will respect you and want you. You know, we have Bering over here that’s wonderful. MCC. There’s two or three. There’s Bethel. I can think of half a dozen churches that are not Ed Young at Second Baptist or other, you know —

TAPPE: And then too, in Interfaith Ministries, that was and may still be involved with —

KEEVER: I think they are, but I don’t think they’re as involved as they were.

TAPPE: Okay. But a number of churches or faith-based organizations stepped up early on.

KEEVER: Right, right, right. I was helping out, as a matter of fact — it’s funny now. Red Cross stepped up, but it was because they were worried about the blood supply, so they stepped up to be safety for them, not really for us at first. It’s like, they allowed us to use a meeting room at their facility for some meetings that we did early that it was called the Houston/Harris County Panel on AIDS. And they had people that were appointed by Kathy Whitmire on this side, and the County
on this side, and then a couple of just regular, just — and I was lucky enough to be on that, thanks to Ms. Whitmire, who I knew and had been over to her home. And so we would sit there and talk about what’s happening, what’s going on, what’s not going on.

And there was an — well, I say older; he was probably 50 at the time — who was a drug abuser, but he was clean. And he’d come in and he would go, “What are you going to do about drug abusers? They’re out there. They’re getting AIDS. Why aren’t we doing anything about the drug abusers?” And he talked like that, and I’ll never forget that.

And that’s also another avenue where it had not been brought up, talked about, until people went, “Oh.”

TAPPE: That’s right. Well, I think most of the focus was on the gay men.

KEEVER: Right. But some gay men were also doing intravenous drug use they shouldn’t have been doing.

TAPPE: Sure, right.

KEEVER: Yes, I’m preaching. But I mean, pompous, I can be semi. Luckily, I never did that. I was afraid of needles from childhood, so I would have made a horrible drug abuser. I also had very tiny veins, which collapsed on me a couple of times in the hospital, so it wouldn’t have worked.

TAPPE: No. Just as well.

KEEVER: But at the same time, that was a new portion that people weren’t talking about.

TAPPE: That’s right. Well, when we meet again, I’d like to touch on this coalition and some of the background on that and where it went, because I know there was
some hoopla around all that. And since you were involved with that, I’d love to
hear your take on that, and then we’ll just move on from there. Okay?

KEEVER: Oh, yeah. It got really messy. I was part of the protesting. We protested
Helen something. She was the director over at Harris County, and she didn’t want
those AIDS people and, I mean, a black woman, and she was very caustic. I
mean, there were two or three places where they were just “If those gays wouldn’t
be so promiscuous, we wouldn’t have this problem.”

“No.”

Yeah, that happened.

[END OF AUDIO PART 4]

[INTERVIEW RECESSED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 28, 2015]

TAPPE: This is Renée Tappe. It is September 28th, 2015, meeting again at the home of
Brian Keever.

KEEVER: Hello.

TAPPE: Hi, Brian. I want to finish up our interview today about your recollections of
HIV/AIDS in the Houston and Harris County community.

When we left off the other day, we had just started talking a little bit about
one of those initials panels that were put together. If you could tell me a little bit
about that: who was involved and the purpose of it.

KEEVER: It was the Houston/Harris County Panel on AIDS. It was a collaboration of
people that were HIV positive and/or affected by HIV. Half the people were from
the City. Half the people were from the County. So Kathy Whitmire appointed a
couple of people. Jon Lindsay appointed a couple of people. And then there
was — because it was held over at the Red Cross headquarters over on the Southwest Freeway right there at Greenbriar.

And it was just kind of like just an ad hoc meeting of like minds to figure out what we’re going to do, how we’re going to do it, and what’s going on. I don’t want to say it wasn’t super good, but it got at least some people out meeting so you had a contact point. You knew somebody. You said, “Oh, so that’s what you look like. I’ve talked to you on the phone.” Things of that nature. And we tried to do outlines of what to do throughout mixing between the City and the County, because at the time it still was so — no one knew yet.

It was one of those things, “Well, I think the City should be doing it.”

“No, I think the County should be doing it.”

TAPPE: Is this in terms of funding? Services?

KEEVER: Right, funding and services. I think all the — I’m paraphrasing. I think all the patients should go to the county facilities. I think they should not go to private this and private that.

And then, the County is going, Well, we don’t expect, you know — no, huh-uh. You know, it should be a little bit of everything.

So it was that type of, you know — and I’m glad for the simple fact that it was just something. And our Mayor Whitmire at the time was — she was on the ball. She was trying to get it moving, trying to figure out who, what, where, when, why, you know, where some other people, yeah, not so much.

TAPPE: Some other people in the County or the City?

KEEVER: Right, right.

TAPPE: Or both?
KEEVER: Well, I think both, but mainly the County. They kind of — in the City, it was more of a, “Well, we’re going to let Kathy do that.”

TAPPE: Right. Well, and the mayor of Houston is not a medical provider.

KEEVER: Yeah. But it was more of a — I don’t know. It was just there. And we —

TAPPE: What happened with it?

KEEVER: Huh?

TAPPE: What happened with it?

KEEVER: That’s where my memory gets a little foggy, but I don’t think — I mean, some good came of it, but I don’t think it was what everyone thought it was going to be. It became kind of like a catalyst of people talking to people and getting things, and then going back to your respective communities or respective organizations to say, “Well” — you know, we had a gentleman there whose name
I can’t remember. He had a very big drawl and would ask what we were going to
do for the drug abusers, which was totally new. No one had even thought about
it.

TAPPE: That was so early on.

KEEVER: Right. So early on that it was before even that.

TAPPE: Do you remember anything about why that group or coalition stopped
functioning together or —

KEEVER: To tell you the truth, no, because I kind of dropped out of it, thinking that it
really wasn’t something I was getting anything out of. And I think at the time I
was still trying to — I was also doing my own medical stuff, and so it just didn’t
fit in with a lot of the stuff I was doing.

TAPPE: With some of your goals — okay.

KEEVER: Yeah, and I don’t know. I would love to talk to someone else that was
actually there, that could kind of refresh, and I’d go, “Oh, yeah,” but I don’t
remember.

TAPPE: Well, and outside of that particular panel of government and community people,
as time went on do you recall anything about, for instance, say, Harris County
Hospital District, that would —

KEEVER: Well, there was Sue Cooper, who was the director in charge, and she was less
than pleasant on her not wanting to deal with us. She would sit at one end of the
table, and people would sit at the other end of the table, myself once in a while,
some other people that she just — “I don’t understand why you-all are even here.”
She was very —

TAPPE: “You-all” meaning HIV people?
KEEVER: Right, HIV people or gay people, or I don’t — just “you people.” That’s happened a couple of times throughout the years. “You people.” And you’re not exactly sure which “you people” you were. And other little groups that were trying to help out and get things going, and it just seemed to — no one else is doing it, so gay men and some lesbians were, like, “We’ve got to do something.”

TAPPE: Because apparently at that time the response was not ideal from the government.

KEEVER: Oh, well, they wouldn’t even mention the name.

TAPPE: Yes.

KEEVER: It took Ronald Reagan how long to even mention the word “AIDS”?

TAPPE: Yes. And because of those issues, I assume that there was little if any funding coming through?

KEEVER: Right. The majority of the funding that was happening was us. Good people, some of wealth, doctors or nurses that would help out, and pro bono. You know, because it was the gay cancer or the gay men’s disease and “If they just quit doing all that stuff, we wouldn’t have this.” Well, at the time, people were scared. Lots of people in my own community didn’t know and didn’t have a clue what to do, how to do it, and where to do it, so at places like the Montrose Clinic, AIDS Foundation Houston, there was little offshoots that everybody kind of had their own little area.

There was a gentleman, I want to say Joe Porro, he did Aid for AIDS. There was the lady, I can’t remember her name, but she was just taking people in and taking care of them in her home. I don’t know at the beginning, because I wasn’t around it, where the Bering Church was, I don’t remember that. But MCC
Church was. They were having an AIDS support group, AIDS food pantry, and things of that nature. So I mean, there were small things happening in different parts of the city, but there wasn’t, like, a mass umbrella at the beginning.

TAPPE: Right, in terms of control.

KEEVER: And we were the first city in the nation at the time, in 1986 or 1987, I want to say 1987, where the people over at M.D. Anderson, it was getting bigger and more than they were willing to deal with, and so the powers that be in all the medical field over there came up with a plan, and they bought a hospital on the north side at I-45 and Little York and redid it and called it the Institute for Immunological Disorders and closed down Station 10 at M.D. Anderson and a couple others and pretty much shipped everybody up there. And it was the world’s first AIDS hospital. It wasn’t really called that because of the stigma, but it was the Institute for Immunological Disorders, and that’s basically what it was.

TAPPE: Code word for AIDS.

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: Who staffed it? Or did M.D. Anderson provide the staffing? Or the County?

KEEVER: Some of it. That was, at the time, Dr. Gary Brewton, Dr. Peter Mansell, Dr. Adan Rios, and a couple of others. And then nurses who came from the hospital district and stuff, and from the various places, said they wanted to be there and that’s what they wanted to do. They were going to try to do trials, drug trials, and just all kinds of different things, where that way it would be a one-target place where you go.

One of the organizations put together a van that picked patients up in Montrose over at Grace Lutheran, because it was centrally located, and would
take them up to the hospital and drop them off and then come back and pick them
up later in the afternoon, for people that didn’t have cars or lovers or things,
because you were up there the majority of the day. You saw your doctors. Your
lab work was there. Everything was there. But unfortunately, it didn’t last
because there wasn’t a lot of money. But there was a lot of good that came out of
that.

I was a patient there, and Dr. Gary Brewton was my doctor there along
with Rios and — let’s see, Crofoot? No, let’s see. Rios, Mansell, Brewton, and
somebody else. There were four major ones that had come over from M.D.
Anderson. And Dr. Rios was a character, because he used to be the personal
doctor for the guy in Colombia that was the dictator, Manuel Noriega. He was
Noriega’s doctor. And he would tell stories about that to the patients up there at
the institute. So I mean, it was really good.

We had a lady. Her name was Shirley, a rather large African-American
lady, and she was just tough as nails, but she was wonderful. She took care of
people. If you didn’t show up when you were supposed to show up, when you
came back you got a lashing from her. So I mean, that was the beginning in the

And of course, going and doing the March on Washington in Washington,
D.C., doing The NAMES Project quilt. Houston was very, very into that and very
much — Doug, everybody called him Dog Lips, but Doug and his lover and all,
we all did panels, painted panels on the back outside patio at Mary’s to send off to
San Francisco for your lovers that had passed away, because The NAMES Project
was quilt panels, and the quilt was the same size as a casket, and so you would
make a quilt honoring someone who passed away. And so they did a display
down at Eleanor Tinsley Park on the side of the hill, but the beginning of it was at
Mary’s in the outback, where we put together — I wasn’t the one in charge at all.
Doug and his lover were, and a couple of others, and they set up sawhorses and
paint and everything and made panels, and it started raining, so they had to close
them up, put them in Mary’s, and then Doug and his other half took them home
and strung them up to dry and then packed them. And they personally paid to
ship them UPS to San Francisco, over a hundred panels.

And that was one of the first big shipments of quilt panels that came in to
San Francisco to The NAMES Project, when they were going, “Is this going to
work? Are people going to send us stuff?” And Houston, Texas was one of the
first cities that sent over a hundred panels directly to them.

So there’s all these different little avenues of history for HIV and AIDS
here in Houston that I think outdid Chicago, L.A., New York. I mean, they were
the big, big places, but we were the ones doing stuff.

TAPPE: And do you have any idea why? It was just the community and how people
pulled together?

KEEVER: Yeah, right. You know, I mean, one good thing I love about Houston, in that
time frame in that era, it didn’t matter who you were. People got along.
Leathermen and drag queens and lesbians and cowboys and people wearing
three-piece suits that worked for Texas Commerce Tower. I mean, you kind of
did what you could do to help each other out because we were it. In the 1980s,
your friends were getting sick and you didn’t want to, and you wanted to help out,
and so everybody kind of just tried to do what they could do and raise money.
TAPPE: A true sense of community.

KEEVER: Yeah.

TAPPE: On some of the organizations that you’ve been involved with, a lot of them were — if I remember correctly, you had some of your political aspects as you named, like The NAMES Project and the Gay Political Caucus.

The support services. Tell me a little bit about some of the organizations you worked with that provided direct support to patients or clients.

KEEVER: Well, it’s interesting how they started as social organizations, ended up becoming social /service organizations because there was no one else to do it. You couldn’t just go to Methodist and walk in the door and get seen. So we had organizations, the Colt 45s AIDS Troublefund, which paid for so many things for people. I mean, helped pay for medication, helped people get to the doctor, paid for their — I mean, just everything. You name it. Send food to them. It was the —

TAPPE: That was an all-volunteer organization, correct?

KEEVER: Yes, yeah. Oh, yeah. It was a group out of the BRB originally called the Colt 45s, and it was a Levi-leather cowboy group.

TAPPE: Just a social group.

KEEVER: Right, just a social group, that ended up going, “OMG, we’ve got to do something,” and so people started — Miss Camp America started as a social organization just to parody Miss America and ended up doing the same thing.

The Imperial Court System started out as drag queens just going out doing shows, and the money was theirs. That quickly changed over to: the tips went to help support people with AIDS. So I mean, it was all these different
The Pride Committee, it was celebrating who we were from Stonewall, and then 1988, I think, 1987 or 1988, the grand marshals for the Pride Parade here in Houston were people living with HIV, because of what was going on, because every year they would have a male grand marshal, a female grand marshal, and all that, but that year it was strictly the grand marshals were people with HIV. I mean, it’s just all the different avenues. And PWAs. Just all kinds.

The Bunnies on the Bayou, which used to be called Bunny Party [indicating], which I won’t say on the —

TAPPE: I wonder how that’s going to translate.

KEEVER: It was Bunny Funny Party. Take it from that. Which was just a party to just have fun, and ended up changing over to raising money and bringing donations of canned foods and nonperishables for Stone Soup, which was the pantry that got started through AFH and through getting people food that didn’t have food, couldn’t afford it. So Stone Soup Kitchen, who Doug and Bruce Cook and a couple others said, “We’ve got to do something,” and so it got to be where if you went to an event, you took food. It was always canned or — no fresh food, but nonperishable items. Toiletries, toilet paper, all kinds. That’s what you took to the bar or to the business or to the party. Instead of donating just pure cash, you brought supplies.

TAPPE: For Stone Soup. I remember that.

KEEVER: You know, for Stone Soup and all. So I mean, things of that nature.

The Montrose Activity Center. There was a group that I was real involved with, and you’ll laugh when I say this, but it started out as a social organization
also. The National Leather Association Houston, and yes, it was leathermen. At the time in the beginning it was strictly leathermen that used to meet and enjoy the company, the camaraderie and all that, and I was lucky enough to be on the ground level and one of the founding members. And the person that was in charge, Dean Waldwick, was the manager of a McDonald’s over on Kirby. I mean, just varied, varied people. And National Leather Association Houston was the first organization that we figured out we wanted to help people out, but we wanted to do something targeted, so we put together at Christmas a — we wouldn’t call it Toys for Tots because that was copyrighted with the Marines and all that stuff. So we did, in the gays bars, we put boxes and asked people to donate teddy bears and all this kind of stuff for children with AIDS, and we adopted — well, the first couple of years, we didn’t have an organization to give it to. We just put them together, and this person knew that person who knew this person.

And we even, the second year we did it, we kind of adopted a family, an African-American lady and her kids. We came over, we put up a tree, we brought presents and toys and all that stuff for them, and she was just ecstatic.

But it was from leather, and people were going, “What? Oh, my god.”

But that’s what you did. It was strictly for children with AIDS. It had nothing to do with leather, any connotation like that, but it was something to give back. That was our little thing.

So we took boxes and asked people if we could put boxes in their business, in their bar, in their restaurant, to ask for a gently used or new or wrapped toy for a person, for a child. And it was amazing what we got, I mean.
And we would take home — because at the time, it was in a bar. We would take home, empty them out on the bed, and Febreze [indicating], and all kinds of — and then put them in sections for kids under this, and kids this age, and kids — we had everything from babies all the way up. We had a house over here that the lady was taking care of children with HIV trying to do it, so we went over and did that.

And eventually all that kind of mushroomed and AFH was doing their toys, and so we started giving them to them, that they would take over to Thomas Street Clinic and give them to the patients over at Thomas Street. So that way, it got, you know — and it became the Red Ribbon Toy Drive.

TAPPE: I remember the bears with the little red ribbons. They had them on their neck or a little red ribbon.

KEEVER: So NLA presents Red Ribbon Toy Drive. There is not a lot of that that happens anymore, because some of the community doesn’t do that and don’t even go to clubs and restaurants and stuff that are targeted. But that was something you did.

TAPPE: And that was a big shift from concentrating on the gay men’s community and moving outside of that and looking at other communities that might be infected, such as children.
KEEVER: With HIV and AIDS, yeah.

TAPPE: Right, right. But initially, I think the focus, of course, was the gay men’s community.

KEEVER: Right. And then as years progressed, yeah, obviously, it was not just a gay man situation, so — well, Miss Camp America, of course. I was very involved, and I’m not as involved now, but still a very, very proud member of the Imperial Court System, which is a very large court system. And the Court, I mean, as in royalty, as in kings and queens and dukes and earls and princesses, throughout the United States and Canada and Mexico, that used to do it just for fun, just to visit other places, raises money. And it’s one dollar at a time. You’re either in drag or doing male impersonation, and you go and you perform, and every dollar goes back into the community to help, and not just HIV anymore. It’s women’s and prostate cancer and breast cancer; as well you know, AssistHers. So just different and various things throughout the Imperial Court System, and you travel. And so that got started the same way, was social and then became HIV, and then became all the other avenues that came into it.

TAPPE: Do you ever see any of these organizations shifting just back to strictly social, or do you think now —

KEEVER: I haven’t yet.

TAPPE: And it may not concentrate on HIV/AIDS, but as you said, spreads out to other concerns and health issues. So you feel that they’ll just continue to be fundraising activities?

KEEVER: Right. I mean, and unfortunately some of the organizations and all don’t exist anymore because there’s not people to help staff them. The Colt 45s don’t
exist anymore. Miss Camp America is not around anymore. The Grey Party is not around anymore. The Garden Party is not around anymore. So you have to depend on other avenues of help everywhere.

TAPPE: And some have, I think, consolidated under a larger umbrella.

KEEVER: Well, prime example with Legacy. Legacy started as Montrose Clinic and bought this one and merged with that one, and now Legacy Community Health does everything from the cradle to the grave, and it’s all — some of it’s insurance, but the majority of it is: If you walk in and you don’t have a five-dollar bill to your name and you’re sick, you’re going to get seen. They’re going to ask you, what do you have? But if you don’t have anything, they legally cannot turn you away, which is good, because there are more than a few that will. And so that’s pushing all different kinds of things in the city of Houston, plus outside the city. I see that happening more and more.

TAPPE: Now, you told me at one point you were involved with the Montrose Clinic. Tell me about the poster.

KEEVER: Oh, well, as a person living with HIV for many a year, I used to — I became a patient with Montrose Clinic, with Legacy, to this very day, and I was there as a client first and then started to people, and people asking me this and that, and asking me if I would help volunteer. “Well, of course.” I didn’t have a husband. I didn’t have a beautiful home and all this other stuff, so why not. Pardon the expression, it kept me off the streets. So I did, and so I volunteered. I would go with people.

And then Sona, who worked for the Montrose Clinic, and a couple of others, had a bright idea to take my picture and slap it on a board with my story
from 1986 and 1987 and kind of make me a poster boy for when I wasn’t feeling well or when it wasn’t appropriate for me to be there, they could take this chalkboard, the billboard or whatever you want to call it, with them to the River Oaks or to The Villages, or to wherever that they were going to be asking for money, asking for people to support Legacy or Montrose Clinic.

And so there was this board that had my picture, and then on it, it says I was diagnosed in 1985. They told me I would be dead by 1988. At the time, I weighed 129 pounds. I had a 27-inch waist. I had thought my life is going to be this, but it ended up being this, so thanks to the wonderful people that helped me out at the Montrose Clinic and now Legacy, I’m still here. I’m still around.

Could you please help us out?

TAPPE: That’s great.

KEEVER: In a nutshell.

TAPPE: And so you were literally the poster boy?

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: That puts a smile on your face, yeah.

KEEVER: Well, that was the Montrose Clinic, and that was back when we didn’t get all the federal or even a bunch of corporations — it was still basically emptying money out of the soda machine to make sure you had money to pay bills.

TAPPE: That’s right. And then your fundraisers and a dollar tip at a time.

KEEVER: Uh-huh.

TAPPE: Out of all of your involvements — you’ve received a lot of recognition and a number of awards — are you able to identify which award might be the most precious to you?
KEEVER: Well, I’ve been very lucky through the years, through the late, late 1980s, most of the 1990s, to have been at the right place, at the right time, at the right way to help out through Pride, through AIDS activism, through political activism. My favorite through all of that is my Pride work, which nowadays is not as prevalent, but at that point in time we were still trying to make people realize who we were, where we’re from, what’s going on, because of Stonewall.

And so being involved and getting our history out — I’ve always been a big proponent of gay history, lesbian history, trans history, whatever, but to let people know the reason they can go in on a Friday afternoon at J.R.’s with their lover and have a great time and don’t worry about anything didn’t come just by accident.

TAPPE: You’re right about that.

KEEVER: You know, so that, and I feel very, very pleased and very happy that they can do that. That’s wonderful. It’s unbelievably wonderful. But you need to remember where you came from. And doing the Pride parades and the Pride weeks and doing the remembrance projects and things like that really was something that I really enjoyed doing. Really to me I felt like it really made a difference having your history, knowing that this is what happened and knowing the people. I was lucky enough to have known some of those people. I knew Frank Kameny. I knew Barbara Geddings. I knew other people, where we traveled and met with them, because that’s what you did. So I was very happy with that.

I will say also doing stuff, working for the TWT, *This Week in Texas Magazine*, for many years, helping out just in different various portions of the
community that I love and I’ve always been in. I used to laugh and tell people, either they’d ask me when they meet me what I do for a living. And I’d go, “I’m a professional homosexual.”

And they would laugh and go, “Pardon me?”

And I’d go, “Well, I work for a gay company. I raised money in the gay community.” You know, everything I did was inside of the gay community, and so, yeah, probably it was a little bubble, because I didn’t have to deal with things if I didn’t want to, and I knew where I should and shouldn’t go. I knew I shouldn’t go to try to go square dancing at Gilley’s on a Saturday night with a boyfriend.

TAPPE: Probably a wise decision.

KEEVER: It’s just, that’s just the way it was. So I mean, and I was good. I did things, well, for people that couldn’t, that had the responsibilities, the really nice jobs, all the stuff, that they couldn’t step forward and do this. I was very happy and very lucky that I was able to do that. And I think, granted, I didn’t set the world on fire, but I’m very, very happy with the way things basically have gone.

TAPPE: I think in Houston, you’ve set part of this city on fire with your history, including the Empress 10.

KEEVER: Oh, yes, I was Empress 10 for the city of Houston, and it’s an actually elected position. You can’t buy it, and you can’t, you know — you don’t have to be the pretty one. If you have a driver’s license and it’s got a Harris County zip on it, you can vote, no matter who you are. And so at the time, we were ten years old. They’re now on 33, today. My stage name and entertainment name is Damita Jo, who was a live, real person, lounge singer a few years, and so that was what I
went by when I was performing. So I became Empress 10, and my title was Her Royal Sovereign and Imperial Majesty — Her Royal Sovereign and Imperial Majesty, the Leather Lone Star Empress of Houston, Texas, Inc.

TAPPE: That’s a mouthful.

KEEVER: I know. So you would basically just go ERSICSS or RSICSS, and people would say Reese’s Pieces? And I would go, that was the initials. But we would say I’m Empress of Houston. I help raise money. I travel. I talk good about our city. And you travel around and help raise money in other cities and other states, and they come and do the same thing for you.

TAPPE: Uh-huh. And I know you’ve enjoyed that.

KEEVER: And I’ve enjoyed that. And at the time, it was — this was in 1994, that I did that. I can’t imagine, and I’m very proud of the people that are able, can do that today. I laugh. I said, “It took me two and a half years to pay Damita off when I was reigning,” because we traveled a lot. And I enjoyed it. I made a lot of friends.

TAPPE: Big commitment.

KEEVER: Kind of crazy, but it was wonderful. And each year, they raise money, and the Emperor and Empress decide their pet projects as far as they want money to go to the Colt 45s or to the Montrose Sports Association and different ones.

And one of mine, when I was Empress, that I loved and they’re still around, is the Pet Patrol. And so we were lucky enough to raise thousands of dollars for a good friend of mine, Tori Williams, who was one of the founders of the Pet Patrol, where we would — because your pets are your children. If you’re sick and you don’t feel good, you have your dog, your cat, your other, ferret,
whatever, to make you feel good, to keep you going, just things like that.

So the Imperial Court even to this day is still doing really good things, good business, and people enjoy it.

TAPPE: And I can’t let this go without mentioning that you were grand marshal.

KEEVER: Yes.

TAPPE: As much as the Pride meant to you, you were grand marshal in 1992, I believe.

KEEVER: Yes, I was. And that’s a major honor for whoever, because you would have a male grand marshal, a female grand marshal who were a gay or lesbian, and then you would have a grand marshal ally, which was usually a straight person that was so very involved in helping GLBT. And then you’d have an organizational grand marshal. So that’s a very, very good thing.

And there are people throughout the years that have done it, and it’s very good. Marion Coleman, a good friend. Grand marshals, just different people. Annise Parker was grand marshal one year. Debra Danburg. I mean, just throughout the years.

TAPPE: So you were keeping good company?

KEEVER: Yes. And knowing good people.

TAPPE: That’s exactly right. I want to touch, just a little bit, in wrapping this up, in terms of we’ve gotten a lot of your wonderful history with your personal history, your fundraising history, your community history. And I’m very curious. You work at Legacy now. I know you deal with all aspects of our community and the community at large, and you’re still involved with the gay community. And I’m just curious as to how you view our younger generation, how they view us, how they view their community, some related to social aspects, but health in general,
HIV, tell me a little bit about, because they’re obviously raised in a whole different world.

KEEVER: Oh, definitely. It’s very fun, challenging to be a young person today, especially in the health field. I from time to time will get upset with young people; that their little slogan is, “Oh, well, if I do something I shouldn’t do and get that, I’ll just take pill.”

Well, yeah, that’s lovely and wonderful, but it doesn’t stop it, just taking a pill. And so, from that standpoint, I think some of the young people who luckily never had to experience the issues and the problems and the dying that my generation and the generation right after me did. And it’s across the board. It’s not any socio-economic anything. It’s pretty much across the board that young people, twenty-somethings, are entitled and they feel that it’s just like having high blood pressure or something like that. And we try to teach and let people realize that no, that’s not it.

But a majority of them, I’m hoping, because I see people when they come to the clinic, and since I don’t hang with twenty-somethings on a regular basis, I am hoping that they’re — because the one thing that’s happened strictly from my gay men’s perspective is the Internet and the hooking up of both gay, straight, bi, whatever, where you’re not having a conversation like we’re having now. You’re tweeting, texting, grinding, all kinds of different things where you don’t have to worry about going to a club or a restaurant and carrying on a conversation. You just do your fingers and go visit and come back. So they’ve lost the art of conversation or sitting at a table. Unfortunately that’s a pet peeve of mine, is people sitting at a table in a restaurant and both of them are on their iPhones.
texting, and I’d say a good quarter of the time the person they’re texting is sitting across the table from them.

TAPPE: Interesting.

KEEVER: Or they’re walking, they’re down, they’re looking at their Facebook or whatever, and they’re just not carrying on a conversation with people. And so, yeah, that’s my biggest problem that I see, is — and people can go online now and get medical, quote-unquote, advice, which I don’t think is a good thing, but it’s getting a little better. I just wish that there was some accommodations for all to be able to set it down for a while.

TAPPE: Right. Yeah, I understand. In terms of the — and you said you not hanging out with twenty-year-olds, and I understand that, so you may or may not have some insight into this, but in terms of the sexual behaviors of the younger generation, I know when we were living through this period that we’ve spent a lot of time talking about, the education was everywhere.

KEEVER: Right, it was everywhere.

[END OF AUDIO PART 5]

TAPPE: I mean, it was the academic, it was everywhere, it was every magazine you picked up, it was on TV, it was everywhere about the — and of course there was controversy about terminology that we used, but for lack of a better term, safer sex and condoms, et cetera.

KEEVER: Right.

TAPPE: I don’t see that very much anymore. Do you?
KEEVER: No, I don’t. And even with us at work, since I work in the healthcare field, the education department still has to remind people regularly about using condoms, about just the things that you would think they would automatically know about, because they don’t see it, it’s not in their face. It’s not a billboard or a poster, saying play safe, or put a condom on it, or use a dam. So just all kinds of stuff that it’s become kind of an undercurrent now, and it’s become more of like high blood pressure or diabetes or something where it’s there, but you don’t really see it, and that’s —

TAPPE: Whose fault is that, do you think? Or is it a bad thing?

KEEVER: Well, I don’t think it’s a bad thing in the fact, but if you never see it — out of sight, out of mind — then you may forget, and god knows, all of us at some point in our life has. But it’s just not — and unfortunately, I think some people in certain parts of our big, beautiful world don’t want us to talk about it, don’t want us to see any of that, because abstinence is the best thing in the world. You don’t mention anything about that. If you don’t mention it, it doesn’t exist. Well, we all see how that works.

But I think the future of HIV will be handled and be able to — I don’t know if it will be in my lifetime, but it will be just no different than having some other type of issue. It won’t be a death sentence. It won’t be ostracizing a bunch of people. I personally think that the day will come when they will go, “Oh, guess what? Guess what we found?” and things will get twenty thousand times better. I don’t see that in mine, but I do have — I’m thinking and knowing how much the drug companies make and how much we spend and all that stuff; that eventually down the road it will be a nonissue, I’m hoping.
TAPPE: More of the, as they’ve said, the chronic issue, like treating diabetes or something like that.

KEEVER: Right. Or having heart murmurs or things of that nature; that it won’t be an issue where we have to worry about it.

TAPPE: Do you see or do you know — you may not know — still a fair amount of funding going into research for HIV?

KEEVER: Not as much. I don’t see — there is some, but it’s not a number one priority anymore. You don’t see Rock Hudson on TV or Magic Johnson or this person, so it’s not in their face, so they don’t think about. It’s pushed back the same thing as heart disease or someone with a cataract. It’s just not, and it needs to be. It desperately needs to be, because it’s still not cured.

It’s still not — and in other parts of the world, it’s just as bad. In Africa and in developing countries, HIV is still a very, very big problem. Luckily, here, Houston, Texas, it’s not as bad, but what we are seeing are more smaller things popping up. People are getting more STDs again and more other things, that you would have thought we had kind of gone past most of that.

TAPPE: Right. But if they’re getting STDs, then chances are they’re not using protection of some sort, which of course can lead to HIV.

KEEVER: And unfortunately, more — well, luckily, people are not smoking as much. There’s not as — there are other avenues, other venues to do other than going to the gay bar in the gay community, in the lesbian community. And lesbians have been more non-bar-oriented than men were anyway, from what I’ve seen for years; that gay men were — you went to a gay bar, you had beverages, you talked to people, you went home. And now there are so many other avenues and
differences, but at the time there’s still a problem with recreational activities.

TAPPE: He says with quite a smile on his face.

KEEVER: So that’s still an issue. But as long as we can, as long as there’s something out there, we’ll try to keep it going.

TAPPE: Well, I cannot thank you enough for your time and —

KEEVER: Well, I’m happy. I’ve met a few people that kept on pushing me to do something like this because of all the stuff that’s happened, and so I’m very pleased and happy that I’m able to do this, and I hope that it helps some people and it helps our history; again, our GLBT history and non-GLBT for helping out and knowing what’s going on. I hope it keeps people knowledgeable and knowing what’s going on.

TAPPE: I’m sure it will, and for me it’s been an interesting experience listening to you from Kannapolis, North Carolina through a tremendous life, particularly in the city of Houston. I guess that’s basically where you’ve spent your adult life. And the impacts that you’ve had on the gay community, specifically, and I think the city of Houston, in general.

KEEVER: I will say that I love living in the city of Houston. For the rest of my days, as far as I know, I’ll be right here in the city of Houston. I actually nowadays do live in Montrose, so it only took 25 years to get me into the ’hood, but I’m very happy, very content as far as living in this city. It’s wonderful.

TAPPE: Great. Well, you’ve found your home.

KEEVER: Yes, I did.

TAPPE: We’re not going anywhere.

Thank you, Brian. It’s been an absolute pleasure.
KEEVER: Thank you. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

TAPPE: You’re welcome. Thank you.

[END OF AUDIO PART 6]

[INTERVIEW CONCLUDED]

****