

THE
OH
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of HIV / AIDS
in Houston and
Harris County

Oral History

An Interview with
Frank M. Staggs, Jr.

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Interviewer: Renee Tappe

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(Signature)

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AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK M. STAGGS, JR.

RENÉE TAPPE: This is Renée Tappe interviewing Frank Staggs for The oH Project, Oral Histories of HIV/AIDS in Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas. The interview is taking place on January 19th, 2016 in Houston, Texas. The purpose of this interview is to document Mr. Staggs' recollections concerning the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston.

Hi, Frank. Thank you for joining us today.

FRANK STAGGS: Glad to be here.

RENÉE TAPPE: And thank you for being willing to share your knowledge about HIV/AIDS in the city of Houston.

Let's start off, to set a background, a little bit about your personal history: where you're from, where you were born, how old you are, your family history.

FRANK STAGGS: Briefly, my full name is Frank Maurice Staggs, Jr. I was born in Laredo, Texas on February 11, 1953. As you could tell with the Junior, my father's name is also Frank M. Staggs, Sr. And my mother was Maria Julieta Farias Staggs, and I have one brother, Raul Clayton Staggs, and he is still alive and lives in Van Nuys, California. My mother is recently deceased, and my father still lives in Laredo, Texas. At the age of 90, he is still an active rancher.

I grew up and spent most of my life in Laredo, Texas, except for a few months of my early life we lived outside of Laredo, Texas, closer to the ranch, where my parents were teachers in Mirando City. For the most part, I say I just grew up in Laredo, Texas.

TAPPE: Where did you go to high school?

STAGGS: I went to St. Joseph Academy in Laredo. It was a private Catholic boys' preparatory school. I had been a student there off and on since third grade.

TAPPE: That was not residential?

STAGGS: No, no. When I graduated from St. Joseph, I immediately was enrolled by my family in the Instituto de Filología Hispánica in Saltillo, Mexico for the first summer of college, and then I transferred to the United States. I originally was going to go to St. Mary's University, but on the day I was going to matriculate I decided that I would not want to continue with a Catholic education, so my parents enrolled me in Texas A&M, and my father made sure that I was in the Corps of Cadets, so I was enrolled in Fish Camp. My career as an Aggie cadet lasted for the duration of their Fish Camp, or the equivalent of boot camp, and I opted out of the Corps of Cadets.

TAPPE: Why did you choose not to continue your Catholic schooling?

STAGGS: There were a host of reasons. One, I didn't like St. Mary's, but I had spent most of my life in a Catholic education. Anybody that has spent their life in Catholic school kind of knows what I'm talking about; that you just have an aversion to the constraints of a Catholic school.

TAPPE: Exactly. Now, your Fish life, how long does that last at A&M?

STAGGS: Fish life, that means freshman, but when I said I was in Fish Camp, that's sort of their boot camp, and that only lasts, I think, two and a half weeks. I got my hair cut, I was going to be in the band, and I decided I just could not handle the Corps of Cadets, so I unilaterally opted out of the Corps.

TAPPE: How were your parents with that decision?

STAGGS: Actually, they were okay with it. It wasn't as big a deal as I thought it would be.

TAPPE: Good. When you were in high school, what particular activities were you involved with? Were there any clubs? Social organizations? Political?

STAGGS: No, not really. Laredo was a small town at the time, and you had your public schools and you had your private schools. In the private school, like St. Joe, where your class size was only, like, 33 to 35, you basically did everything as a class, including Boy Scouts or Explorers, and everybody was expected to be in athletics in one way or the other, either as an athlete or as a water boy or something, manager, they called us managers, if you weren't in that particular sport.

TAPPE: And then when you went on to A&M, you ended up at A&M, and you became involved early on with a particular lawsuit. Would you tell us about that?

STAGGS: Well, actually, I'm not going to say early on, because I was at A&M from 1971 through 1978. I took both a bachelor's and a master's. My undergraduate career was uneventful because I was working. I started working at the school, in the department of sociology, from my sophomore year on, so I didn't really have time for a lot of activities, and I was carrying a fairly heavy load. It wasn't until I was working on my master's that I became more politically involved. I was a graduate student and graduate teaching assistant at Texas A&M. I became aware of a community of gay and lesbians through my work as a graduate teaching assistant because my major professor was the unofficial faculty advisor for what was then called the Gay Student Services Organization.

As part of my master's thesis, I interviewed a number of the gay/lesbian

people on campus and became more aware of myself and the existence of the gay life at Texas A&M, such as it was. It was very underground. There weren't a lot of people out.

It was in approximately 1976 that a group was formed, Gay Student Services Organization. Officially, I think the name was Gay Student Services. It started, really, as a casual thing until one day we were passing out leaflets and stapling them to bulletin boards on campus when two of the people involved — I think it was two — were met at knifepoint by a group of cadets and forced to rip the notices down, and they were hauled around the Academic Center and the Quadrangle, if I recall. It's been quite a while. But they were made to take down all the notices and —

TAPPE: They were made, by these students?

STAGGS: These young, what we call CTs. That was the name for cadets.

The reaction to that was that we decided to seek official recognition from the university. You have to remember, back in the early 1970s and before, Texas A&M had a history of not having too many private clubs, and it had no Greek life. There were no sororities and no fraternities. They considered the Corps of Cadets to be the one and only recognized fraternity. We weren't asking for any type of financial aid. All we wanted to do was get approval to post notices of our meetings and to be provided a safe space in the Memorial Student Center or anywhere else on campus that we could meet.

The request was made officially, and it lingered, I want to say, for six to eight months, well into the following year. I think that was 1977, at which point the university decided to decline our offer because homosexual conduct was

illegal, 21.06 [Texas Statutes – Section 21.06]. I think everybody remembers that. So that was about the same time, too, that the Anita Bryant fiasco was coming to fore, so there were a lot of things going on.

Our organization contacted Ray Hill here in Houston to see what kind of advice he could give us, and he put us in contact with an attorney, Patrick Wiseman, who suggested that we file the lawsuit. Initially there were, I think, four persons that were officially named, because they were the officers of the Gay Student Services.

And we came to Houston, met Ray Hill, and he helped us file the lawsuit, and of course — well, I don't want to say of course; at the time, we didn't know that Ray Hill was very active and very media-savvy. And he —

TAPPE: You learned quickly about that.

STAGGS: We learned quickly, because as soon as the lawsuit was filed in the Federal Court, there were a number of cameras outside. I came into town with the other people to watch it being filed, because we, of course, felt it to be a historic day. By the time we returned to College Station, we were notified by the sheriff that, quote, he couldn't guarantee our safety. And so we found a safe house and stayed for ten days, with people looking for us, especially members of the Corps of Cadets looking for us to do us harm. That eventually faded away.

But we were invited back to Houston to participate in the first Gay Pride event, which was a walking — it wasn't a parade; it was a walking demonstration through downtown to the courthouse. It was passing, I believe, the Hyatt Regency downtown, because Anita Bryant was speaking to the State Bar of Texas. And so this was in response to that. It was a very interesting event,

because we learned a lot about legal and passive demonstrations. We were told to line up two by two and just walk on the sidewalks, observe all the traffic signs, no loitering, no jaywalking, anything like that, anything that the police could ding us on.

I can't remember where we started, but I remember walking through downtown Houston. I didn't know downtown Houston very well. And then we walked to the park in front of City Hall, because that was an area that by City ordinance people couldn't be arrested for vagrancy.

TAPPE: Where the pool is?

STAGGS: Yes, and that was also close to the Federal Courthouse. And we dispersed.

So that was my first taste of political activism.

TAPPE: So when you do it, you do it big?

STAGGS: Do it big, yes.

TAPPE: Any reaction from family members?

STAGGS: Well, I was never out to my family.

TAPPE: Were they aware of this?

STAGGS: No, nobody was aware of it. I also had to keep a low profile in order to protect my major professor because he was the unofficial faculty adviser, and he didn't have tenure, so we had to walk a fine line. There couldn't be that tie between his office and what was happening, and also because College Station and Bryan and Texas A&M are very hostile. GLBT — I think as late as 2012 or 2011, A&M was rated as the least hospitable or most hostile public college for gay and lesbian, transsexual, bisexuals.

TAPPE: What a fact to be proud of, right?

STAGGS: My master's thesis evolved from drug abuse to the study of a gay subculture on college campuses, because I was in the middle of it. And I remember when I filed my proposal, I filed it on a Friday afternoon, and by Monday morning I was hauled in front of the dean of graduate studies. And all my professors, who was my major professor, the professor I worked for directly, and my English professor, we were hauled in front of the whole graduate committee, and I basically had to defend my thesis based on my proposal.

TAPPE: Before you ever wrote it.

STAGGS: Right. And it started out — I think they were upset with the title more than anything, or that's what grabbed their eyes. I called it *Cruising and Choosing: A Sociology of Subcultural Knowledge and Practice*.

TAPPE: Were you able to write it under that title?

STAGGS: The answer is yes and no. I had to do another title, more saline or whatever you want to call it.

TAPPE: Acceptable.

STAGGS: Yeah, acceptable. It was just *Subculture Knowledge and Practice*, I think.

But then at the very end, when I submitted it, I changed the page and put a colon and put the original title on it to follow.

TAPPE: That's great. I like that story. And obviously, it went well after that?

STAGGS: It went well. In fact, they told me that I should have done it as a doctoral dissertation because it was 200 and some-odd pages long, when a master's thesis only had to be, like, 50 pages, but I had spent three years on it, and it was an oeuvre that my orals — when I defended my dissertation, the entire sociology department was there. All the graduate students and all the teachers were just sort

of crammed —

TAPPE: They just were interested?

STAGGS: Yeah. Some of them were gay, and others liked it, and other people were shaking their heads.

TAPPE: Well, good for you. Interesting time.

Now, this legal issue wrapped up a number of years later, didn't it?

STAGGS: Yeah. It was not really settled until, I think, 1984 or 1985, and basically it ping-ponged back and forth between the District Court and the Fifth Circuit. The District Court would throw it out, and then the Fifth Circuit would reinstate it, and back and forth, back and forth. And it finally went up to the United States Supreme Court, where the Fifth Circuit decision — it was on certiorari; it was denied. So basically it was a good precedent.

So eventually, I think it was 1984 or 1985, that I was already a practicing attorney when it came out, and the name of the organization, I think it changed already, because they changed it from Gay Student Services Organization to Gay Student Services, and I think by the time the decision came out, it was called the GLBT Aggies or something like that. But the day that it came out, I remember seeing in the, I think it was the *Chronicle*, a picture of their celebration.

It was also around the same time as they were doing the MDA Kissathon in the Student Center, and the president, if I recall, the president of the Trinity University gay and lesbian organization came to congratulate Texas A&M. They had a picture of the two presidents kissing each other, which I think caused — and I wasn't there at the time; I just hear this by word of mouth — that that created a whole different sensational response by the school newspaper, *The Battalion*,

which had taken a picture of it and posted it, and I don't know if they tried to put it in the yearbook, whatever.

But again, we're talking a big difference from the early 1970s or mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, because so many other things were happening in the 1980s. Nevertheless, A&M being what they called the bastion of conservatism, that still made news, and I was very proud. Unfortunately, many of the people that were originally in the group were either deceased because of AIDS or we couldn't find them. I know that several persons changed their outlook on GLBT life and activism.

TAPPE: Is that right?

STAGGS: Yeah.

TAPPE: Interesting. So some went this way; some went that way?

STAGGS: Right. The one that did that, the one offhand I can recall, was one of the officers. She and her partner married at the Unitarian Church around that time, which was another milestone. That was the first gay wedding I had attended. That person went on to graduate work and eventually married a man. So I guess she was the B in the GLBT. But from my understanding, she wanted her name removed, which they couldn't do, because the opinion had already come out. One of the plaintiffs is still alive. He's an attorney here in Houston. The other person, I have tried to find, and I think he passed away. I just don't know. The very first person to die of HIV was also the very first person that was listed as a plaintiff in that lawsuit.

TAPPE: The first person to die of HIV in this group?

STAGGS: The first person that I ever knew that passed away of HIV was one of the

colleagues.

TAPPE: Well, congratulations on historic work.

STAGGS: Thank you.

TAPPE: I'd like to talk a little bit about your work in the gay community with different organizations, both faith-based and otherwise, and then perhaps move a little more specifically into HIV/AIDS, what you saw happening and your involvement. I am aware that, at least in my mind, one of your biggest pieces of work has been with Bering Church.

STAGGS: Yeah, Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. And that, I think, would be the stepping stone for everything else that I have done in Houston, because after I left A&M, I went into law school, and as a law student I just sort of cocooned myself and I was not really involved with politics while I was in law school. It was night school, so I was working. I had essentially three different jobs that I was doing part-time each, plus going to law school, so I didn't have time for much of anything else, and it wasn't until I left — well, first of all, I left Houston when I graduated and clerked at the Texas Supreme Court, and then I returned to Houston, and it wasn't until I started attending Bering Memorial that I became involved with different activities. I think most of the things that I've been involved with, other than the Executive and Professional Association of Houston and The Diana Foundation, have been in some way connected to Bering Memorial Church.

TAPPE: Do you remember what you were doing in terms of your initial involvement with the church?

STAGGS: Initially, I was just a member of the Men's Club, and we were doing a lot of

different things, making friends. It was a time when Bering was about half older people — I say older; they were probably my age now — and a number of Montrose residents, largely gay, lesbian, bisexual. Most of our original projects were just church things, Pancake Day, Men's Club, fundraising for the church.

But then that nasty little thing about AIDS started really getting big. It was already creeping along when I was still in law school, but I wasn't going out as much and I didn't have as many contacts then. When I was living in Austin, people talked about it, but really it wasn't a big thing because, you know, it was that gay cancer, gay pneumonia, very early on. I remember when I moved back to Houston, people started saying that it was related to popper use. I remember people were really scared about poppers, and there was really no connection with sexual activity or blood exchange for a while.

Nevertheless, the Houston community had already started coming together by fits and starts. They had started the McAdory House; I think it was the very first project that had come about. I got involved with that only through my participation as a member of the Executive and Professional Association of Houston, when we did some fundraisers to buy them computers. We really didn't know much about it. There was a lot of anonymity, so people really weren't out about it. But we knew that there was a problem, and I think they came out and they established McAdory House and then Stone Soup.

Bering, at that point I was just a peripheral member, and as I said, younger. And I remember when the very first person at Bering died of HIV. It was a shock to everyone. I didn't know the person very well, but I remember attending the funeral. I didn't know it at the time, but there was a group of people

that had been putting together what they called a Grand Plan for Bering to form a foundation, but they didn't know what direction it would take. The person that really wrote that was Esther Houser. After that first person passed away — I'm not going to mention his name — we had another member that contracted HIV. His name was Jay Nelson. He was out about it. And he pushed Bering to do something, anything. And he worked and partnered with the associate pastor, Reverend Annette Jones, and they came up with doing a spiritual support group that was centered on just having a meal together, because at that time HIV was so scary that people wouldn't even want to eat in the same room with someone that had HIV or was perceived to have AIDS.

I became involved with that because the covenant, or prayer group, that I was meeting with, we all knew Jay, and he was a member of that group. And he sort of pulled us along and used us as the founding members of the support group, and that really snowballed because Jay was a very well-known member of Bering and a church leader.

TAPPE: And from your support group came —

STAGGS: The HIV ministries. But we had the meals, and they were small. They started, I think, with 10 or 11 people, and maybe most of the people were what we call facilitators, but it grew, and as people heard about it, they started coming in at the same time. The real church leaders like Esther Houser and Ed Cordray, who was a local dentist, they were concerned about things, and they were working on using the outline of a community services organization that Esther had devised to start conceiving of a dental clinic. And Ed Cordray was one that worked real hard on that with Esther, and they pulled in the people at the support group. And Ed

was also talking with another local dentist that we all know, Bruce Smith, because they were the only two people that wanted to work on it, but they could donate one day a week.

And suddenly we found some funding through — I think it was Johnson & Johnson that was going to give us some used equipment. I hope I get this right. Ed would be the one to ask about it. But it sort of snowballed, and we needed a 501(c)(3), to accept all this stuff, and we had some other attorneys that were members of Bering, and we all worked together to figure out what 501(c)(3)'s were. We read the law, filed the papers. And at that time, it was fairly easy to get a 501(c)(3) status.

We filed our Articles of Incorporation with the State of Texas, we got it running, and we drew upon the help of a gentleman by the name of Randy Shields, who was a very good friend of Esther Houser's, and he was the director of corporate giving for Southwestern Bell and a member of the church, and he helped us put it together and he was the first president of what became Bering Community Services Foundation. AIDS as it was then, I think it was Kaposi sarcoma and HIV, and then it became AIDS.

TAPPE: So when you were first working on this, this wasn't even identified as HIV/AIDS, was it?

STAGGS: No, no. It was KS, and then it became KS/HIV, and then KS/AIDS. It had all kinds of different names.

So I think my focus, as well as a lot of the people's focus at Bering, became the Bering Community Services Foundation. Randy Shields and some others who knew a lot more about things and knew people in the community,

decided that we would do an Evening of Hope, because we needed \$25,000 to continue the dental clinic work, so we decided that we were going to do a night at the Alley Theatre and try and maybe raise \$15,000, hopefully \$25,000, but Randy Shields and his friend Randy Hodde, H-o-d-d-e, knew so much about doing things that they got Carolyn Farb to be our honorary chairperson. The City of Houston let us use the plaza in front of the Alley Theatre to do an after party.

[BRIEF INTERRUPTION]

TAPPE: Okay. Let's go back to the Evening of Hope.

STAGGS: The Evening of Hope. We needed \$25,000. We were hoping for \$15,000, thinking we were going to raise \$5,000 to \$10,000. And I mentioned that two of the people that were involved with the formation of Bering Community Service Foundation, Randy Hodde and Randy Shields, they knew Carolyn Farb, and Carolyn Farb agreed to be our honorary chairman. And when I say honorary, she did far more than just being an honorary person that lent her name. She pulled us together and told us how fundraisers were done, she coached us, and she put together a wonderful evening. And we had so many people from the community that helped decorate the square in front of the Alley Theatre. It was probably the most beautiful night I have ever had in my life, even as I sit here at 63. We had so many people from the community. We had one day to put it together, the day of the event.

TAPPE: You mean access to the area for one day?

STAGGS: Access to the area. The City, which they stretched to give us this, and I think it was because of Carolyn Farb. Had we not had her and the people of the Alley

Theatre behind us, we would not have been able to have so much as a sandwich picnic there. But they let us have it from early in the morning, and we had to have it all down by the stroke of midnight. This was sort of a Cinderella story. But we had so many creative people at Bering and friends of Bering, religious and not, that helped us put that thing together.

And it was a play, and I wish I could remember the play. In my mind, I always remember it being *Steel Magnolias*, but that may not have been it. But for whatever reason, that's what my memory says it was, but I'm probably wrong. We watched the play, and then we went out and had a wonderful evening of auctions and dancing. Everything was donated, everything. We didn't pay a cent. Carolyn Farb did so much with that, and the people that were members of the congregation and their friends, again, just put together a spectacular evening.

As I said, we needed \$25,000. We were hoping for \$15,000, expecting \$5,000. And at the end of the evening, I remember Ms. Farb and Randy, the two Randys, getting us all together and saying you're not going to believe this, but we think we're going to break \$50,000, maybe more, because we haven't tallied the auctions, silent auctions. As it turned out, it was over \$100,000. I think it was \$125,000. And that was historic. It was the first time that a fundraiser, a major fundraiser for HIV/AIDS had been done, especially with somebody from the community like Carolyn Farb and all her friends with the blessing of the City and the Alley Theatre. And the amount was staggering. It was tenfold what we were expecting.

TAPPE: That was a great amount of money for your organization.

STAGGS: The money went to helping the dental clinic, and I hope you have a chance to

interview Ed Cordray and Bruce Smith about how that worked and how it grew and became a model for the United States. It was the only dental clinic this side of the Mississippi for people with HIV/AIDS. But the way it was set up with the help from the Methodist Hospital that we were getting, it gained an international reputation because not only were they helping people, but they were actually doing research and discovering things and how important dental care was to HIV patients and that oral infections — and you're going to have to ask Ed or Bruce, Dr. Smith or Dr. Cordray, about this, but as I understood it, so many of the opportunistic diseases had entry through the mouth. And if someone had a compromised oral situation, like thrush or periodontal disease, that would hasten their death dramatically.

TAPPE: Their donations of their time was tremendous.

STAGGS: Yes, do not discount that one bit. But I think the fact that they did it was an even greater sacrifice because I know that both of them lost a number of patients who didn't want to be treated by someone that was treating HIV patients.

TAPPE: A business backlash on them.

STAGGS: A business backlash. But so many important things grew out of that. The whole idea of precaution. Dr. Smith, Bruce Smith, developed a protocol for treating people with HIV so that both the practitioner and the patient would be protected and that other patients would be protected and nothing would be passed along. So Dr. Bruce Smith was the one that I recall that developed that. And it was between him and Ed Cordray, and eventually they hired another dentist to work at the dental clinic when it became known that one day a week just wasn't going to cut it and with the money that we had, they could go to two days a week,

and then three days a week, and then full-time as different years and different monies came in.

TAPPE: And of course, the needs were rising.

STAGGS: Correct. At the very same time that all that was happening, another group of people at Bering realized that we needed a day care center for HIV patients because at the time there was no place that people could give care to their partners or their children. And this was back in the day when it was a very atrocious disease and it was very aggressive. You had three hospitalizations, and then you were dead.

[BRIEF INTERRUPTION]

STAGGS: I believe where I was at was — there were a lot of different things going on, and different people in the congregation had different ideas of what needed to be done. And again, when all this is going on, there's also the support group, which was really the core of everything, because it was the first mission of the church, that and the dental clinic. Those were two things that were driving it in the meantime.

The group at Bering became aware that we needed a day care center because the disease was so vicious that it affected people and it really broke down their mental status and their physical status. And as I said, you basically got three times at being sick or put in the hospital before you died, and you had about a two-year period, but it was a terrible two years. People were losing their jobs, and they were losing their insurance, which led to another group of people that came up with a way of — the AIDS Assistance Fund for saving insurance. And there

were so many things that started coming up, all within the gay community, all of it. Stress “ALL,” capital, bold.

Going back to the needs of the day care center, people started taking their partners to hospital rooms, emergency rooms in public health centers, Ben Taub and LBJ, because they knew that they were overwhelmed and they never got through meeting people. The waiting rooms were always full, so they would put their partners there in a chair with some money and whatnot and a book and some food, knowing that if something happened to them, if they passed out, that then they would have medical care. You’d park them there, and they had to. People had to have jobs, you know. They would take their partners in the morning, and pick them up.

There were horror stories about that, because as the County became aware of what we were doing, they started not letting people be there. So we developed the plan for converting this storage facility that used to be the old activity center at Bering, turning it into a day care center. By the time we got it all cleaned out, which took forever, and repairing it and making it habitable, the need had changed. Things were changing a little bit, and people didn’t — we had it all set up with hospital beds, where people could just lay there, and that’s not what they wanted. They wanted activities. And so instead of hiring a director, we just hired an activities director. We went through several people, Thom White being one, Mary Walker being another. They were just activity directors. There was no training. There was no real focus to it. It was just a place for people to go while their partners went to work. And it was close to the dental center. It was close to the support group.

And then as the support group grew, so did the whole need for counseling. It's all these different things started growing, just like a jellyfish, but still interdependent, growing. And the people in the city, the community, were doing things. The support group was growing. It was becoming institutionalized. Whereas we had volunteers, the facilitators were now doing — we were developing a training on how to interact with persons with AIDS: what we could do, what we couldn't do, just learning how to be peer counselors, and then learning how to take care of each other after doing — the Wednesday night support group, being a support leader, or being a visitor. If you were a facilitator, one of the things that you also did besides facilitating the Wednesday night dinner and discussion group after is that you visited people in hospitals, which was its own learning experience.

[END OF AUDIO PART 1]



Frank M. Staggs, Jr.

TAPPE: I assume some people were alone. They didn't have partners. They were disowned by their families.

STAGGS: Yes, oh, my gosh, yes. And that was about the same time that Omega House — Eleanor Munger was putting together Omega House, and one of the members of Bering went over and became her director and that developed its own trajectory. Eventually it merged with Bering Community Services, and we became Bering Omega.

Yes, it was a lonely thing. I remember my very first visit with somebody in the hospital. I'm going to use a pseudonym. He was a young — a Muslim

from the Mid East. I'm not going to even say what country he was from. He couldn't have been 20 years old. I'm going to just call him Malik, for want of better things. He was totally disowned by everyone. He was here in school, so I think he had some brothers here, but he was keeping it quiet and he was coming to the support group. And I remember him, he was also coming to church on Sunday, even though he was Muslim, and he would take communion, because you can do an open communion in the Methodist Church. You don't have to be baptized to take communion in the Methodist Church. He took communion even though he was a devout Muslim just because it was a part of interaction.

But he was so scared, and when he had his hospitalization — he only had one, and it was at Southwest Memorial Hospital, and that was back when they quarantined the rooms, and if you went in, the nurses didn't like you and they made you dress up in — like HazMat almost, but he had no one. I was his designated visitor, and I only visited him for a weekend before he died. He died alone except for, I guess, me.

TAPPE: I'm sure he was thankful to have you, but so scared.

STAGGS: Yeah, he was so scared. His family didn't want anything to do with him, and the consulate didn't want anything to do with him.

TAPPE: What happened with him?

STAGGS: I don't know. When he died, that was the end of it. I was told to leave and not come back. No information. Again, one, we don't know. We didn't take full names or anything like that.

TAPPE: You said the staff at this particular hospital, at that time, didn't like anybody — the patients or their friends or their family members.

STAGGS: Right, yeah.

TAPPE: Did you find that true in all the hospitals, although not all hospitals end up with these issues?

STAGGS: The answer is no, because at the same time, we had some very courageous gay and lesbian physicians that started doing work with HIV patients, and they dedicated their careers to it. Gary Brewton. Oh, gosh, I'm not going to start to name names, because I'm going to miss somebody, and I don't want to miss their names. But they sacrificed their careers just like they knew what had happened to Ed Cordray and Bruce Smith. They lost a lot of patients. But they concentrated their practices at both Park Plaza and Twelve Oaks, and they had dedicated floors for HIV patients, and the people, nursing staff, everybody that was involved with that, they were very loving. That was my recollection. If you had to go to the public hospitals, I know that the experiences were a lot different. But the people that I visited were at Park Plaza and Twelve Oaks. But yes, the people that were at the public hospitals, we had a lot of discrimination.

TAPPE: I do remember at Park Plaza, the floor, the designated floor.

STAGGS: Ninth floor.

TAPPE: And I remember hearing it called the AIDS floor, and I don't know if there's anything wrong with that, but that is what I remember it being referred to early on. I guess it was just a way of designation.

STAGGS: It was designating it as that, and maybe the other people in the hospital looked askance with it, but the level of care on those floors was probably the best in Houston, only because the people that were on there volunteered to be on there.

TAPPE: Which makes a world of difference.

STAGGS: Which makes a world of difference. In fact, my partner at the time had appendicitis, and when he was admitted, he asked to go to the AIDS floor even though he was not HIV positive.

TAPPE: He knew he would get good care up there.

STAGGS: Right, but he was also one of the facilitators, and our friends were up there, and his doctor was up there.

TAPPE: Well, that worked out.

STAGGS: It worked out well, and he got good care. That was just an aside.

You were talking about the response of people. And yeah, there was a lot of prejudice. There was a lot of prejudice in the gay community, especially by other gay men. There was a lot of fear, and as a result, I think that if you look at all the different organizations, you're going to find at the very beginning that the seminal groups were probably a majority women. The response of the lesbian community was leadership, and nothing that exists now or existed at the time would have been possible without that leadership.

TAPPE: Now, can you be a little more specific about that? I do know your reference to Esther Houser and what she did from the business side, and DIFFA.

STAGGS: Yeah, and Tori Williams, and just all the others. If you went to every fundraiser, every caregiving group, the leadership, I'm going to say, was a majority women. And of the women, the majority were lesbians. Not all were gay, not all were lesbian, but —

TAPPE: I wonder if that comes from the fact that they were supporting their male friends, the fact that they are women and tend to be caretakers by design, or just a combination?

STAGGS: I think it was a combination.

TAPPE: And so much of the men's community was suffering and their energy was going into just surviving.

STAGGS: They were suffering, and then again, I think there was a lot of prejudice.

TAPPE: For the, quote, healthy men versus the infected men?

STAGGS: Yes, the whole fight. There was a lot of tension between seropositive and seronegative people. And as a result, I think positive people tended to date only positive, and people avoided each other. There was a lot of ignorance, because we didn't know at the beginning what to expect, and that's why the spiritual support group, the whole idea of it centering around a meal itself was, I think, a revolutionary concept that Jay Nelson and Reverend Annette Jones came up with. We're doing that now with homeless youth, sharing meals with them, and maybe that's a Methodist thing, food.

TAPPE: Well, it's a nice thing. But I think when you talk about sharing a meal back then with men and/or women that were positive, there was a lot of fear about contracting HIV and at that time they still weren't quite sure — are you sure I can be around you?

STAGGS: Can I serve myself afterwards?

TAPPE: That's right. The silverware and all that kind of stuff. So that's kind of telling in terms of a positive way to share and not be so afraid.

STAGGS: And in the support groups, you would listen as — stories about how people interacted with their partners, their friends, or their family. As time went down, if they weren't in Omega House, if they were with their parents, some parents would keep a whole set of different dishes and silverware and wouldn't use the

restroom that their son was using.

TAPPE: That's got to hurt.

STAGGS: Siblings keeping their children away from their uncles or aunts. At the time, there weren't that many women that were diagnosed with AIDS. I think they had it, but they weren't diagnosed with it.

TAPPE: So we know a whole lot more, obviously, decades later, about HIV/AIDS and how it's spread and isn't spread. Do you still see some of that same prejudice go on within our community?

STAGGS: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I see it more with people my age. I lost 75 percent of my friends. But at the same time, some of the survivors still refer to things as the big plague or sometimes referring to, you know, he's got AIDS, and you kind of grit your teeth, and then everyone — when I hear it, to those few people that have the stupidity to say it to my face, I do use it as a learning moment, sometimes more moment than learning.

TAPPE: It's got to be tough. I would imagine you want to bite your tongue a little bit on that.

STAGGS: You don't see it so much among the younger people.

TAPPE: The men that are of our generation, I know there are still fundraisers that go on and that we still have organizations that put money towards AIDS Foundation, Bering Omega. And of course, the number of organizations that we had years ago have dwindled tremendously. No. 1, because there's less need; No. 2, the volunteers were exhausted or passed away. Also, as you know, having been in a number of the organizations —

STAGGS: Funding just dried up.

TAPPE: Right, funding dried up. A number of organizations merged, this little piece, that little piece, to become something larger.

STAGGS: And partnering was a good thing because when the cocktails came out, it was dramatic. You went from going to three or four funerals a month, sometimes a week, to going to a funeral every three months. And it was manageable, and people didn't need a lot of the services. They still needed the dental clinic and the day care. The day care center changed its focus. It wasn't an adult day care center. It was an activity center, and there was a hub for services. People could come there and learn with case managers or something, interact with other organizations in the community.

And also, the demographics were changing. The young white male demographic was changing. They had died off, and it was changing. It was going into persons of color. More women were being diagnosed with it. So a number of the organizations either started moving away or partnered with other organizations, because unfortunately those people didn't — if they were straight or on the down low or whatever, they didn't want to come to a gay organization for help.

TAPPE: And they weren't reinventing the wheel. They weren't creating their own, for the most part. Maybe there were some churches that had some services.

STAGGS: People tried to do that, but they eventually kept coming back to the organizations in town. The big divide, I think, in our community, was between the secular and the religious. So you had some really good group, like Legacy, which is secular, existing side by side with Bering Omega. Similar missions, but also different outlooks and serving different groups of people.

There was a group that left the support group and formed Body Positive because they were nonbelievers and they felt that there was too much emphasis on religion, even though we recognized it; that we would separate the prayer part. It would have a service at the very end. People could leave, get up and leave if they didn't feel comfortable, but we still wanted to provide that because there were some of the people that couldn't — because they were kicked out of their churches.

We had a different mission. There's still people that we can talk to. I actually can talk to their mothers, who brought their children there for services on Wednesday night; and then eventually on Sunday, they felt more comfortable. They served a need. At the outset, I think there was more tension, but I think the people at Bering, we were able to roll with the punch and not treat the creation of secular groups as saying something bad about us.

TAPPE: It wasn't a competitive thing.

STAGGS: It wasn't competitive. In fact, I would say that a number of people, many of the people, like me, that were members of Bering Omega, being on their board, also did a lot of fundraising and was a member of either boards of service organizations or groups that did fundraising for them, and I never looked at it as a competition as long as the leadership stayed in the gay community.

You and I had a discussion about that; that I'm in a very small minority of people that think that even though the demographics are changing, that the leadership or the mother house of all the services should remain in Montrose, because we built it in spite of the reaction of the general community. You know, in the Reagan years they were against us. We built something unique, and I don't

ever want to see that taken away from us.

TAPPE: Yes, you stated earlier today about how our community did the building of all of the support and the fundraising.

STAGGS: Even though Bering Omega has merged now with another organization that has many other purposes, I still support it. But I also support and have been a great admirer of Legacy. My last big contribution as a donor before I retired because I was sick was to Legacy. It was to their capital campaign. It was a large contribution spread out over five years. But when I made it, I talked to them and I made sure that they were going to stay in Montrose, and that's why I wanted to see the building built where it was.

TAPPE: You can't get more Montrose than that.

STAGGS: Exactly. Besides the fact that they do so much work, and being a fan of it, that's where I wanted this to stay, with us. AIDS response.

TAPPE: The heart of it, yes, the heart of the support.

STAGGS: And I always thought that if other people had to come to us, maybe people that were homophobic at the beginning, that they needed to overcome that and people needed to recognize the gay community as giving care to them; that they needed something that was created by and for the gay community originally. That's one of the few political activism stances I've taken in this community other than being a Democrat, that and filing the lawsuit at A&M. I think those are the only times that my radical political hackles have been raised.

TAPPE: Where you want to keep things here and recognized here?

STAGGS: Yeah, and I'm in the minority, and I recognize that I'm in the minority, and I understand the reasons for going out, but I also fear the day when it boomerangs

back into the gay community, and I don't want gay people to have to go somewhere else and feel prejudice or homophobia when they're fighting for their lives.

TAPPE: In terms of your role in fundraising, there was a time pre-AIDS, prior to HIV/AIDS, where you did fundraising, I believe, for Bering, and you had parties and social gatherings.

STAGGS: I don't know that to be a fact. I don't know that to be a fact because I moved back to Houston in 1983, and by 1985 I was involved at Bering, and by 1986 the foundation was already being established. So even though I was a member of EPAH [Executive and Professional Association of Houston] at the time and doing fundraising for other things, I don't remember a time of non-HIV-related fundraising. I can't tell you. I mean, I have done it. Yes, I have done it.

TAPPE: But the vast, vast majority has been AIDS-related?

STAGGS: Yes. Well, that or related to women's health issues, or as time went by and the skills that I learned, legal skills and just organizational skills dealing with being on boards and stuff, things that I learned with the AIDS response, I was able to translate into other community structures or missions. The Bayou City Performing Arts, Unhinged Productions, my work with The Dianas. And that also always curved back, most of the time, to HIV.

TAPPE: And I will just add Bunnies on the Bayou, right?

STAGGS: Bunnies on the Bayou.

TAPPE: Equality Texas, Lambda Legal Defense Fund, Victory Fund, Krewe of Olympus, Human Rights Foundation, Emergency AIDS Coalition.

STAGGS: The Emergency AIDS Coalition and SEARCH were the two things that were

non-HIV-related, but the reason I was involved with them was, I was the outreach chair at Bering, and Dr. Sinclair told me, as outreach chair, you are our representative to the EAC, Emergency AIDS Coalition.

And then within a year of that, Don said you're going with me to a meeting at Temple Emanu El, because they have some exciting news and they need to start another group for homeless people because there are two women over at Temple Emanu El, Kay Schwartz and Shelly Cypress, who want to do outreach to the homeless, and Kay Schwartz had given a huge amount of money to see that, and she would continue to do that. That was just her starting gift.

So I went with him, and I really didn't know what I was getting into, but at some point I guess the group decided that all the representatives from EAC would also be the representatives to SEARCH just because nobody else would do it at that point. And eventually they split, but not for me. I got involved with SEARCH, and we developed that. It worked as a model for a couple of years. We had a drop-in center at Louisiana and Elgin, but then we had to change our focus because we had a lot of complaints we were too successful.

TAPPE: Whoa, what a problem to have.

STAGGS: What a problem to have. You have the starting group of people, and then you have the next group and things. Any successful group goes through evolutions. If anything, out of all the things I learned at Bering, I was able to take my skills over to SEARCH and realize that the congregations really couldn't be the rulers of SEARCH, but we needed the churches to be involved for support and for volunteer bases and for a lot of other reasons.

So I was on the committee that was going to change SEARCH, and after

several different board retreats I met this one lady that was also involved with the Methodist Hospital, and she suggested I use their model of the way the boards are set up there because you have Methodist Church, and then you have the board of governors and so on. And so I used their model to create a new structure where SEARCH was owned by the Counsel of Congregations and then elected at first, the first working board, and then let the working board take over. But it was still answerable if there was any change in constitutional structure; that the churches would have to be the ones to approve that.

TAPPE: That was a successful —

STAGGS: It was bloody. I had some bloody meetings. And I was also younger at the time and didn't have the patience that I have now, but I got it through with a lot of help from other people and counseling from people my senior telling me how to do — bite my tongue. But yes, we got it through.

TAPPE: Diplomacy.

STAGGS: Diplomacy. And while that was going on, Shelly Cypress and Kay Schwartz were still getting more money and they developed the House of Tiny Treasures, a day care center for homeless kids and their families. And then Temple Emanu El — and on this, I'm going to say the leaders of SEARCH were the congregation at Temple Emanu El and also the people at Annunciation Cathedral and Trinity Episcopal Church. Those were the three big pushers. Of those, Temple Emanu El probably — Kay Schwartz and her friends pushed.

She got a building donated, and we remodeled it. I got through that, and then I stepped down. I was burned out. That's when my burnout started, was with doing SEARCH and being on the board of Bering Community Service

Foundation, and I was traveling. At the time, I had some case loads that I was traveling. I was out of town.

TAPPE: You were trying to work during all of this.

STAGGS: Yeah, and my travels were — let's say three weeks out of the month, I was leaving on Sunday or Monday and coming back on Thursday or Saturday. Doing a lot of stuff by phone, going to meetings. Sometimes I would fly in for a meeting, a board meeting of somebody's board, and then fly right back to Denver or L.A.

TAPPE: To go back to work?

STAGGS: Yeah, for a deposition the next morning. And that was before you had computers. No emails, none of that.

TAPPE: No emails. Everything was actually having to talk to somebody.

STAGGS: Yeah, or handwrite stuff.

TAPPE: The work you're doing now has kind of —

STAGGS: Shrunk?

TAPPE: Yes.

STAGGS: It's going to another level.

TAPPE: You're not as spread out as you used to be.

STAGGS: I'm going to say I'm doing as much, but I'm doing it easier. I'm going to steal that from the Queen of England. They asked her what she was doing now that she was 90. They said, "Are you cutting back on what you're doing?"

She says no, she's not, but she's just doing it easier.

But yeah, I have cut it back to — I think now with me living in Fort Lauderdale, I have cut back. And I went through a period of complete burnout,

where I just sort of disassociated myself from everything except going to fundraisers or maybe throwing a fundraiser here at the house, but not being on boards, because I don't care how good a board is or healthy it is, it's still draining. People are emotionally invested in them, and you do have arguments and things.

TAPPE: It takes a lot of energy.

STAGGS: Yeah. So I took a strategic retreat.

TAPPE: Now, you're working with some homeless children now, with an organization; is that correct?

STAGGS: Yes, I am.

TAPPE: Is that connected to Bering?

STAGGS: It's connected to Bering. It's the Open Gate Ministries. I'm on their advisory board, helping with the fundraiser, and that's something that Esther Houser and I are doing together. We're the old people on that. And basically, I think we're there more not to tell people how to do it, but to kind of give them ideas and say, "Well, you know, maybe this is sort of what we did back then," but never to say we tried it and it failed.

The only time I've ever — I'm doing that now, and I did this when on my last term of office on the Reconciling Ministries board. I would say, "We tried that before, but it didn't work, but here's why I think it didn't work," because as somebody said, you can't step in the same river, ever. It's always changing. So why things don't work in 1995, it's a whole different environment in 2005 and 2015.

TAPPE: It doesn't mean it won't work now, or something similar to it.

STAGGS: Exactly, or maybe the people that came up with the idea are smarter. I'm just

amazed at the people nowadays, the younger people. I just think they're doing so much more than we ever did.

TAPPE: Well, maybe because you were in the throes of it, so it didn't feel like you were doing as much as people are now. I think maybe someone watching you would think you and your friends and your community did a lot during the time.

STAGGS: Maybe. That is probably true. But I know I learned a lot. I never really considered myself a leader. I always felt like I was following somebody. I was either following along or walking along with Esther or walking along with Ed Cordray.

TAPPE: More a behind-the-scenes type?

STAGGS: Yeah, because those people always seemed to have the vision, and I never saw my job as being visionary. It was more the mechanics, the legal stuff. You all come up with the mission statement, and I'll write the bylaws.

TAPPE: As you know, you can't do anything without someone like that. You can have all the vision in the world, but if you don't have someone to put it together, it doesn't mean a whole lot.

STAGGS: I understand that. I don't want to demean the people that are doing that nowadays.

TAPPE: Oh, no, not at all.

Let me just ask you a few more things. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the fundraising that you did within the gay community, primarily in the men's community, I suppose, because there's a lot of money in the men's community. It's kind of a stereotype. But from a woman's point of view or from a general community point of view, there seems to be, for a variety of reasons,

money to be had within the gay men's community.

Were you able to tap into that in particular for your HIV/AIDS fundraising? Were there men very willing to support the causes and the organizations financially but couldn't necessarily step out there and be a face because of early stigmas? Do you understand my question?

STAGGS: I see what you're talking about, and the answer to that is that my ability to do that was a growing one. At the beginning, the answer would be no, because I was just a young associate at a law firm. I think as I got older and had more experience networking-wise and developed my own bona fides, then I could ask people to do stuff or people would ask me if they could do stuff through me. That happened on occasion, not a great deal, until, I think, as I got older and more financially stable, when I was able to make significant gifts, then I could approach other people with confidence to ask them to make similar gifts.

And yes, I was on committees. I was put on committees because if I could make a lead gift, then I could go to somebody and ask them if they would match my gift or more.

TAPPE: That's how a lot of fundraising works, whether it's our community, the straight community. It doesn't matter.

STAGGS: I did that when I was working with the Reconciling Ministries. They would always find somebody on the board that could talk to another board member that was equally financially stable and ask them to make a similar gift or to meet with the people at the Gill Foundation. And it would be more successful if you have a board member that would come in — and as I always tell people, you always have to have 100 percent board giving. It doesn't matter if it's \$10, but every — if

you're on fund development, you have to be able to go to people and say, first off, I have 100 percent board buy-in. That's all they want to know. They don't want to know that everybody has given \$5,000 or \$3,000. I tell people, don't put an amount. Don't say each board member has to give a gift of \$3,000. I think there are too many downsides to that, because the most important thing that donors look at, and I'm in the donor group, is whether or not it's 100 percent buy-in.

If you can go in and you can tell somebody, well, first of all, I have 100 percent board buy-in on this campaign, and we're trying to make \$1 million, and I have already pledged or given \$25,000 or \$50,000, and I know that you are in a position to do that, and I want to talk to you about doing that. That's usually in my introductory phone call.

TAPPE: They might see your name on the caller ID and not answer.

STAGGS: True, true.

TAPPE: Just teasing. What a skill, though. Truly, what a skill.

STAGGS: It is true. And when I would lead board workshops within, let's say,

Reconciling Ministries, for board development, that's the way I would say it.

You have to be able to say what you want and not be ashamed of it in the introductory phone call. Don't ever blindside somebody. Likewise, if you want to just sit down and talk to a donor who's been a good donor, you can call them and say I don't want to ask for any money. In fact, I will not accept any money. I just want to tell you where we're at and what we've done with your money.

TAPPE: And you have just learned those skills through the years?

STAGGS: Yes.

TAPPE: Good for you. Important, valuable skills.

STAGGS: And I've done that not just with the HIV stuff, but with — when I was on the Bayou City Performing Arts, with the Reconciling Ministries program, with SEARCH, with Dianas. And then I supported but I haven't been on their boards, you wanted me to point out — Equality Texas. At one time I was with HRC [Human Rights Campaign]. Still with the Victory Fund. I was a faithful giver to Krewe of Olympus until I retired. And I told people when I was sick, when I was first sick but I was still working, I said, I'm going to have to retire pretty soon, so I'm not going to be able to give anymore, so please don't embarrass me by having to say —

TAPPE: Right, put you in a difficult position.

STAGGS: Yeah. That's when you find out where your friends are.

TAPPE: And who's going to honor that.

STAGGS: Yeah. You're going to find out who — I've had several people just drop me as friends.

TAPPE: Oh, come on.

STAGGS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Or suddenly I'm not invited to their events anymore.

TAPPE: I'm sorry to hear that.

STAGGS: But that's the way it goes. And sometimes I think it may be because the people that are leading their fundraisers don't have the history and they don't know me from Adam, and that's a fair way of — that's the way I look at it. They don't know that I've given that group \$3,000 a year or \$2,000 a year for the last 20 years and then I'm not in that position anymore; that nowadays I can only give — pick three groups and support those, and then everybody else gets \$100 and that's it.

On the other hand, you have people like at Legacy that remember your gifts and thank you, even when you can't give big gifts anymore.

TAPPE: Well, you're not, hopefully, defined by — and not just you, but anyone that gives at various levels — defined strictly by your bank account.

STAGGS: But a lot of people are, and it happens. But you can weed that out, and what those people forget is that there's still legacy giving, and I don't mean Legacy, the group; I mean in your will.

TAPPE: You're right. Don't burn those bridges.

STAGGS: And some people have, and I have changed it. Maybe you shouldn't publish this until I'm dead.

TAPPE: You can take that out.

STAGGS: No. But you know what? Somebody needs — they need to know that. They need to know that. You don't take that out. It would be nice if it happened after I passed away, but that's an object lesson.

TAPPE: Good.

STAGGS: Working people can give a lot of money, and then when people retire, their level of giving goes down but their — if you keep them interested, then they'll remember you in their wills. One time when I was doing a fundraiser for Reconciling Ministries, I said adding somebody to my will, that's an act of faith in your group, because that's the last thing I'm doing. That's my last worldly act, and I'm giving you something substantial.

TAPPE: Frank, let's pull this back a little bit to the younger generation, the LGBT community, HIV/AIDS-related. Tell me what you see in terms of attitude, behaviors, concerns you might have, things you feel good about, in terms of this

younger generation.

STAGGS: First off, as I mentioned earlier, I am amazed at the power and intelligence and the things that the millennial group, for want of better words, Gen X and millennial people are doing and capable of doing. But they're doing it politically. I'm finding that they have maybe just a little bit harder time pulling together social groups like The Dianas or EPAH, their involvement, but I'm finding that I think they're having more difficulty in putting together defined gay and lesbian — or at least gay, and then limit it to the men — social groups like The Dianas. And they view those institutions as being older and somewhat irrelevant, although the president of Dianas now, Tanner Williams, is focusing on bringing in new blood. Sometimes it just may have some of the older guys, but he is doing an excellent job of bringing in new blood, bring in the 35 and below, so there is some hope. But I think part of it is maybe because the world has changed and the need for an underground subculture no longer exists.

In terms of HIV, I think they don't see themselves as potential patients. One, just because it has not affected their population as much, that they know of, and they tend to be a little bit more risky. And then you have the Truvada, which is a wonderful thing. I'm not one of those people that says Truvada is a party drug. It's something that's a miracle. But I am concerned that whether or not people are on Truvada, usually not, they're not taking any precautions. That's why I think HIV is going to boomerang back into our community. And I've talked to several people, healthcare professionals, that say that they're starting to see a bump-up in the gay community. It's going back to the original demographic. And that's why I was insistent politically of having the HIV

organizations maintain their center in the GLBT community in Montrose, because when it does boomerang, which I think it will, that I want those structures to be there.

I guess I was digressing.

Just the whole thing with the victories with marriage and now sometimes — we had the defeat with HERO [Houston Equal Rights Ordinance], which I think was a clarion call to the younger group. They needed to get back and active in gay- and lesbian-focused political activities, I guess is the word. But I think they have many more skills to offer, and they do work so good with, like, the Equality Texas, with the Victory Fund, or when I read the annual reports from all these groups that I still give money to and you see the young faces, I can say, well, they're doing — we may have launched them, but they're stepping on our shoulders just like we stepped on the shoulders of other people.

I think, as far as young lesbian and gay women, and I'll make a distinction only because at my age, women themselves made that distinction, some did, so I've learned that the women tend — I see them as more coalesced at the younger age than the young men. I don't know the reason for it, but I would like to know why. And I see it as a good thing. Maybe it's because some of the issues of health, women's-only health issues are now more pronounced, and they're taking the skills that they learned with HIV and translating them. The older women, I think, are imparting their knowledge to the younger women.

[END OF AUDIO PART 2]

TAPPE: Factoring all this time period that we were talking about with HIV and those

issues, 1970s, 1980s, I remember — well, I guess it was probably before HIV, because a lot of women did step up, but just completely separate communities.

STAGGS: Yes.

TAPPE: And I never really understood that, nor did I like it, because I lived over here [indicating] with the men, and then I had these women friends over here.

STAGGS: See, I never had that. That was another experience that I had until my later years, because at A&M we were all one subculture and we were together. There weren't staterooms in this boat. We were all in the same rowboat. And then at Bering, again, we were one church, and we had a men's group and we had a women's group, but we supported each other.

TAPPE: Similar missions.

STAGGS: We were on our missions, yes. And it wasn't until later that I became aware — sometimes, because I did some stupid things and — or not, you know — I realized that there was a fork in the road. It happened with The Dianas. You know, there was a split after I was president, which ever since then we've been trying to heal.

And then I've done other readings, and I do a lot of reading on the Internet about what is this divide? And there are different reasons for each of the communities. I think the women's community — just as an outsider, not being an insider — I'm seeing that the women themselves are sort of dividing like the men had divided. You have different groups of the younger and the older, the — and I could be wrong about this, but it used to be, I think, there was more role playing in the women's group, just like there was in the men's group, the men before my time, there was more role playing, I think.

TAPPE: With the older women, there was more role-playing than with the younger women now, yes. I think you're right.

STAGGS: The last thing I read was that in the times before, a butch couldn't date another butch, a woman. It was always butch-fem and you really didn't cross over. And they had specific terms and specific roles in some of the larger communities. And that's changing.

TAPPE: I always found that to be a head scratcher.

STAGGS: I didn't understand it. I didn't understand it in my group, so how could I understand it if I'm not in the middle of something else?

TAPPE: I think what you stated earlier about the young people working together — at first I thought you were taking away from what you had done, and you said well, they're so active now. And as you went on to explain that, I'm thinking, you know, you're absolutely right. When I see a lot of these different organizations now, 90 percent of them are the younger generation and smart as a whip — I think technology plays a role in a lot of this.

STAGGS: Social media plays a role in it.

TAPPE: Yes, because of the way they communicate and can pull things together, where they're not having to pick up the phone or type things out on a typewriter.

STAGGS: They're like butterflies. At a younger age, they can unfold their wings without a lot of the prejudices and dangers that people had to face before.

TAPPE: It's another world.

STAGGS: It's another world. It used to be, you'd go to jail, you know, like it is in Africa and many places, or in Arab worlds, you could go to jail and maybe be subject to the death penalty. Now, there is a need for employment discrimination

laws. HERO, we needed. And it's interesting to watch as the focus goes to the transgender needs and to see whether or not we're going to be able to accommodate them within the umbrella or how it's going to develop.

TAPPE: Well, it's taken a long time for the gay, slash, lesbian community to take on the B and the T.

STAGGS: Yeah. In my lifetime, the big question was what came first, the L or the G in organizations, which it didn't make any difference to me.

TAPPE: I know it. Sometimes I have to look down and go, now, is it LG or GL?

STAGGS: When I see GLBT, I go, oh, my gosh, they didn't get the middle.

TAPPE: I know, but wasn't that the way it used to be?

STAGGS: It took five years or so.

TAPPE: Wasn't it GLBT?

STAGGS: It was GLBT. It's still, I think, the GLBT group at Texas A&M, they haven't changed it. It took us a while to get that straightened out, no pun intended. So now, I think that it's time for us to focus on the T's and somewhat the bisexual group. That's a whole different can of worms on that. I don't even want to get into why I think there are problems between the groups on the B's. The learning curve is a steep one.

TAPPE: I think there are probably various sociological issues tied into that.

Well, Frank, I want to thank you so much for all of your input and your sharing.

STAGGS: Well, probably when I read the transcript, I may have some changes, but I am glad you're doing this. I don't know who's going to want to go back, but every once in a while, somebody wants to go back and do a story.

TAPPE: Right. The concern, one of the concerns, is that we're losing everybody.

STAGGS: Yeah. Like, I'm moving away.

TAPPE: Right. People are moving. People are dying natural deaths. We've lost, already lost, as you know, too many people to the disease itself.

STAGGS: Yes, we have. Thank you, Renée.

[END OF AUDIO PART 3]

[INTERVIEW CONCLUDED]

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