

Interview with Delma Cummings
Leeyah Rassu
Vivian Guan
Kaching Ho

Q: When did you come out? How?

Delma Cummings: I'm not completely out to all of my family, uh, but I actually came out to myself when I was about 18, and, uh, I had, I didn't, wasn't aware of too much, you know. Back when I was goin' to high school, there were queers. I didn't know anything about gay life or gay people or anything else. So, I go ask my friend. I said, Jessie, what are they talkin' about, and so, she said well, I'll tell you exactly, and we're goin' down, uh, down over there on North Shepherd in front of the Sears store, and she was drivin', and she told me. She said, well, I just want you to know that I'm gay. She said, I'm not a queer because I don't like men, and queers like men, you know. So, I said okay, okay, and she said, and I think you may be too. And I said, yeah. She said, you better think about it. So, I went along for a long time. So, then one day I called her up, and I said, Jessie, if I'm gay, am I butch or fluff. That's, that's how naïve I was, and she said, that's for you to decide. Well, I haven't decided yet, so it's still goin' on. But, anyway, that's, that's up to when I discovered that I was actually gay, and then, uh, I, uh, uh, I'm still friends with all those people. We've been friends for 50-some odd years.

Q: How did your family react?

DC: My sister is the one that I haven't come out to because she's 7 years older than myself, and I can only describe her as a southern Baptist housewife. Her daughter is a southern Baptist housewife. Her granddaughter is a southern Baptist housewife. She would not understand if I even tried to tell her about it, and she would ask me 150 stupid questions that has nothin' to do with anything. She does not need to know. It's not necessary in my relationship with her for her to know that. Now she knows I've had women friends all my life. Whether they talk about, I don't know. She has never asked me about it, and I came out to her daughter because I just thought I needed to, and she, I think she already knew it.

Q: Did your bosses know?

DC: Just know you could never let the bosses know. You have to speak and go so that nobody would know that you're spending your time exclusively with women. Or I have a new boyfriend. His name is Jerry, or, and it may be a female Geri, who knows, but you had to cover it up, and you could get fired for it. You could very well get fired for it. In fact, I knew a girl that did.

Did you ever want a nuclear family? What about children?

DC: I have a nuclear family. I have many, many, many, many friends, many friends, and a lotta times we go do things on th – in fact, for Thanksgiving, there was two, two guys, three guys and five of us women went to Brady's Landing for Thanksgiving dinner. So, we have, we have a large family. I, I, one thing I worried about when I was younger is the fact that I would die alone, and nobody would care. Well, it's never gonna happen because I have a large, large selection of friends, especially since I've been so active in the gay community. Once when I was younger, yeah, but I'm glad I didn't have any. Yeah, I did once, you know, when I was younger,

and I had, have had an affair with a guy, but, and it didn't produce any children, which I'm grateful for because he's a bum.

Q: Tell us about the Lesbian Health Initiative (LHI)

DC: 'Cause then I was real proud of LHI because we through our health fairs we helped numerous women. We had people come in there who had never had a mammogram. Stage 3 cancer, breast cancer, you know, or we had a girl that came in there with her blood pressure was like 300 and something, not, you know, her blood, her blood sugar was 300 and something, and so we sent her, uh, to the hospital right then because, you know, and, but they're not aware. When his health issues are much more to the forefront now than they used to be. People are paying attention. I have an, b, by LHI having the health fairs and showing them that they, that they have, they their, they can talk about anything, and I think that that has convinced a lot of more people especially the younger girls to go get, to take care of themselves.

Q: What do you do with SPRY?

DC: Myself and seven, seven other people, and we went out to Harris County, Montgomery, all the counties around Harris County specifically looking for 60 plus seniors, GLBT seniors. I talked to people, a couple of women that lived in, in, uh, League City. They're out there in the, in the suburbs just as happy as they can be. They don't need any help with anything. One of them lost her partner, one of the women died, you know, so she's out there by herself. That's her choice, but if we can get to them and get them in to activities at the counseling center which is SPRY Seniors preparing for the Rainbow Years. We have gone to all the nursing homes, senior living centers, assisted living, independent living center. We go in there and we'd pass out our little flyer and tell 'em that we would like to explain to them what the program was about so that they would know that if they had any seniors in their facility that they even suspected might be gay that we would like to talk to them to let them know that we were here for them to help them get in, get involved and go visit them and stuff like that because we had a guy that was in an Alzheimer's unit here that was a costume director on Broadway. Came down here to be close to his family. Got here, his family rejected him. He died in that Alzheimer's unit. That's before we got a chance to talk to him, with no one. That's not right. I don't care who it is, it's not right, and our people are not gonna be that way. We're not gonna, none of us are gonna be that way. We're gonna be there for each other.

Q: Most rewarding SPRY experience?

DC: I would have to say the most real, really the most rewarding one which was, turned out to be not, kind of tragic in the end was we went to, which I don't, don't do bars. But, um, one of the male outreach workers and myself went into a, a male bar, and there was a man there that we convinced to talk to us, and he was an ex-stripper, male stripper. His stage name was Windy Chicago, and he was in there every morning, every morning in his cup, so to speak. Him and his partner lived under a bridge downtown somewhere, and his partner who was named Bobby rode his bicycle everywhere he needed to go, and so they were in there every morning. So we did an intake on him, and we got him actually to go seek some physical health at the clinic. We got him into the clinic. We got him, got him, got him some housing. They didn't even have housing. We got him some housing. Pulled some strings, got him in Allen Parkway Village, and Bobby, then, after they got all settled down and quit trying, you know, had to worry about this and eating and all that kind of stuff they and, we got him his Social Security check 'cause he didn't have an

address, couldn't get his Social Security, and, uh, Bobby, they dis, diagnosed with cancer, and he didn't live very much longer but Windy's still over in, uh, Allen Parkway Village. That was a success. We got those guys off of the street and into some housing. That was a success.

Q: LGBT Youth and Seniors, how is their relationship?

DC: I think that, uh, a lot of the younger people value the senior's information. We do a lot of, uh, LOAH is another organization I belong to, does a lot of, uh, speaking to the HATCH kids, and I went and spoke to the HATCH kids, and then I went back and I said I want y'all to tell me your y'all stories. I want to know how it is for you out there right now, but, you know, you tell 'em your story and they don't believe you. They say, aw, can't be that bad. Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

Q: Changes in the closet?

DC: Well, I tell you what. These young kids are not gonna take nothin' off of anybody. They, you know, they are not. They're not gonna go and say, they, they're not gonna go to a facility and say do you have us, can we be here as a couple. They're gonna say, we're gonna come here as a couple, and they're gonna have to accept it. I mean, they are just, they don't have to hide. I mean, they face a lot. The HATCH kids face a lot of school, but we get to, but they're very much more out than we were. Sometimes I think it's a little bit confusing for the younger kids because they, they don't know what they are yet, you know, and they, one day might wake up and say, uh, I think I'll dress like a boy today. Then dress like a boy. Be a boy all day. Next day they can dress up real feminine, but that's just growth for them.

Q: How united is the LGBT community?

DC: I think by and large there's, there's getting to be more, um, uh, intermixing of the sexes as far as, um, as far as men not trusting the women and women not trusting the men, so I hope that we're making that a little bit better because, you know, a man told me one day he said, we're all in the same boat. We're just paddling off on different sides. I do a potluck once a month. For the SPRY people. I have three men that religiously come. They like to be around the women, and most of the women at first sit over there and I don't wanna have nothing to do with them, but as they get to know each other and really see that this is a human being over here that's going through the same things you are and forget about the fact that he's a male.

Q: Partner: retired sergeant and Marine, what was her experience?

DC: You don't even want to go there. She fought from the day she started there, she was the first female sergeant. They were out to get her. She took to carrying a, a tape recorder around to protect herself, but she, she retired from there. They didn't run her off, but they sure tried. Very much, very, very much they discriminated out there against women.

Q: Annise Parker's Election. How did it change Houston?

DC: I don't think it changed them at all. They still think she's a, a queer mayor. They're not gonna change just because of that. It's a good thing that she got elected and the gay people were excited, ecstatically happy, but the straight community will never accept her. They'll never accept her. They, she does a good job and that's why she got, got the mayor's job is because she does do a good job. I'm proud of her for the fact that she stood up for who she is, but it, it's, it's not exactly an asset for her.

Q: Advice for the younger generation?

DC: If I would've had the chance or if I ever do have a chance to talk to a person that tells me they think they're gay my advice to them would be make dad'gum sure that's what you want because it is not an easy path to go. It's not an easy life to choose.

Q: Coming out of the closet. Do you know anyone who regrets it?

DC: The regret, no. Mm mm. It's a hard life, but it's a life and it's a good life, and you don't, you actually don't have a choice no matter what they say. It is what, you are who you are. It, you just live your life the best way you can with what you have. I, I didn't ask to be this way. This is the feelings that was put in me by the Lord, and I live li, my life the best way I am, can, and try not to, you know, hurt people anymore than I can, and I'll be judged in the end for, for me, for who I am. This part, this little gay part, it's just only a very small part of who I am. It, it's the, it's a, you know, it's me, but it's not the defining factor in who I am.

Q: Gay Marriage?

DC: It's a personal choice if a, if, if a woman feels like they, if two women feel like they need to be married to consummate their relationship then they ought to be able to. Myself, I see no need in it. As far as benefits go though, I'm, I'm all for partnership. I'm all for partnerships. As far as the marriage thing goes, that's much to do about nothing unless you want to procreate and as you very well know you don't have to be married to do that.

Q: SPRY Seniors and their children?

DC: And I have some friends, some people in SPRY who, who are very close to their children, and I have others who are alienated from their children, and, um, the ones that are alienated it hurts them. It's very, very stressful on 'em, but, uh, eventually it comes down to where they get back together sometimes but whenever they're fixin' to die they're always right there. They show up from somewhere.

Q: Connection between SPRY and HATCH?

DC: They like, they like for us to come and they ask us questions, and, uh, it just helps 'em maybe understand that, you know, here we are. We're semi successful. Teachers, whatever you know, and we made it through without any, uh, really bad scars, and, um, I think it helps the kids. I, I think hat, HATCH is a wonderful program. It gives the kids some place to go and socialize without, and especially their prom. I think that's the neatest thing that, in the world, they can just take their girlfriend or their boyfriend and have a prom just like, like in the other high, other kids do.