

GLAMA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



PARTICIPANT: Katheryn Shields

DATE: February 27, 2018

LOCATION: Councilwoman Katheryn Shields' office in City Hall, located in downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

INTERVIEWER: Austin R. Williams

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Katheryn Shields was born in Smithville, Missouri and grew up in Parkville, Missouri. She attended college at UMKC where she received a Bachelor of Arts, a Master's degree, and a law degree. After serving as an Assistance County Counselor for Jackson County, she was elected to the Kansas City, Missouri City Council, serving from 1987 until 1994. During that time, she co-sponsored an ordinance that included antidiscrimination protection for people with HIV/AIDS. The same measure also included protections based upon an individual's actual or perceived sexual orientation. She has been described by many activists as a strong supporter of LGBTQ civil rights. Shields was reelected to the City Council in 2015 and again in 2019.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Kansas City, Missouri City Council, HIV/AIDS, the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Equal Rights Amendment, the Women's Political Caucus, the Human Rights Ordinance, the Human Rights Ordinance Project (HROP), the Westboro Baptist Church, Joanne Collins, Richard Berkley, Emanuel Cleaver, Bob Lewellen.

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Katheryn Shields Interview

AW: It's 10:00 on the dot. Hey, perfect.

KS: Okay.

AW: All right. Okay. Well, welcome. Today is February 27, 2018. My name is Austin Williams and this is part of the GLAMA Oral History Project. I spell my name A-U-S-T-I-N W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S. And I am here with Councilwoman Katheryn Shields. And while I just said your name, could you please say your name and spell it?

KS: Sure. Katheryn Shields. It's K-A-T-H-E-R-Y-N. And Shields is S-H-I-E-L-D-S.

AW: All right. And with this being part of the GLAMA Oral History Project, I know that the bulk of our conversation today is going to involve your time on the City Council and especially efforts to pass an anti-discrimination ordinance. But to kind of help us get to that point in time, could you give us a little background on when and where you were born?

KS: Sure.

AW: And maybe your background before getting in City Council.

KS: Sure.

AW: And, you know, where did you go to college? And-

KS: Yeah.

AW: Yeah.

KS: I'd be happy to. I was born in Smithville, Missouri and grew up in Parkville, Missouri from kindergarten through 11th grade. My folks owned 30 acres there and so I was kind of a modified farm girl. Not maybe all the way, but we had a few head of cattle and some chickens and that type of thing.

When I got to college age, I went to UMKC for my undergraduate degree, received a BA in history. Then I continued there and got my masters in ancient history. And from there, I got a variety of jobs. I worked for Planned Parenthood for a year as a health educator working with low income families. And then for several years I was – worked for the Concentrated Employment Program, which was located at 3030 Prospect and we helped trained minorities primarily, economically disadvantaged to help them get jobs and secure jobs for them. And so I did that until August of 1975 when I went to law school again at UMKC and graduated in '78. Was in the Prosecutor's Office for a year or so, then

went into private practice. In about '83 or so I went to work at Jackson County as an assistant county counselor doing governmental law. And then in 1987 I ran for the City Council and was elected.

AW: All right. And throughout that time period, especially the late 1970's and in early 1980's, and you had mentioned some involvement with Planned Parenthood.

KS: Right.

AW: Were you – most of these interviews are with people who were part of various activist organizations.

KS: Right.

AW: And is there any part of your life before you're on the City Council where you would describe yourself as an activist?

KS: Yes.

AW: Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

KS: Yes. Definitely.

AW: And, and what were those causes? And-

KS: Well, in 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment came out of Congress. And I had been talking with myself about how I was going to join the National Organization for Women, but I just hadn't done it. But when it came out of Congress, I did join the National Organization for Women, held various offices in that organization, including President. And then I got involved in the Women's Political Caucus locally and held a variety of offices, including President. And I was one of the young people that went down to Jefferson City to lobby for the Equal Rights Amendment, and that was certainly an eye opening experience-

AW: For sure.

KS: ...in terms of the governmental process.

AW: Right.

KS: And it led me to be even more convinced that we needed to have women and men who were committed to the concept of equality, that we all worked as a community to get elected to public office.

AW: Right.

KS: And that's really how I've spent my time since then. Sometimes as a candidate, sometimes supporting other people. But with that goal of actually bringing basically open-minded people into the governmental process who don't come in with a preconceived notion, but who, on every issue, whether it deals with human rights or just a zoning issue, that you're open to listening to the facts and listening to the concerns of the citizens.

AW: Right. Right. And I've talked with many women, for instance, who were part of organizations like NOW, and then also became involved in gay and lesbian issues more specifically. Was the issue of gay or lesbian civil rights something that – I hesitate to use the phrase like “on your radar,” but in the 1970's and then to the early 1980's, was that anything that you were specifically involved in or, or knew individuals? Or was this an issue that maybe came into greater focus later in life?

KS: Well, it – I had some initial involvement with it. Not particularly as an activist, but there certainly were women both in NOW and in the Women's Political Caucus whose focus was on rights for gay and lesbian people. And I was supportive of those, but frankly, the activism around those issues hadn't really come to the forefront yet.

AW: Right. Right. And in the late 1970's, there are – well, there's one individual that becomes almost anonymous with these anti-discrimination ordinances in Anita Bryant.

KS: Right. Sure. Yeah.

AW: And she actually did come to Kansas City and – but was any of her visit or those anti-discrimination ordinances in the late 1970's or early 1980's anything in particular that you remember?

KS: Well, I mean, I was aware of them, but I was not involved in standing up against them.

AW: Sure. Sure.

KS: I mean, that's just – it's just that simple. Yeah. Yeah.

AW: Right. Yeah. Yeah. No, and I just want to ask that to be clear, because clearly, you do start to stand up.

KS: Right. Right.

AW: I kind of want to get that time frame.

KS: Yeah.

AW: And then also, before we dive into the City Council, the early 1980's, an illness becomes reported that's originally called GRID, Gay Related Immune Deficiency.

KS: Right.

AW: And can you recall when the AIDS epidemic – well, it became an epidemic – first became something that was – that you were aware of?

KS: It really wasn't until the early 1980's. In 1982 I worked on Alan Wheat's congressional campaign. And there was a young man – a young gay man, Dennis. And I apologize, I don't remember his last name. But he worked very hard with us. And after that campaign was over, he very quickly became ill and within a couple of years died. And frankly, at that time here in Kansas City, I think none of us understood – certainly I did not understand what he had died of or the widespread toll that this was taking on people in Kansas City and the world as a whole. I just was not aware of it. And it's only as it became more in the public press that I went, “Oh, Dennis. That's why Dennis was suddenly so healthy and then just two or three years later was gone.” And it was a very eye opening experience in terms of, you know, when you personally lose someone you know, that really brings something home to you. But it also shows kind of how sheltered – I mean, I, I read a lot, you know, but I was not aware until several years after Dennis' death of the epidemic and what was happening there.

AW: Okay. And in 1987, when you're elected to the City Council, what were some of the major issues that you remember being at the forefront of either your agenda or the Council's agenda at that time? And maybe I'm asking that in a broader sense of when exactly and how perhaps the issue of AIDS and funding starts becoming more prominent.

KS: Right. Well actually, there were a lot of issues. I'm very much an environmentalist, and that's something that really grew out of my experience on the City Council. I'm very much concerned about mental health issues, and again, that's grown out of issues that I had to confront as a City Council person, issues that were facing our community. In terms of AIDS, I became aware as we began getting grants from the Federal govern – the Ryan White grants. Also Mayor Berkley was the Mayor my first term on the Council. And his wife, Sandy Berkley was very, very active in bringing attention to the AIDS epidemic and seeking funding and community support for individuals who were suffering from AIDS. And so it was really through her efforts that I first became aware and involved in trying to fund programs that would help people suffering from AIDS.

AW: Okay. And a number of organizations – and actually, let's take a quick break real quick.

KS: Okay.

[recording pauses]
[recording resumes]

AW: All right. And we're back. And what was I – oh, well, you had mentioned Mayor Berkley's –he had a task force on AIDS and that eventually culminates in the AIDS Council.

KS: Right.

AW: And philanthropists, such as his wife Sandy, I think were doing a lot of good work in raising money for people with AIDS and also in programs like the Good Samaritan Project.

KS: Right. Exactly.

AW: The Pink Triangle Political Coalition and a group named The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power – ACT UP/KC – form in 1988. And let me start by asking a broad question as far as – do you remember when those organizations – I'm going to use that phrase again – came on your radar? And ACT UP had some rather controversial methods.

KS: Right. They did.

AW: So what did you think about them as an organization?

KS: Right. Really, I didn't become aware of them until after we had introduced – that Mayor Cleaver and I sponsored and introduced the Human Rights Ordinance. And actually, that had come about because a group of lawyers and others that I just happened to know who were civil rights lawyers, actually invited me to a meeting where they talked about the need to have protections for gay and lesbian individuals. And they wanted to ask me to sponsor an ordinance that would ensure those protections. And I agreed. I did caution them that I wasn't sure where all my Council colleagues were, and so I thought they needed to think about what effect would it have if we weren't successful. And I thought they needed to think about that before I went forward. And so they assured me that they had talked with Emanuel Cleaver and he was absolutely convinced that when it was introduced it would, in fact, move forward. And so I said, "Fine. I am happy to be a sponsor on it."

Then after it was introduced and after we had all these long hearings and their – and the passage became more endowed, that's really when I became aware of the activists, because of course they began interacting and demonstrating at City Hall.

AW: Right. Okay. Can I ask you [for] a brief moment of clarification?

KS: Yeah.

AW: I believe that in 1990 Emanuel Cleaver's on the Council, but I believe Mayor Dick Berkley-

KS: Was still Mayor.

AW: ...was, was the co-sponsor with you on the original ordinance.

KS: Oh, okay. Oh, you may be right.

AW: Yeah. Yeah.

KS: Yes.

AW: And, and-

KS: You may be right that that – that they had talked to Emanuel, but he actually wasn't a sponsor. I had forgotten that, but I think you're probably right.

AW: Right-

KS: It was Dick Berkley and I.

AW: Okay. Yeah. And when you mentioned this initial meeting with some lawyers and – can you remember any individuals?

KS: Well, Cathy Connealy, Fred Slough, their partner – a woman partner whose name just escapes – Madden.

AW: Kay Madden.

KS: Kay Madden. Those were the people I had known before the meeting, and so those are the people whose names I remember. But there were probably – it was probably a gathering of eight or ten people that met with me to discuss these issues and to ask for my help in passing an ordinance.

AW: And it's been really interesting to hear about this genesis of the ordinance from different points of view. Jon Barnett and David Weeda who were with ACT UP at the time were at some point in late 1989 contacted by Mike Bates on the Human Relations Department.

KS: Oh, sure.

AW: And do you also recall working alongside-

KS: Well, I knew Mike was involved with the passage of it and was supportive of it.

AW: Right. And Jon and David go on to form a group known as the Human Rights Ordinance Project in early 1990. It appears for a few months. There is work being done on the language, whether it should be sexual orientation or sexual preference. There – in Kay Madden's collection are a few memos that refer to specific meetings. And I'd be curious if you remembered this one where there's one meeting that says that you came to the group about a week before the introduction of the ordinance, and initially they had wanted for what at the time was referred to as transsexuals and transvestites to be included. But you had polled the City Council and felt there wasn't support that had to be-

KS: Support. Right.

AW: So do you recall that? And-

KS: Yeah. I do. I do. And I was very torn, but I was trying to give them what was my best political advice. And my advice was that we should focus on gay and lesbian rights and not necessarily – and probably not look at transgender and transsexual issues.

AW: Right. Yeah.

KS: And, you know, perhaps not my proudest hour, but certainly a time when I was trying to explain to them what I thought were the parameters of what we could successfully get the City Council to do.

AW: Right. Yeah. And even the Human Rights Ordinance Project themselves end up voting to go ahead and move forward, understanding that passage of something would be better than passage of nothing.

KS: And that's what I suggested – let's get this passed and then we can come back and perfect [the ordinance].

AW: Right. And in one of those same memos with the Human Rights Ordinance Project, before it's introduced, there is perhaps a naive line that I read where they said, “Hopefully there won't be much opposition.”

KS: Right. [laughs] Yes. Yeah.

AW: And so in April it's introduced, and this is specifically ordinance 65430. And it certainly does draw a lot of opposition.

KS: No, it did. Yeah.

AW: And so by just asking it more in a question form, but to be specific, I guess this is the – I'm sorry – the Audit and Finance Committee?

KS: Yes. Yes.

AW: It, it was, it was in committee?

KS: It was in committee.

AW: With-

KS: And Bob Lewellen was the chair. Joanne Collins was, I believe, the co-chair. And then I was on the committee, and Mark Bryant was on the committee. Those I believe were the four members.

AW: Right. And could you put in perspective for people who aren't familiar with, you know, public testimony –I do believe I'm correct in saying that over three weeks of public testimony were heard over a dozen hours.

KS: Right. Yeah.

AW: Is this typical of public testimony?

KS: No.

AW: Or was this unique?

KS: This was very unique. And I remember one hearing we were having that went on I believe into the evening, but we had – people had to sign up to testify. And we only took testimony from individuals – our rules were you took testimony from people who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, since it was Kansas City, Missouri ordinances. And we had testimony like one African-American woman, an older lady told us that she had lived in San Francisco, and the gays had followed her from San Francisco. And they were continuing to basically torture her psychologically. And her example of that was she brought a frying pan with her with a lid stuck on it, and she said the gays had used their rays to fuse the lid onto her frying pan so she couldn't use it.

AW: Right.

KS: And, you know, we started out – there was a lot of great testimony from religious leaders, from community leaders, from neighborhood people all saying, you know, this is a basic human right and we should be passing this ordinance. But at the same time, there was a lot of testimony not dissimilar to what I have just related to you. Also, many of the African-American ministers were very strongly opposed and came out and spoke very strongly against it.

And then we ended that hearing with a woman who identified herself and said that she was from Independence. And Joanne said, “I'm sorry, but we don't take testimony from people who don't live in Kansas City, Missouri.” And she said, “Oh, please. I've stood here for so long. Won't you let me testify?” And so Joanne relented and said yes. And this woman, she looked like a little school librarian. I mean, she was very conservatively dressed. And she began talking, and she began describing in great detail the sexual con–possible sexual conduct that homosexual people could have. And she referred to terms for it, et cetera. And this went on for quite sometime. In the middle of it, Joanne leans to me and says, “And I had to let her talk.” *[laughs]*

But it kind of – I mean, the obsession that the opponents had – the fear and the obsession was very evident in the hearings.

AW: Yeah. And actually, I wish there had been maybe some time to show you all of these, you know, clips of – because I've watched them so many times. And one of the things that seemed you had to constantly refute was the conflation between homosexuality and pedophiles.

KS: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

AW: There seemed to be a big theme there. And this whole argument of a slippery slope.

KS: Yeah. Yeah.

AW: Yeah. So as far as-

KS: I think I probably at some point even said that statistically, heterosexual males are far more likely to be involved in – as a pedophile than homosexual men.

AW: Yeah. And you did say that actually on numerous times. Which some people refused to accept that answer and-

KS: Yeah. Sure.

AW: Yeah. And so for weeks testimony is heard. And if you recall this, in the – I believe it was May 2nd or May 3rd of 1990 where it passes out of committee on a week where Bob Lewellen was not in attendance.

KS: Right.

AW: And a lot of the opponents seemed to have a problem with that. And if I could ask, many of the individuals, especially from ACT UP that I've spoken with, do not speak of Mr. Lewellen in a very kind, you know, light.

KS: Right. Right.

AW: And could you talk [about] just maybe some of the inner workings of just the committee and maybe either some of the challenges or opposition that was coming from within the committee and anything in that regard?

KS: Sure. We really didn't have a lot of discussion within the committee. It was very clear that Joanne and I were strongly in support of the ordinance. Mark Bryant really had not said much at all. And frankly, Lewellen hadn't either. And my take on Lewellen not being there that day was that basically it allowed to come out of committee, because it was on a, I believe, two to one vote that it came out of committee, which if he had been there, it would have been a two/two and would not have come out of committee. And so, you

know, like all of us, Bob Lewellen was a complicated person. He was a very traditional Catholic. And he certainly had a great deal of trouble, I would say, dealing with this issue. But I will say, I never heard him ever say anything derogatory about anyone. It's just it was pretty clear that he wasn't comfortable with this ordinance and wasn't going to vote for it.

AW: And when it does go to the full council a week later, eventually, the council decides to take a vote on whether or not to send it back to committee. And it does get sent back to committee and all the footage indicates it was a very dramatic day. When that happens activists like Carl Hippensteel stand up and demand, "human rights now."

KS: Right. Yeah.

AW: And it's interesting. I've talked to many people with many different takes as to [how] they remember – some of them remember, "Oh, we knew it wasn't going to pass." And others say, "We were completely caught off guard." How do you remember – because for instance, Mayor Berkley was the co-sponsor with you and he also voted to send it back to committee. Do you recall on that day thinking that it was going to be sent back or-?

KS: Well, let me talk a little bit before on, on kind of where I saw people as being. First of all, Dick, who certainly was a co-sponsor, said to me at one point after all – there was all of this kind of dissent and opposition, he said, "Well, I've talked to our – Mike Bates and others, and I think most of the things they want are already covered by our existing ordinance against discrimination." And he said, "So I don't – what is it they specifically want?" And I said, "Dick, they want to be told they're okay. They want to be told that they have the rights to protections just like any other citizens of Kansas City." I mean, I said, "This is far more than just what specific changes this makes to our ordinances. This is about how they perceive themselves and how they want to be acknowledged, that they are an important and viable part of our community." I said, "That's what this vote is about."

And then I know Emanuel Cleaver continued to get a lot of pressure. I don't think he was anticipating the extent to which the minority ministers would come out against this ordinance. And I don't think he asked me, but someone came to me and said, "Emanuel would like you," meaning me, "to make the motion to send it back to committee." And will I do that? And I said, "No, I will not do that." I said, "I'm the person that tried to warn the community that this might not be a success. And Emanuel's the one who told them, 'Yes, we can get this done. We'll get this done. Introduce the ordinance.'" And I said, "So if Emanuel wants it sent back to committee, then he needs to send it back to committee. I'm not going to make that motion." I'm going to cry again, so. [*grabs tissue and chuckles*]

AW: That's okay. Yeah. I will stay with it.

[Off topic conversation]

AW: So it gets sent back to committee. And maybe I should – if we have time to briefly discuss it – and talk about one of the nuances of this ordinance. And I think people like Councilman Sharp spoke about this a lot in the final days’ discussion – was that there were actually three things that were being amended to this civil rights ordinance. There was the discrimination against families and housing.

KS: Right. Yeah.

AW: So familial status. And then there was the HIV and AIDS being indicated as a handicap status. And then also sexual orientation.

KS: Right. As a protected class.

AW: Right. And I’m curious as to whether or not either that was common to kind of group things together like that, or if maybe in hindsight that was one of the things that – because it appeared that there were people maybe that were supportive of the AIDS – everyone seemed to be supportive of the familial status.

KS: Yeah.

AW: And the AIDS portion was maybe more sympathetic than – but it was the sexual orientation that, that seemed to have a lot of problems with it.

KS: Yeah.

AW: Is that common, I suppose, to have multiple issues like that in one ordinance? Or is that-

KS: Well, I think what we were trying to do-

[Grabs phone. Off topic conversation]

KS: I think what we were trying and what our Human Rights Department tried to do was provide us with a comprehensive ordinance that would cover a variety of issues; housing, and AIDS as an illness, and then the whole issue of sexual orientation. So you know, it was probably the – I don’t know that I had another ordinance dealing with human rights while I was on the Council, so I can’t say it was ordinary or not. But I think the purpose of it was in fact to attach as much protection to look at the different ways in which individuals could be discriminated against and to try to address those different ways and provide protection.

AW: Right. Okay. And after May of 1990 when it gets sent back to committee, there are many protests over the summer of 1990 where people are calling for something called Rule 28 and they-

KS: Pull it out of committee. Uh-huh. Yeah.

AW: Right. Yeah. But it never comes to fruition.

KS: Right.

AW: And I know we have to move forward chronologically. So in November of 1990, the familial status and the AIDS portion of that initial ordinance does get passed by the council.

KS: Yes.

AW: And there's also a vote in Kansas City to limit City Council members to two term limits.

KS: Right.

AW: So this opens up a lot of City Council seats and Jon Barnett runs as the first openly gay City Council member. But the Human Rights Ordinance Project morphs into the Human Rights Project and tries to endorse candidates.

KS: Yes. I remember that.

AW: Right. Yeah. So do you remember I guess any of that process as far as either getting support from the Human Rights Project or the next Council – it takes until June 3rd of 1993 for this to come back.

KS: Right.

AW: What were some of the uphill battles or issues – I'm trying to frame it in the form a question. But with the new Council -

KS: Yeah.

AW: Why did it take a year and a half for it to come back – or was that-

KS: You mean from when it was defeated because we were-

AW: Right.

KS: The elections were – for the new council were in '93, right?

AW: Actually in 1991.

KS: Oh, they were '91 – oh, okay. I couldn't – that's right. I'm sorry. That's right. Yes.

AW: Right. Yeah. And in fact, maybe let me put this in [the context of] some events, because I know that, for instance, in the final campaign for Mayor, Emanuel Cleaver runs against Bob Lewellen, which is I think one of the reasons that the Human Rights Project endorses

Emanuel Cleaver. And do you remember controversy in the summer of 1991 about a Gay Pride proclamation? The gay and lesbian communities seemed to be upset about Emanuel Cleaver not issuing a proclamation, and he becomes the target of their anger for a while. But it culminates in a commission on gay and lesbian concerns. Is that anything that you remember or want to speak to?

KS: I vaguely remember it. I don't really remember any of the details around it.

AW: Okay.

KS: You know, Emanuel was running for mayor. You had all the minority ministers come out against the ordinance in '90. And he was nervous about it. I mean, I think, frankly, that's why it got sent back to committee. I think he didn't want to be on record as – now this is my opinion. I mean, he didn't announce that. I don't think he wanted to be on record supporting it, because I think he felt it would hurt his chances running for mayor, particularly if it turned the minority ministers against him.

AW: Right. And let me maybe move forward to something that happens just before this ordinance does come back and then gets passed, which is the – a group from Topeka, Kansas starts coming on the scene in the Westboro Baptist Church, and actually, in doing some research on their early protests, there's a gentleman in Kansas City – well, he's actually in New York, but he's from Kansas City named Kevin Oldham who was a piano player that passed away of AIDS.

KS: Oh, okay.

AW: And the Westboro Baptist Church threatened to demonstrate outside of his funeral in Kansas City, Missouri. And this appears to be the first time the Westboro Baptist Church actually leaves the state of Kansas.

KS: Ah, okay.

AW: And we haven't had a chance to speak about this ever in the past, but an emergency ordinance was passed by-

KS: Yes.

AW: ...the Kansas City Council to ban protesting outside of funerals-

KS: Right. I think we put some distances as to how close they could be or something like that.

AW: Right. So can I ask about – before I ask anything specific – I guess just your recollections of when the Westboro Baptist Church came – I'm going to use the phrase again – on your radar?

KS: Right.

AW: And what led to that passage of that ordinance – that emergency ordinance?

KS: Well, I think that basically they came on about the same time as we knew that this young man had died and they were – they, the Westboro people, were making announcements that they were going to come and protest outside his funeral. And I think everyone on the council was just deeply offended by that. And so we talked about what could we do, and what came out of it was the idea of doing – at least putting distance limits on how close someone could get to a funeral to protest the person's lifestyle during the funeral.

AW: And do you recall that, I guess, this ordinance ends up going to the courts, and I think gets rescinded at some point?

KS: That may be. I don't remember that.

AW: Okay. I was curious about that. Yeah. I think I'm accurate in stating that. And as far as like a first amendments –

KS: Yeah. I know they continued threatening and did some demonstrations at other funerals. I remember – I don't remember exactly when Ken Hill died, but he was a very active Democrat, very much a leader in the Democratic Party, and also a gay man. And I know they threatened that they were going to picket his funeral. I actually think some people from labor kind of dissuaded them as to the wisdom of doing that. I don't think that was actually state action. I think it was individual action of people saying that this is not a safe course of action for you to take.

AW: All right. Well, I actually recall David Weeda talking about – and some individuals – so Ken Hill dies within days of the passage of the ordinance-

KS: That's right. Yeah.

AW: ...and just about a month, maybe a month and a half after the death of – or the funeral of Kevin Oldham. But there's a story, actually I think they talk about that the Westboro Baptist Church did get there early and they turned the sprinklers on them. And that they-

KS: That may be true, too. Yeah.

AW: ...turned away. Yeah. But many people say a lot of very positive things about Ken Hill. And so in that time frame, in June of 1993 – actually June 3, 1993, and there's some footage of this – the City Council does finally add sexual orientation to the civil rights ordinance and it is, by this point, a pretty different Council than the one initially. It passes eight to zero. And could I ask – I'm – I don't want to make assumptions, but the fact that many people were not in attendance that day –

KS: Right.

AW: ...is that a coincidence? Or is it maybe that when there are people that can't vote for something, they're not there that day or-?

KS: Yes. I think – to have five people absent at the same time is a very unusual occurrence.

AW: Right. Okay. So in, in a way, maybe abstaining from a vote is sometimes the best form of support that people can offer, or-

KS: Yes.

AW: Do you recall – you've done so many things, that I, I can only imagine trying to pick out something very specific from, you know, decades ago. But do you recall when it finally did pass? Maybe not the specific day, but just, you know, it had been something you almost throughout your entire time on the Council-

KS: Had advocated.

AW: Yeah. So when it did finally pass, was it either almost anti-climatic, because it had been so long? Or was it a big relief? Or-

KS: No. It was a great – it was a great day. It was absolutely a great day. And I think those eight of us who showed up and voted were very much kindred spirits on that day in believing that it was time to say that sexual orientation did not make someone less than a full citizen of Kansas City, Missouri. And we took that vote to affirmatively say that, and that protections against discrimination were, going forward, going to be included in our ordinances.

AW: Right. Well, and so many people have said – there are stories that, for instance, the day that it didn't pass, there was a meeting at All Souls Unitarian Church.

KS: There was. Yeah.

AW: And you show up with your son. Maybe I shouldn't talk – maybe I should ask. Do you remember that?

KS: Oh, yeah. I remember that. I actually remember that more than the day that it did pass.

AW: Oh, really?

KS: We were – I think we were all – I – you had asked me earlier. I was very disappointed. I don't know that I was surprised, but I was disappointed that day that it didn't pass. And so somebody had given me word that there was going to be a gathering at All Souls, and so I went there and I took my son who was a toddler with me. And, you know, we just celebrated together. I mean, it's hard to say celebration, but yet we had all worked so hard and we worked so well, and we knew that this wasn't the last step in the journey. And we

really just took some time to be loving and open and supportive of one another. And it was a wonderful gathering. It was one of the best I remember in my political career.

AW: Well, as we maybe bring this overall discussion to a close and – I should potentially ask about – is there anything in particular that we haven't addressed that you would like to address as far as any key events or individuals or-?

KS: No. No. I don't think so. I think we've pretty well covered it.

AW: Okay. Well, in a second then, we'll bring this to a close. And there's one final thing I'll ask us to do.

KS: Okay.

AW: But I guess any – you kind of just did it, but as far as where in your career or in Kansas City history, I mean, the move to include sexual orientation – what it meant to you or where you think it either led afterwards or just any closing thoughts I suppose.

KS: Well, I think it meant a great deal to me, as I've said before. I mean, I am – I've been a member of the American Civil Liberty's Union since I was [in] my early 20's, on the Board, very active. Civil rights, human rights have always been – protection of people under the Constitution have always been issues that I am very concerned about and very cognizant of. And it became so clear to me just after probably one meeting with the group that I described earlier that this was something that needed to happen. And I was willing to be part of helping to make that happen. And so it was really significant.

The thing closest to it probably in my later career was after 9/11. I put together a commission dealing with issues of discrimination against Muslim Americans. And we did a whole thing where we went to different – not just to the mosque, but to all different religions represented in this community and held meetings in those different places of worship. And that had that similar kind of feeling of people from across the community coming together, knowing that they were standing up to emotions that expressed fear, but also what is least admirable about people – when they act out of fear instead of out of knowledge and compassion and love. And that was a similar kind of experience that I had as to when we passed the Human Rights Ordinance.

AW: Okay. Well, I guess on that note, we can go ahead and bring this to a close. And on behalf of the GLAMA Oral History Project, today, February 27, 2018, Councilwoman Katheryn Shields, I thank you so much for your time.

KS: You're welcome. A pleasure to be involved, both then and now.