Kyle Trahan

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Lafayette, LA

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Ethnographic Preface:

As part of the ongoing LGBTQ+ Archives Project, Special Collections of Edith Garland Dupré Library and the Guilbeau Center for Public History are collecting oral histories documenting the region’s LGBTQ+ community. Project Co-Director Dr. Zack Stein and Undergraduate Research Assistant Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto attended Pride Acadiana 2023 and interviewed various attendees for an oral history harvest.

 TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [GH]

Interviewee initials: [KT]

GH: Okay, so this is Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto. Today is June 24, 2023. I am here with Mr. Kyle, what was your last name again?

KT: Trahan.

GH: Trahan. And Mr. Kyle, I just want to let you know if you want to opt out at any time, you're more than welcome to. If you want to skip a question, you're more than welcome to, just let me know if there's anything you need. And this is gonna go online. Is that okay with you?

KT: Oh, yeah, that's fine with me.

GH: Okay, perfect. So we're gonna get started. So describe what it was like growing up LGBTQ+ in Louisiana?

KT: Well, it wasn't easy at first, because I grew up in the '70s. And back then, you didn't say you were gay--you didn't even say the word "gay." But I'm lucky because I have a lot of support. I had a family who loved me. I still do. And they didn't really accept it at first. But then, when they got to meet my friends, they just melted. And they welcomed me with open arms.

GH: That's amazing. So you said you had an accepting family, like your parents were very accepting after they met your friends?

KT: Yeah.

GH: Okay. So, what do you think is the best part of being LGBTQ+?

KT: Right now it's the family. It's everybody, whether I know them or not, this is my community. And this is my family. It's the family. They say there's a family you're born into and the family you choose. Well, this is the family I chose. And I could not ask for a better group of people.

GH: That's amazing. I'm so glad to hear that. So what does Pride mean to you? And why is it important in Louisiana?

KT: Pride means everything to me. Because back when I was growing up, there was a lot of people that would get beat up, get murdered, you know, very bad things would happen back then. And it wasn't all fun and games like it is now. But you had to basically stay in the closet just about.

GH: So, were you involved in any of the bar culture around the '70s and '80s?

KT: Oh, yes.

GH: Oh, tell me about that.

KT: I can tell you almost every bar that was in Lafayette.

GH: Yes. Tell me as many as you can remember.

KT: Oh, God. Well, the first one I can remember is was called The Owl's Perch. This was around 1974. It was a bar on Moss Street, kind of close to where Breaux's Mart is now, around in that area. I can't remember exactly which building, but it was there. That was when I first heard of it, and then about five or six years later in 1977, they had a bar called Southern Comfort. It was downtown; it was where the old Fun Shop was. You know where all the little clowns were?

GH: Yeah, I remember that.

KT: Well that bar burned down in '77. Somebody set it on fire. Well, I never really got to go to that bar. But there was another bar called Frank's.

GH: I’ve heard of Franks.

KT: Frank's was my go-to when I was in high school. I was a sophomore in high school; I was 16 years old. And back then they didn't check ID. They didn't care. I mean if you were in a gay bar, you know, well that's you. That’s your problem.

GH: That’s so funny. Were you around whenever C'est La Guerre was open?

KT: Yes.

GH: Did you ever go there?

KT: C'est La Guerre was the original show bar in Lafayette. I loved that place. That's where I made most of my friends.

GH: That’s awesome, that's amazing. I’m so happy about that.

KT: We would go there to see the Miss Bayou State Pageant; there was always a show going on. There was always something going on there.

GH: That's awesome. Do you remember any other ones?

KT: Yes. My favorite one. The one that I loved the most; it was called Fantasy One. It was ran by a man called Randy Chestnut, who personally was more of a father to me than my own father.

GH: That's amazing. That's so great.

KT: He passed away about a year ago. It was it was kind of hard because I hadn't seen him in a while, but I got to tell him goodbye. So that was a good thing. Everybody in the gay community that I have met has some affiliation with that bar; that's why I said that bar gave me a life because before that I didn't really have a life. I didn't know what I was gonna do.

GH: Right, I totally get that. So, about the bars, do you remember there being any retaliation from the community about the bars being around?

KT: Oh, they’d throw bottles; they would throw Coke bottles and throw eggs and stuff. I had one of my friends was standing outside at Pharaoh--it was the bar downtown, called Pharaoh. We were all standing outside, and all of a sudden they came, and they threw eggs at us. Talk about stink! But we got in, we washed ourselves off, and the party went on.

GH: That's awesome. The resilience.

KT: I mean, if you let it bother you, you wouldn't come out. I mean, so you had to, you had to get brave enough to at least go out, so you can be with the people you were meant to be with.

GH: Right. Absolutely. That's amazing. That's really, really good information. Thank you. So, do you see a difference in the way LGBTQ+ individuals in Louisiana live now versus when you came out?

KT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there's a huge difference. I am so proud of the young people today because they can be who they want to be. They can go to school dressed … if there's a function or something, I know they all wear uniforms. But they can go to school with nails, they can go with long hair, they can go with makeup. And it's fascinating to see. And they're getting a little bit more support than back in the day when nothing was talked about. They have these LGB centers, they have these little clubs and stuff just for if you're gay. So that's something I wish I would have had when I was in school.

GH: Right, right. So, tell me about how you met your husband.

KT: I met my husband, we were … there was somebody that was kind of like following me. And I walked into this place called Belsco. It was a police supply company. I wanted some mace. And Lewis was behind the counter, and he said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yeah, there's somebody following me. And I don't feel safe. And I need a gun or some mace or something so I can protect myself." And he showed me a can of mace. And he said, "Here, this will stop them in their tracks." So, I bought the mace. And we had a little conversation. And a few days later, I was walking around Girard Park where everybody goes, and I meet up with him again. And we talked; we had a really long conversation and stuff. And I told him about my life. He told me about his, and I figured, "Oh well, that's cool. I made another friend." I wasn't expecting anything. And then, after that night was over, he went home, and I said, "Oh, well, I'll never see him again." Well, he comes knocking at the door the next day and says, "Hey, do you want to go out to eat?" I said, "Yeah." And then he said, "Tomorrow I'm cooking at my house if you want to come over. I'll cook for you." I said, "Okay, fine." Well, he cooked me this deer roast with rice and gravy and all the trimmings, and god it was so good. Well, that night I went to his house. I stayed the night. And I never left.

GH: Oh, that’s so sweet.

KT: We were together almost 30 years before he was murdered in 2016.

GH: I’m so sorry to hear that.

KT: We met in 1987, in December of '87.

GH: I'm glad you got a lot of time with him.

KT: I was so lucky because most people don't even get a month of what I've experienced with him.

GH: Right, true love.

KT: True love. And it was almost love at first sight. It was like I knew it the minute I saw him, you know?

GH: Is he the only person you've ever dated?

KT: I've dated a few others, but nobody compares to him.

GH: Absolutely, absolutely. So, tell me about your marriage with him.

KT: Well, when we first got together, it was fine when it was just us. But then I was very uncomfortable with his family for a while because they had to get used to the idea. But I was just a roommate for about five years. And then they started questioning.

GH: Oh I’m sure.

KT: And then, his mom caught us. So, we had to come clean. I said, "You're the one that's gotta come clean; I'm out of the closet."

GH: That’s so funny. That’s awesome.

KT: But after that, they accepted me with open arms. And they are still my family today.

GH: That’s amazing. So, you mentioned something about your civil union, tell me about what that means to you and what that means to the community?

KT: Well, for me personally, that means the world to me. Even though he's gone now, and it's just a piece of paper to everybody else. But that held us together; that guaranteed that nobody could keep us apart if one of us got sick in a hospital. Or if it meant that when he passed away, I was his spouse. We made mirror wills. And I can't stress this enough to anybody who wants to get married, make mirror wills--you leave everything to your spouse, your spouse leaves everything to you. And not only that, but make each other the executor of your estates. You do that, and nobody can fight anything you want to give to each other. That's what we did.

GH: Absolutely necessary. So, you mentioned you had a civil union in 2000; you said that it was the first...

KT: I believe there was another couple, I think they were from Baton Rouge that got married around the same time. We couldn't find who they were. So, we're kind of like taking the title.

GH: And what is that title? Being the first …

KT: Being the first [same-sex] couple to get married in Lafayette.

GH: Perfect. So, let's talk about... You can take some time to think about it if you need. How do you feel about the recent political actions taken against LGBTQ+ people in Louisiana, such as book bans, legislation, sports bans, etc?

KT: I think it's stupid. It's really dumb. They are just trying to provoke us. And you know, if you don't say something, you're wrong; if you say something, you're wrong. So it's like, what are you supposed to do? And sooner or later, it just goes away. So I mean, if you wait long enough, things will fall into place.

GH: It’s just a waiting game.

KT: It's just a waiting game. Exactly.

GH: Yeah, I think the biggest thing people have to realize we're not going away.

KT: We're not. And we are organized now. I mean, we've all got each other's backs. If somebody picks on one, you got to pick on all of us.

GH: Yes, you're exactly right. What can you share about your experiences in queer spaces in Lafayette? So, we mentioned bars, was there anything else that you had that you found solace in?

KT: Really, that was the only thing--the bars were the only place we could go. Back in the late '70s, early '80s, that's where you met everybody. That's where everything took place. Unless you were best friends with a few people and you went to their houses or there was an after-party that somebody was giving, you could go do that and have fun. But other than that, there was really nothing but the bars, and there was about seven or eight bars at one time.

GH: Wow, that’s awesome.

KT: And now there's just only one: Bolt. Thank you Bolt for keeping the community going.

GH: Absolutely. So, in your experience, what support have you seen from schools and other educational institutions?

KT: Well, I graduated in 1981. And back then, there was no support at all. And when I got to college--when it was called USL; it’s now UL--they had an LGBT group that you could join. I joined that little group for a while, but they would keep breaking up and getting back together and breaking up. So, it wasn't stable back then, but now it seems like everything is stable and it's really caught on.

GH: Absolutely. So, what's your hope for the future of the LGBTQ+ community in Lafayette?

KT: For the future, I really do hope that everybody can be themselves, everywhere all the time. That's my biggest hope. And it seems like it's coming true.

GH: That’s awesome. That's so fulfilling.

KT: It's so nice to be able to walk down the street and be able to hold hands. You’ll still get a few crazy looks every once in a while, but it's not like it was back then where you had to stay three feet apart. And there was no COVID back then either.

GH: You're right, you’re right. Is there anything else you want to share before we end?

KT: Well, let's see. I told you I knew a bunch of bars that were open back then. Let's see if I can remember the whole list. The first one I remembered was The Owl's Perch, and then the second one I came in contact with was Fantasy One, that was my favorite bar. And then Pharaoh's opened up, and there was like a competition with Fantasy. And Fantasy eventually closed down. And then let’s see, after Pharaohs there was Images and Street Talk, which I think it was right here. I'm not sure; I think this was it. It was called Street Talk for a while. Let’s see what other ones. There was Sound Factory. There was Backstreet which was where, what's the name of that little bar? Legends. Where Legends is now, that's where Backstreet was. And then they moved into another place where there was another bar called Sound Factory. They moved in there and it was called Backside after that. So, it was Sound Factory and Backside for a while. And then let’s see, a little bit back in the '90s, there was Lautrec’s, which is now torn down. It was right across the street from the Salvation Army. It was a two-story building, and they condemned it because the upstairs was sagging. And then, there was another one called Charlene's.

GH: I’ve heard of Charlene’s.

KT: It was on Johnson Street; it was the old Lipstick Lounge or whatever. It's like a scrap yard now.

GH: Yeah. Oh yeah, I know what you’re talking about.

KT: Right there. And then, let’s see there was like I said Southern Comfort in the '70s; that's the one that burned down. There was C'est La Guerre, which was basically the staple. I mean, they would open and close all the time, but C'est La Guerre was always there.

GH: When did C'est La Guerre close?

KT: I think it was around, I want to say 1995.

GH: Oh wow, so it was here a long time.

KT: It's been a long time. It's a women's shelter now. I think that's the last I heard.

GH: Okay. I don’t think I know where it’s at.

KT: It's on... You know where the underpass on University is? Well, if you go down where the light is--that first light--if you look, it's the building right past... Well, before you get to the light, it’s the building right past that tire center. There's a tire center then there’s like a beige-looking painted building--that used to be John's. It used to be a big old red building.

GH: Okay, okay. Cool, cool. Anything else you have?

KT: I'm trying to think; I know I'm forgetting a few of them. Right now, that's about all I can think of.

GH: All right. Well, if that's all you have, I guess we'll end. If there's anything else you think of you're more than welcome to come back.

KT: Yeah. Oh, I'll think of something when I'm down the road.