

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

The Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

Anne Stanback

*Anne Stanback on the Connecticut Campaign
and Freedom to Marry's Board of Directors*

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2016

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Anne Stanback, 2015

Anne Stanback was director of Love Makes a Family, the campaign to win marriage in Connecticut, and served on the steering committee and then board of directors for Freedom to Marry from 2010 to 2016. Stanback was born in 1958 in North Carolina and raised and educated there through college. She attended Yale Divinity School with the goal of doing social justice work. In the early 1980s she had come out as a lesbian and worked in feminist and lesbian organizations. In 1999 she was a founder of Love Makes a Family, which advocated extending marriage rights to same-sex couples. In this interview, Stanback discusses the marriage equality movement in Connecticut from the 1990s through 2009 when the state started issuing licenses to same-sex couples. Stanback also discusses her role on the steering committee and, once it was separately incorporated, on the board Freedom to Marry's 501(c)(4) political advocacy arm.

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Freedom to Marry Oral History Project

In the historically swift span of roughly twenty years, support for the freedom to marry for same-sex couples went from an idea a small portion of Americans agreed with to a cause supported by virtually all segments of the population. In 1996, when Gallup conducted its first poll on the question, a seemingly insurmountable 68% of Americans opposed the freedom to marry. In a historic reversal, fewer than twenty years later several polls found that over 60% of Americans had come to support the freedom to marry nationwide. The rapid increase in support mirrored the progress in securing the right to marry coast to coast. Before 2004, no state issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples. By spring 2015, thirty-seven states affirmed the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. The discriminatory federal Defense of Marriage Act, passed in 1996, denied legally married same-sex couples the federal protections and responsibilities afforded married different-sex couples—a double-standard cured when a core portion of the act was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. Full victory came in June 2015 when, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution’s guarantee of the fundamental right to marry applies equally to same-sex couples.

At the very center of the effort to change hearts and minds, prevail in the courts and legislatures, win at the ballot, and triumph at the Supreme Court was Freedom to Marry, the “sustained and affirmative” national campaign launched by Evan Wolfson in 2003. Freedom to Marry’s national strategy focused from the beginning on setting the stage for a nationwide victory at the Supreme Court. Working with national and state organizations and allied individuals and organizations, Freedom to Marry succeeded in building a critical mass of states where same-sex couples could marry and a critical mass of public support in favor of the freedom to marry.

This oral history project focuses on the pivotal role played by Freedom to Marry and their closest state and national organizational partners, as they drove the winning strategy and inspired, grew, and leveraged the work of a multitudinous movement.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California Berkeley first engaged in conversations with Freedom to Marry in early 2015, anticipating the possible victory in the Supreme Court by June. Conversations with Freedom to Marry, represented by founder and president Evan Wolfson and chief operating officer Scott Davenport, resulted in a proposal by OHC to conduct a major oral history project documenting the work performed by, and the institutional history of, Freedom to Marry. From the beginning, all parties agreed the Freedom to Marry Oral History Project should document the specific history of Freedom to Marry placed within the larger, decades-long marriage movement. Some interviews delve back as far as the 1970s, when a few gay activists first went to court seeking the freedom to marry, and the 1980s, when Evan Wolfson wrote a path-breaking thesis on the freedom to marry, and “domestic partner” legislation first was introduced in a handful of American cities. Many interviews trace the beginnings of the modern freedom to marry movement to the 1990s. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Hawaii responded seriously to an ad hoc marriage lawsuit for the first time ever and suggested the potential validity of the lawsuit, arguing that the denial of marriage to same-sex couples might be sex discrimination. The world’s first-ever trial on the freedom to marry followed in 1996, with Wolfson as co-counsel, and culminated in the first-ever victory affirming same-sex couples’ freedom to marry. While Wolfson rallied the movement to work for

the freedom to marry, anti-gay forces in Washington, D.C. successfully enacted the so-called Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. The vast majority of the interviews, however, focus on the post-2003 era and the work specific to Freedom to Marry. Moreover, OHC and Freedom to Marry agreed that the essential work undertaken by individual and institutional partners of Freedom to Marry (such as the ACLU, GLAD, Lambda Legal, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Haas, Jr. Fund, and the Gill Foundation) should also be covered in the project. Once the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell* in June 2015, the proposal was accepted and work began on the project.

After an initial period of further planning and discussions regarding who should be interviewed and for roughly how long, an initial list of interviewees was drafted and agreed upon. By December 2016, 23 interviews had been completed, totaling roughly 95 hours of recordings. Interviews lasted from two hours up to fourteen hours each. All interviews were recorded on video (except for one, which was audio-only) and all were transcribed in their entirety. Draft transcripts were reviewed first by OHC staff and then given to the interviewees for their review and approval. Most interviewees made only minimal edits to their transcripts and just a few seals or deletions of sensitive information were requested. Interviewee-approved transcripts were then reviewed by former Freedom to Marry staff to ensure that no sensitive information (about personnel matters or anonymous donors, for example) was revealed inadvertently. OHC next prepared final transcripts. Approved interview transcripts along with audio/video files have been cataloged and placed on deposit with The Bancroft Library. In addition, raw audio-files and completed transcripts have been placed on deposit with the Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, the official repository for the Freedom to Marry organizational records.

The collected interviews tell a remarkable story of social change, the rate of which was rapid (although spanning more than four decades), and the reach profound. Historians of social justice and social movements, politics and policy, and law and jurisprudence will surely pore over the freedom to marry movement and Freedom to Marry's role in that for explanations of how and why this change occurred, and how it could happen so rapidly and completely. Future generations will ask: What explains such a profound transformation of public opinion and law, particularly in an era where opinions seem more calcified than malleable? What strategies and mechanisms, people and organizations played the most important roles in changing the minds of so many people so profoundly in the span of less than a generation? Having witnessed and participated in this change, we—our generation—had an obligation to record the thoughts, ideas, debates, actions, strategies, setbacks, and successes of this movement in the most complete, thoughtful, and serious manner possible. Alongside the archived written documents and the media of the freedom to marry movement, this oral history project preserves those personal accounts so that future generations might gain insight into the true nature of change.

Martin Meeker
Charles B. Faulhaber Director
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December 2016

Freedom to Marry Oral History Project Interviews

Richard Carlbom, “Richard Carlbom on the Minnesota Campaign and Field Organizing at Freedom to Marry.”

Barbara Cox, “Barbara Cox on Marriage Law and the Governance of Freedom to Marry.”

Michael Crawford, “Michael Crawford on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Scott Davenport, “Scott Davenport on Administration and Operations at Freedom to Marry.”

Tyler Deaton, “Tyler Deaton on the New Hampshire Campaign and Securing Republican Support for the Freedom to Marry.”

Jo Deutsch, “Jo Deutsch and the Federal Campaign.”

Sean Eldridge, “Sean Eldridge on Politics, Communications, and the Freedom to Marry.”

James Esseks, “James Esseks on the Legal Strategy, the ACLU, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Kate Kendell, “Kate Kendell on the Legal Strategy, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and LGBT Legal Organizations.”

Harry Knox, “Harry Knox on the Early Years of Freedom to Marry.”

Amanda McLain-Snipes, “Amanda McLain-Snipes on Bringing the Freedom to Marry to Oklahoma, Texas, and the Deep South.”

Matt McTighe, “Matt McTighe on the Marriage Campaigns in Massachusetts and Maine.”

Amy Mello, “Amy Mello and Field Organizing in Freedom to Marry.”

John Newsome, “John Newsome on And Marriage for All.”

Kevin Nix, “Kevin Nix on Media and Public Relations in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Bill Smith, “Bill Smith on Political Operations in the Fight to Win the Freedom to Marry.”

Marc Solomon, “Marc Solomon on Politics and Political Organizing in the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Anne Stanback, “Anne Stanback on the Connecticut Campaign and Freedom to Marry’s Board of Directors.”

Tim Sweeney, “Tim Sweeney on Foundations and the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Cameron Tolle, “Cameron Tolle on the Digital Campaign at Freedom to Marry.”

Thomas Wheatley, “Thomas Wheatley on Field Organizing with Freedom to Marry.”

Evan Wolfson, “Evan Wolfson on the Leadership of the Freedom to Marry Movement.”

Thalia Zepatos, “Thalia Zepatos on Research and Messaging in Freedom to Marry.”

Interview 1: April 11, 2016

01-00:00:00

Meeker: Today is April 11, 2016. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Anne Stanback. We are here at her home in Avon, Connecticut. This is interview session number one. Thank you for joining me today. I appreciate your time, and hosting me at your house. And this is great here. We're kind of inside/outside, so the lighting is really, really nice. The way that we begin all these interviews is you just tell me when and where you were born.

01-00:00:35

Stanback: I was born in December of 1958 in Salisbury, North Carolina, which is between Charlotte and Greensboro.

01-00:00:45

Meeker: And tell me a little bit about the circumstances into which you were born, the kind of work that your parents did, for instance.

01-00:00:52

Stanback: My dad worked in a company that made aspirin powder, Stanback aspirin powder, that his father had invented. And Salisbury and neighboring Spencer, North Carolina were hub areas of the Southern Railroad. The railroad provided a perfect distribution source and the aspirin was sold in that way, at least in its early days. My mother was a journalist, and stopped working when she had my two brothers and myself. She eventually went back and taught at the local college, Catawba College, taught journalism and creative writing and English. And both of them were involved in politics in our small town. My dad ended up being the mayor of the town for a few years. My mother developed breast cancer when I was in early high school, and died when I was a senior in high school, so that was obviously an important part of my early life.

01-00:02:09

Meeker: When you were being raised, was your family religious? Did they attend services anywhere?

01-00:02:16

Stanback: My mother was raised Presbyterian. My dad was raised Baptist, and both were very, very liberal in their beliefs, and when they married they liked the minister at the Methodist church, so that's where we went, and were raised, and active in the youth group and Sunday school, things like that.

01-00:02:42

Meeker: Were there any particular kind of values that you remember getting from those experiences, religious experiences, or youth group, coming out of that situation?

01-00:02:53

Stanback: You know, in some ways it feels like North Carolina has gotten much more conservative, certainly in the last month. [laughs] But in the last number of

years, not that there wasn't a lot of religion when I grew up, but, again, both my parents, I think they probably would've both called themselves agnostics, or certainly my mother would have, but my dad, it was very important for him that we attend church. And I think the golden rule certainly would be front and center: treat others as you want to be treated. His favorite Bible verse—not that he went around quoting them, but he always talked about “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God,” and embraced a justice-based theology, I think. So those were the values. We grew up in a very comfortable, and I think—probably had more money than I was aware of, but were always raised to not flaunt that, and be aware that we were very fortunate in what we had, and that it was very important to tithe to the local church, and very important to be philanthropic. So I think those were values that my brothers and I were taught growing up.

01-00:04:40

Meeker:

Did you attend a local public school?

01-00:04:43

Stanback:

Yep, went to Salisbury High School, graduated from there, and I think that was a really important part of my growing up, too. When I was in elementary school—I remember because it was so obvious—there were just two African American kids in my first grade class, and by the time I got to high school the student body population was fifty/fifty black/white. So it was very much during the time of integration. Before I got to high school, there had been conflicts, maybe four years before I got there. I had some great teachers, some less than great teachers, but going to school with really diverse students and friends was important.

01-00:05:53

Meeker:

You mentioned some conflicts. Those were racial conflicts that preceded you attending there?

01-00:05:58

Stanback:

Yeah, I think what was happening in a lot of places around the country, around not just the South, but I think in a lot of Southern schools, as schools were integrating, a big piece of it was you have a black high school, you have a white high school. White high schools are typically going to be the ones that black students are going to move into, because they're better facilities. Both schools have a name. They have a mascot. They have a culture. And figuring out, okay—that white high school was Boyden High School—you know, it shouldn't be that the black students have to come in and go to the white high school just as it had been, so they changed the name and the mascot. I don't remember what the mascot was before, but we became the hornets. Maybe it was the yellow jackets. So just those kinds of things. And the big thing when I was a student was quotas for cheerleaders, so it was important that there were an equal number of black and white cheerleaders. When I was going to school—it's not the case today—I don't think there were any Latino kids that I went to school with. So that's different today in North Carolina. So that was

where we had to learn to compromise, and not everybody necessarily got their way. But I think, looking back, we actually did pretty well.

01-00:07:38

Meeker:

So did some of the friendship circles around campus start to integrate, as well, or was there still a lot of separation by race?

01-00:07:45

Stanback:

I think to some degree, but I may be thinking back with maybe rosier-colored glasses than was really the case. I do remember that our cafeteria, just the way it was built, there were two sides of the cafeteria, and there was definitely a self-segregating black side of the cafeteria and a white side of the cafeteria. Now, people went back and forth, and actually there was some interracial dating, but it was enough of an issue that it was commented upon.

01-00:08:22

Meeker:

So you attended Davidson College, correct?

01-00:08:24

Stanback:

That's right.

01-00:08:25

Meeker:

And that's nearby.

01-00:08:27

Stanback:

Yeah, it's about forty-five minutes.

01-00:08:29

Meeker:

What attracted you to that college?

01-00:08:33

Stanback:

It's funny, looking back now, because kids today just look all over the country in terms of where they want to go to school, but I applied to UNC, Duke, Davidson, and I think Wake Forest. I had gone to tennis camp at Davidson as a teenager, because I played high school tennis, and then actually played tennis at Davidson. I loved the interviews that I had with the staff, I loved the classes I attended, I loved the dean of students. She was just wonderful. I met some great people on my visit. And I probably didn't think about it as carefully as I should've, but in fact I had a fantastic experience, just made amazing friends, and got involved with the social justice groups at Davidson, and that was really an important part of my time there. Played tennis all four years. Played basketball a couple of years. It was a small enough school that I actually could play varsity sports, and that was fun.

01-00:09:54

Meeker:

So I guess you graduated, I guess, 1981.

01-00:09:56

Stanback:

Eighty-one.

01-00:09:56

Meeker:

So this is late 1970s. What was the nature of the social justice organizations of the school? What kind of issues were they interested in?

01-00:10:07

Stanback:

The things that I got involved with early on—nuclear power was a very active movement at that point, and—

01-00:10:20

Meeker:

Not too long after Three Mile Island.

01-00:10:22

Stanback:

That's right, that's right. And I think it was freshman year, a bunch of my friends drove to Washington and went to one of the marches. There was a nuclear plant in a place called Barnwell, South Carolina, and we went down and protested there, didn't get arrested, but we were the support group, and I remember Jackson Browne came and did this concert at midnight, and we're all in our sleeping bags, so that was really fun. Probably some of my earliest activism started back in junior high school, and I think it was because of Title 9 and because of sports, and the fact that at that earlier age I could compete with my friends who were boys, and actually with my boyfriend at the time, who was also a tennis player, and was as good as they were, but there were no girls' teams when I first got to junior high. Title 9 had just been implemented, and so they started a tennis team, and then when I got to high school they started a softball team and a basketball team. And so I was in those first classes, but the facilities weren't as good. The boys got rackets and shoes. We got nothing. We got the worst times to use the gyms and the courts. So I think it was a very blatant form of discrimination that affected me. I mean, I was aware of racism, certainly, but some of the more blatant forms of racism had begun to change, and this was something that was just in your face.

So when I got to college, I had a very progressive group of friends, but Davidson as an institution at that time, there wasn't a women's center, there weren't women's studies courses, I was clueless about gay issues, and there were a couple of people that were sort of rumored to be gay, but I didn't know gay people. So I did get involved with some of the issues related to inequities in women's sports, and we wrote a letter to the president, and met with him, and that kind of thing. Also, at that time when I was at Davidson we were working for what was called an equal access admission policy, because when I was there, there were fourteen hundred students. There was a clause in the college rules that there always had to be a thousand men, so it made it harder for women to get in, and so we worked to try to change that. Some of my friends and I started the first women's center on campus, and did some work around some women's studies curriculum, which later became a very important part of my life. An interest in women's issues was something that was growing in my later years in college. But while I was there, issues of hunger, nuclear power, educational equity, things like that were the major things.

01-00:14:10

Meeker:

So you're doing this, in essence, feminist activism on campus. Were you plugging in with any of the national organizations, like NOW? Were you subscribing to *Ms.* magazine, anything along those lines?

01-00:14:21

Stanback:

Yeah, I was reading *Ms.* magazine. A friend had a subscription, so we were reading it in the dorm. Really was my senior year. One of my friends had gone off to California that summer and come back and had lots of new feminist ideas, and we were really starting to get excited about that. Let's see. Often what you get involved with is the professors that you feel like are your mentors. In my case, there was one professor who led our student service corps group, and then the campus minister also was a really important influence. There was a lot going on with strip mining in Appalachia, so we went off and did some investigation of that. So it was a whole variety of issues, but things that I had not been aware of in high school. So I just felt like my world was opened, and people would probably laugh at that, given that it's little Davidson, but for me it was just a wonderful, eye-opening experience.

01-00:15:54

Meeker:

You attended Yale Divinity School as a graduate student, I think originally with the notion of becoming an ordained minister. Can you tell me about that decision? And I guess faith must've played a pretty important role in your life at this point, too.

01-00:16:11

Stanback:

It actually wasn't with the idea of becoming ordained. I think that, going back to the campus minister who was active in a lot of the things that my friends and I were active with, I couldn't figure out—you know, I was an English major. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. A lot of my friends were going to law school. I didn't really think I wanted to go to law school. I wanted to get involved in social justice work, and I had this naïve idea, okay, if I go to divinity school and get involved with the church writ large I don't have to pick. I don't have to decide, oh, I want to work for women, or I want to work for economic justice, or hunger issues, or nuclear power, against nuclear power. I can work on them all in some national setting. And so there was that justice piece that I was interested in. But I also, as I said earlier, I was raised by parents who encouraged questions and doubts, and I had real questions about what did I believe, did I believe. I certainly did not believe sort of traditional—I was raised Christian, but I did not believe basic things like divinity of Jesus, and virgin birth, those kinds of things. But also I had questions, big questions about do I believe in God, what does it all mean. And I just took some great religion classes, and found the study of those big questions really fascinating. And so I thought, you know, let me try this out.

And I lived in Boston for a year after college, and applied to schools, and sort of like with Davidson, I just found the environment at Yale particularly open and friendly, and ended up going there, and had three great years. I think most

people who attend, even if they don't go in thinking they want to be ordained ministers, you know, you toy with the idea, because that's what lots of people are doing. At Yale, I think about a third of the student body ends up becoming ordained. But the year after college I worked in a bookstore, and could read every book for free, so I was just ravenously reading, and I was in Boston, and that's where my education with regard to feminism just blossomed. And so when I got to Yale I was very interested in feminist theology, and liberation theology, and I was just reading everything I could get my hands on. And so that was a particular interest. But it was also in my first year that I figured out that I was a lesbian, and so that began a whole new journey.

01-00:19:37

Meeker:

Is there a relationship between your reading of feminist theology and kind of understanding perhaps some of the more spiritual dimensions to what that talks about—I mean, you know, sort of like in the Mary Daly tradition, right—and lesbianism? I mean, was there an intellectual element to it, or was it more kind of a personal epiphany, maybe, that you realized who it was that you wanted to spend your time with in an intimate setting?

01-00:20:15

Stanback:

I think that reading the philosophical, all different traditions of both feminism and feminist theology, from the Mary Dalys on through, people like Letty Russell who taught at Yale, who had a different philosophy from Mary Daly, that was just intellectually fascinating, and I think it certainly must've influenced my political outlook on the world. I think who I was, that had been set for a long time, and I was just slow to recognize it, in part because I think I didn't have role models. I mean, plenty of people in small towns realize early on, oh, this is who I am. I think for me, I looked back and it was like, oh, that crush. Oh, that's why I had all these really nice boyfriends that I never was in love with, and what was the matter with me. Well, nothing was the matter with me, I just was looking at the wrong gender. And I think being in Boston, I played on a National Organization for Women/NOW softball team, and I joined as the token straight woman, and by the end of the season I had fallen in love with the shortstop, [laughter] and just the typical story. And then I was starting at Yale. And so going to divinity school, realizing within a few weeks, wow, what's going on here. But then there was both a women's center, where there were both lesbian, straight, and bi women, as well as a gay/straight alliance that I didn't really connect with my first year, but eventually started getting involved with.

01-00:22:27

Meeker:

Were there any classes that were particularly important in beginning to understand who you were around sexuality, and perhaps the history, like lesbian and gay history?

01-00:22:42

Stanback:

I did not ever get to take any lesbian/gay-specific classes. They just weren't offered. I mean, the closest thing would've been my feminist theology classes,

but—let's see—I met my partner, now wife, Charlotte my second year in divinity school, so '83. And she reminds me of this regularly, that when we first got together I guess I said to her, after a weekend together, “I'm not quite sure I'm a lesbian,” and she thought to herself, whoa, what have I gotten myself into. But within a week she had not only made me clear, yes, I'm a lesbian, but if you're going to be a lesbian, you'd better be a political lesbian, because she was already involved with political work in the Hartford area. I like to think I would've gotten there on my own, but she got me there faster.

01-00:23:56

Meeker: People help us all the time. [laughs]

01-00:23:57

Stanback: Yes, that's right, that's right.

01-00:24:00

Meeker: Well, apropos of that, what were the political issues related to lesbian and gay political issues in Hartford at that time?

01-00:24:12

Stanback: Well, Charlotte went to the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, and helped start the LGBT group there, gay and lesbian group there. You couldn't really be out and get a job, and there were no nondiscrimination laws, probably at the school and certainly in the state. And after we had been together for a year, a new organization was forming, and we went to the first meeting called the Connecticut Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights, and that was the group that eventually formed a really impressive statewide grassroots network. Charlotte and I were both in leadership positions, and it occupied our life pretty steadily for about seven years as we worked to get a comprehensive nondiscrimination law passed. Now, that was back in the days where we were clueless about gender identity and transgender people, but it ended up passing in 1991. The organization had a statewide steering committee that was made up of representatives of different chapters, sort of roughly based on the counties of Connecticut, and—I was telling somebody this recently—I probably was going to two meetings a month for seven years around the passage of our nondiscrimination law, and that was just such an important time for me. It's where I really learned about organizing, everything from how do you set an agenda and get people to come to a meeting in your community, to where the places that you go if you want to educate what we used to call the movable middle, and how much do you focus on your base and getting them mobilized, versus how much are we reaching out to the people who we think we can win, versus do we even talk to the people who are completely against us.

01-00:26:58

Meeker: Well, maybe you can dig into that a little bit, because obviously in these interviews that I'm doing there is always a tendency for the new world to be discovered many, many times, and so it's important to go back and recognize

that a lot of what we know now is learned and established and then passed down to us. So this moment where you are learning the process of in fact getting a statewide law enacted in the state legislature is extremely important, and these conversations, I think, that are being had about the balance between motivating your base and speaking to the middle, and even questioning whether you talk to the strong opposition. Can you walk me through that process a little bit?

01-00:27:51
Stanback:

Yeah, I haven't thought about some of this in a while. One thing that just popped into my head, again, a big piece of the whole gestalt back then was are you out, are you not out, the process of coming out, who was out, how do you come out, coming out again and again and again, it's not a one-time thing. So I was later one of the co-directors of the statewide organization, but I got started heading up the New Haven chapter, the New Haven County chapter. And one of the things that we would do is once a month we would go—and I'm sure we were wearing little pink triangle buttons or pins, and we would pick a restaurant, and we would go—and we probably had a name for this, but I don't remember—and we would go and be out gay and lesbian people in a restaurant. And that was a powerful thing. It's just hard to imagine now. There were a couple of gay bars in Connecticut, or in New Haven, but we'd go to the old family seafood restaurant down in Milford, Connecticut, and it was really sort of scary. And it wasn't like we were doing—eventually we were doing kiss-ins and things, but this was just going, and—how did we make it clear? I don't remember how we even made it clear, other than our buttons. I don't think we were even sort of necessarily holding hands. There was the phase we went through where we would stamp all our money with the little stamps that said gay money. But just being out.

I remember my first real job after graduating from the divinity school was I worked for an organization called Infoline, which was a partnership with the United Way of Connecticut, and I was working with the child daycare programs around the region, and helping parents find quality affordable daycare, and we gathered all this information. But I remember I wrote a letter to the editor in my role with this Connecticut Coalition Organization, something related to sexual orientation discrimination, and signed just my name, Anne Stanback, Guilford, Connecticut, and I got called to the office of the head of the United Way. "Is that really appropriate? Because you work with the daycare program of this organization." And it ended up not being a big thing, and certainly I knew this happened, but that was really the first time it had happened to me. You know, when I came out—and I came out pretty quickly once I sort of figured out, yes, I'm a lesbian; I wanted to come out quickly because I didn't want my parents to learn about it, you know, from anybody else but me. And once I came out to them, then I just sort of felt like I needed to come out very publicly.

And then that was sort of my first role as being the professional lesbian, but the *New Haven Register*, which was the big paper at the—still is—had this thing called the Minority Affairs Board, and I was asked to be on it, representing the lesbian community, the lesbian and gay community. And so I sort of became very public in who I was through the coalition and through that *New Haven Register* Minority Affairs Board. And as the years went on with our nondiscrimination campaign, I would speak at Rotary groups and churches, and we'd get—again, back then there weren't a lot of people who were as willing or able to be out, and so I would often be the person to get quoted, or be on some TV segment. And I got a couple of death threats early on. I didn't take them seriously. They were sort of crackpot. But you can't get one of those and not get a little bit of butterflies in the stomach. But we didn't have any of the messaging and research that we had in the post-Prop 8 marriage work, and now that we have around nondiscrimination, with organizations like MAP, Movement Advancement Project. So we were sort of figuring it out on our own, and it was a little bit of trial and error.

And I think this was more my personality and less that I went to divinity school, but my whole philosophy was I was going to be open, I was going to be proud, and I was going to speak up when things were wrong. But I went with the view that people, that much of their views were coming from ignorance and not from hatred. You know, there are the people who hate us, but a lot of it was both around just gay and then later with marriage, that it was a new idea, it was not familiar, it was scary, it just sort of unhinged their foundational view of the world, and I always felt like, and still believe, the more we talk about this, the more it becomes normalized. That is how we win people over. And to just be ourselves, I mean, and that is not a new concept, but that is how we won issues of nondiscrimination. That's how we won marriage. And I would not get hostile, and I would usually be debating people, again, both in the old nondiscrimination coalition and then with marriage, opponents who did not come off very rationally. Brian Brown, who ended up running the national group called the National Organization for Marriage, he started in Connecticut, and we did the dog and pony show around the state many times. And it's just taking people where they are, and not assuming worst intent, even when sometimes there was ill intent.

01-00:35:33
Meeker:

I think that what you just explained is really interesting, and very important, because the way that I'm hearing it—and this is going to be a long question, so I apologize in advance [laughter]—but you're taking us from a point in time in which there was very little established methodology for changing people's minds to a point in time where now we have something that is maybe not tried and true—well, it's certainly tried, and it's worked, and that is, in many ways, the journey narrative in which you, in many ways, sort of acknowledge, and maybe even honor, where people are coming from, and use then various methodologies to allow them to evolve in their opinions. But go back to this point in time in the 1980s when you're doing kind of a lunch

counter sit-in, or there were the kiss-ins, right, later on. And those can be very confrontational. I mean, I remember at that point in time I was probably late in high school, early in college, and you have the kiss-ins, and people going to suburban malls, and Queer Nation activists, “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it.” And that’s a big transformation, because in the late 1980s that was the state-of-the-art of the gay and lesbian movement, if you will, was very strongly confrontational, to a point, you know, after 2010 where the movement, in particular around marriage, had developed a much more refined, perhaps, and arguably very effective methodology. Trying to make a question out of this. [laughter] So then back in the 1980s, when you were starting to do these initial actions, were you kind of sitting back, evaluating, it’s like, hmm, this thing that we’re doing is actually working, or people aren’t really responding to this particular other action? Were you starting to sort that out in your own mind?

01-00:37:48
Stanback:

I think so. And, again, I think my personality is not confrontational, and so I was very aware that with ACT UP and Queer Nation, that those kinds of actions were really important, and they were moving the dial in a way that couldn’t happen otherwise. I did it a couple of times, and I tried to appear cool, but it didn’t jazz me up. It just made me more uncomfortable. And yet, I knew it was important to do. Even when we did those restaurant things, I’m sure that we weren’t holding hands. It was more just we want you to see us. We want you to see us as regular people. So in Connecticut the gay rights bill was introduced 18 times before it passed, and it was only in 1987 we hired a lobbyist, a wonderful lobbyist, Betty Gallo, and we really fine-tuned how we did things. And there was a legislator who stood up in ’87 and said—because that was the first year we actually got votes in the chambers, and he said, “Well, I’m voting against this because there are no gay people in my district.” And we vowed we would never let—you know, legislators might vote against us, but they couldn’t say we didn’t exist, and we weren’t in their districts. And we started doing these things called legislator house meetings where we would find people—we had mapped—this was before all the wonderful software that divided up you database by district. We didn’t have computers. No, we didn’t have computers. How did we do this? I don’t even remember. [laughter]

But we had our list of who was in each of these districts, and back in the days of phone trees and things like that, and we would find, through the ways you do nitty-gritty organizing, a gay person in—you know, we figured out who are our target legislators. We’d find gay people in those districts, actually in as many districts as we could. They would invite their legislator to come over to their house, and we eventually figured out that eight to ten people was the ideal number. Several gay and lesbian people, ideally a parent of someone who was gay or lesbian, if we could get a clergy person that would be great, if we could get a donor to the campaign. You know, we had this sort of little formula. And people would come, and again, our style was not confrontational.

It was we want you to see who we are, we want you to see what our homes look like. We want you to just hear our stories, and see our faces. And many legislators, I mean, through that campaign and all the way through the marriage campaign, the almost decade-long marriage campaign in Connecticut, legislators said to the end this was the most effective strategy. We changed many votes but others said, “I’m not going to vote for you, but keep doing these, because this is what’s going to get people to move. And there was definitely no media in these meetings. It was a chance for legislators to ask questions. No question was too stupid or ignorant. We would ask them, “What’s keeping you from supporting the bill? What’s your issue? Is it religion? Is it politics? Is it you need more letters from us?” So those were some of the early things that we later used for marriage, and we really didn’t change that strategy from the nondiscrimination work through the marriage campaign. We just did it a little bit more efficiently with emails and computer list breakdowns and things like that.

01-00:42:39
Meeker:

When you’re going back to the 1980s, I’m surprised that you were able to get legislators to come out to constituents’ homes. What was the process by which you were able to entice them to come to your homes?

01-00:42:54
Stanback:

Well, our philosophy was always that if a constituent asked a legislator—I mean, it definitely had to be a constituent; we didn’t want anybody in those living rooms that weren’t constituents—that legislators wanted to say yes to their constituents, and that held true from ’87, all the way through 2008. So not every legislator would say yes, and sometimes it took a year of checking in every so often, couldn’t get a date, couldn’t get a date. Maybe it was, all right, you’ve got to find the right person. You’ve got to find their friend. You’ve got to find somebody who goes to their church, who belongs to the Kiwanis Club with them, who’s a donor, who’s part of their town committee, whatever, and that was a trial and error. We now call that power mapping, when you sit down and you take your target legislator and you get a group of people in a room. I mean, we do this exercise at conferences, and people say everything they know about them, and you sort of figure out who they are and what their networks are. And we were just sort of doing that, learning by trial and error. But they would come, and I only remember a couple of negative situations. Again, they didn’t always vote our way. It took a while. But for many of them, when they weren’t voting our way, it was not because they had disdain for us anymore. It wasn’t because they hated or feared us. They were afraid that they weren’t going to get elected.

And as the years went on, both, again, with nondiscrimination and then with marriage, we added the political action committee component. First it was public education. Then it was the lobbying. And then we added in the electoral piece. And finally we had a full-fledged (c)(3)/(c)(4)/ PAC organization, and coming at it from different ways. And sort of the model that

I'm sure was happening all over the country, but we were sort of learning as we were going.

01-00:45:25

Meeker:

You said in these meetings there were a few difficult circumstances, but I wonder if you can recall any meetings that were transformational, any examples of times that you felt like a breakthrough had happened at that meeting, or as a direct result of it.

01-00:46:18

Stanback:

So a particularly transformational meeting—there were lots of those. There were only a couple of times where people—and when I say negative, it was just that they weren't going to let us in, they weren't going to break the wall. But many times, as people would talk—and we learned this then, we've learned this now for a couple of decades—parents are such effective advocates. And PFLAG, we just owe such a debt of gratitude to them here in Connecticut and around the country. And bless their hearts, the PFLAG parents, they could really buttonhole the legislators in a way that maybe we as gay and lesbian people felt a little less able to do. But in one of the meetings that I was in, definitely as the legislator got more comfortable saying—you know, sort of starts off intellectual, and then as it would go deeper, “Well, yeah, I had a friend in high school.” “Oh yeah, there was this guy in the Army with me,” you know. Or one time, and I wasn't in this meeting, but a legislator ended up sort of coming out about their own child. And tears were shed, voices got quivery. They were really quite powerful. And I think just gratitude on the part of the legislators. Again, they might not be politically courageous enough at that point to vote yes, but they were very appreciative that people would—what they saw, and was true for many people—be courageous enough to share their lives about something where they could still lose their jobs or their houses or their families.

01-00:49:11

Meeker:

So in the previous interview that you did for the University of Connecticut, which is available online—kind of a plug for that here—you do talk a bit about the gay rights statute of 1991, and also a little bit about your work with NARAL about that time. So I'd like to fast forward a bit to marriage, because I know that we have some limited time here. You know, it's interesting: when did marriage for same sex couples first appear on the horizon for you as a potential issue that people might be working toward? I mean, although there are examples going back to the 1970s, and perhaps even before, a lot of people I've talked to have a distinct moment they remember actually this appearing on the horizon.

01-00:50:18

Stanback:

It was certainly the Hawaii case, that Evan was so involved with. And Jennifer Brown, who is now the dean at Quinnipiac Law School, and was a law professor at Quinnipiac back in I guess the early nineties—I'm not going to remember the year—but she had a couple of symposium where she brought

Evan and some other activists and lawyers and scholars to talk about the marriage issue. And I know that that was one of the first places where I was hearing the strategic side of this, and I loved it. I mean, I just was fascinated. And I always said while I was working on marriage that this is such a wonderful issue to work on, because there are so many layers to it. I mean, it's emotional, and it's religious, and it's not religious, and it's historic—you know, the whole history of marriage—and it's feminist, and it's patriarchal. And I'm not a lawyer, but just all the legal strategy involved, not to mention the legislative and the public education. So I just love the issue. And then Yale had some conferences around probably that same general time period. But I remember so clearly that Charlotte and I and a couple of friends, we were ready to buy our plane tickets to go to Hawaii and get married if that court decision had come down. And so that was really devastating. So, again, I did not benefit from having courses in gay history, and so I was sort of learning about it as it was unfolding. I didn't really know about what had gone on in the seventies.

So that was when it first came up, and then I was very aware, and when things sort of got shut out in Hawaii I knew that Vermont was percolating. And so we followed the situation in Vermont very closely. And I think that people who were excited about the civil union compromise in Vermont—I mean, it was an amazing first step for our community, and for the law, but having been disappointed about Hawaii, and then to see marriage not happen in Vermont was really disappointing. And so I'm sure I got excited about civil union once it became law, but there was definitely a part of me that was very upset that why did they have to do this. They wouldn't have had any more of the Take Back Vermont backlash had it been marriage. Just do it cleanly and get it done.

01-00:54:16

Meeker:

Well, clearly this was not just an abstract political issue. It's something very personal. I mean, you and your partner, now wife, were interested in going to get married, and I can't imagine you would've been excited to rush off to Vermont to register for a civil union. You know, that's a different thing.

01-00:54:35

Stanback:

Right. And yet we knew lots of people who went up and got civil unions in Vermont, and I got it then, I get it now. But we were definitely not interested in that.

01-00:54:51

Meeker:

Yeah. And what do you send out notes and say, "Oh, we were just unionized," or something? [laughs]

01-00:54:55

Stanback:

Right, right. We started Love Makes a Family in 1999 as this informal coalition to respond to a Connecticut state Supreme Court ruling on adoption, and the Court came down beginning of '99, ruled against the lesbian couple, and a number of groups came together and said, "Let's introduce a bill." And

these were both groups and individuals—and that’s the nice thing about being in a small state, where people are used to working together, and a lot of trust has been developed—let’s introduce a bill and see if we can pass a second parent adoption bill. And we got very close. It was just a hostile amendment of a so-called Difference of Marriage Act, that ended up making us decide we needed to have the bill killed. And we came back the next year, and we passed it in 2000. That was the year that the Vermont civil union went into effect, if I’m remembering this correctly. And I think it was the same year that the Netherlands became the first country to allow full legal marriage. So it was this really interesting time for me personally, because I’d been following Vermont, I was involved in the work in Connecticut, and then this first-in-the-world law on marriage happens, sort of all around the same time. So that’s a long way of answering your question of when did it enter my consciousness, and it was back in the nineties, and then it has stayed there ever since.

01-00:57:01

Meeker:

Well, it’s interesting: it sounds to me like what you’re saying is when it really first kind of becomes part of your consciousness in the early to mid-nineties, around the Hawaii case, you immediately were onboard with this, and that’s certainly not the story of the movement overall, particularly women who identified as feminist. A lot of women said, “Well, wait a minute. We don’t want to join a patriarchal institution.” Or sort of more left activists would say, “This is normalizing and assimilation. We don’t want to participate in that, either.” But the case was different for you? Or did you have to wrestle with those anti-marriage critiques?

01-00:57:46

Stanback:

No. I mean, I certainly knew that they were going on, and at the time, in the nineties, I was the executive director of two women’s rights organizations, Connecticut NARAL, and then the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund, so my grounding was in feminism— I feel like my lesbian consciousness came from my feminism, and I always thought of myself, and think of myself, as a lesbian feminist. But no, this just felt like pure discrimination. And, in fact, I felt like—not something that I would say in my usual speech to a group about marriage, but that it was, in fact, quite radical in the way that it could upend the gender roles, and that heterosexual marriage had a lot to learn from marriage between two people of the same sex. So I heard that. I got it. I found it a little irritating at times, but that was never where I was.

01-00:59:05

Meeker:

So Love Makes a Family starts out as like a coalition, from what I understand, and then becomes a 501(c)(3), and eventually as a (c)(4) component to it, as well, correct?

01-00:59:17

Stanback:

And a PAC.

01-00:59:18

Meeker:

And a PAC. The whole thing. And you know, you provided a brief account, I think, in your previous interview of an early meeting, late 2004, thereabouts, at the GLAD offices with Evan and Mary Bonauto and Beth Robinson, et cetera, where I think there's a lot of strategy. It's clear by this point in time, you know, the *Goodridge* decision had come down, marriages had started in Massachusetts. There was still obviously the legislative wrangling that needed to happen there that didn't conclude until 2007. But late 2004, of course, was, in many ways, kind of a low point of the marriage movement. You know, you have George W. Bush reelected, and he had proposed the Federal Marriage Amendment. Kerry was defeated, and still he was strongly opposed to marriage for same sex couples. And then you have the eleven, or ultimately thirteen, states—

01-01:00:28

Stanback:

Passing DOMAs.

01-01:00:29

Meeker:

So what made you think that Connecticut could be the second marriage state?

01-01:00:37

Stanback:

Well, so we had passed adoption. In some countries, you get marriage, you get relationship recognition first, and then the adoption came later, and we had a legislature and a governor who said, "This is in the best interest of children, and we're not ready to—." We never said this is about marriage: this is about children. But that was 2000. And then once that passed, in the spring of 2000, I had just left my job. That was when I decided, okay, it's time to form this into a—we called it a coalition, but it really was sort of an organization. It functioned more like an organization maybe than a coalition. And in 2001 we had this fantastic public hearing at the legislature, and got all this earned media. That was when we were learning really how to use earned media. And we had no money, and we had no staff, and I was actually functioning for most of the time—I mean, I had the financial ability to do this without pay. So we had this sort of volunteer unpaid staff person, and we did these public hearings for a number of years, and really sort of got the public education campaign going around the state. We're having these house meetings with legislators. You know, there were very few legislators who were willing to say they supported marriage, very, very few. But a lot of them would support civil union, maybe domestic partnership. We were very clear we were a marriage organization, but I think in those early days, yeah, we would've accepted a civil union compromise, or a domestic partnership compromise.

And then 2003, *Goodridge* happens, and the world changes, and people can get married in the state right next door. And we just felt like the time was right. And then this meeting that happens at the GLAD office with all the luminaries of the marriage equality movement, meeting with me and our lobbyist, and saying, "You can't compromise. You are the next, or one of the next states that can win. And we've got Vermont with civil union, we've got

Massachusetts with marriage.” I don’t think they said this, but what I later thought very clearly was “there’s a tipping point.” And maybe we go in this direction that civil union becomes the wave, and it might take a generation to sort out after we go through a civil union phase for decades that we eventually get back to marriage, and to really draw that line and say, this is about equality. It’s not just about rights and protections. And I think in 2005 we end up having this very, very challenging year where we took a position, after a lot of handwringing and heartrending conversations, and tears, and votes on our steering committee, our board—

01-01:05:11

Meeker:

I’m sorry to interrupt. I’d love to hear about that, but I want to bring you back a little bit to this meeting with Mary and Evan and you and your lobbyist. I mean, it’s pretty interesting, because I’m thinking, all right, Connecticut wasn’t one the thirteen states that passed an amendment, so it was open still. There was possibility. There was a good organization already on the ground, Love Makes a Family. Did they kind of come to you and say, “Listen, you are one of the best case scenarios for this broader movement to move ahead”? I mean, were they kind of putting you on the spot? I’m curious, how did that meeting transpire? I mean, when they called you up and said, “Come to our offices,” or assuming they met you. I’m just curious if you could kind of walk me through that.

01-01:06:15

Stanback:

I don’t think we knew what the meeting was going to be about. And I purposely maybe have not talked to all those folks about, okay, what was the conversation like in— You know, I’ve been in plenty of meetings where we have an agenda, we set it ahead of time, we’ve got our talking points, we know who’s going to say what. And I am sure in retrospect that there was a lot of that that happened. And they did put us on the spot. And I understand why they did, and they understand why the meeting happened the way it did. And I don’t remember it with total clarity, but I think there was some good cop/bad cop going on. And part of what was happening—well, two things happened: also in 2004, in the fall, GLAD filed a marriage case in Connecticut. So we knew that that was going to be happening. We’d been in conversations with GLAD. We’d always worked very well with them. But so for the first time, by the time that meeting happened, we began to have the two-track strategy, the legislative and the legal, and so legislators realize, okay, we saw what happened in Massachusetts; this could be happening for us. And I absolutely think that in the couple of months after the case was filed, and before we had that meeting, legislators were beginning to say, “We better jump on board the civil union train, because otherwise we are going to get marriage.” And I think that that meeting—and one day I will have a conversation with some of those folks about it, but I think—

01-01:08:38

Meeker:

What would you ask, if you did?

01-01:08:40
Stanback:

Give me the backstory, you know. What did you all think? You know, I took a very strong position against civil unions, but I don't think I would have been quite as strong in my position had I not heard their arguments, but also felt the weight of and the support of the national movement. And when we went into the session the next year—and it's not often that you have every one of those national players—and again, from GLAD to Freedom to Marry to Lambda to HRC all on the same page, the Task Force. And I agreed with them, but had I not agreed with them, that would've been a hard wave to push back against. So, fortunately, I was on the same page, or they got me on the same page pretty quickly.

01-01:09:59
Meeker:

Well, and then as you were saying, you took this agenda, this goal, that we are not going to seek civil unions, we're going to go for marriage, back to your steering committee. Can you describe that? I mean, you've described it in this interview so far, and in previous interviews in sort of general terms, but do you remember some of the points and where people were lining up, vis-à-vis that conversation?

01-01:10:30
Stanback:

I often need to put things on paper, and sort of write out the pros and cons, and just sort of map it out. And I remember doing that for myself. I remember talking to Charlotte about it ad nauseam, and some of my closest friends who were part of Love Makes a Family, people I really trusted. And those people around me that I trusted the most, they were on board. Certainly there were a lot of people that had to be convinced, but when you went through, okay, here are the reasons why getting civil union and not pushing full-force for marriage, and framing civil union as separate and unequal, not just as we want marriage, but here's why civil union— That was what the difference was, that it was an insult to our relationships. And I remember Evan—a line that we used a lot that, many of our best lines came from Evan— “We don't need two lines at the town clerk's office, one for marriage and one for civil union.” You know, there was that equality perspective. And then there was a political piece. So we had this political action committee. We were supporting candidates. If we, as the marriage organization in the state, said we supported civil union—and we knew that there were marriage supporters who would grudgingly support civil union, but there were a lot of conservatives who did not ever want to see marriage, who saw this as the compromise position, keep those people out of my marriage, my heterosexual institution, but we'll give them this thing, civil unions—if they came on board, our PAC would be in the position of having to support them as incumbents who supported civil union over challengers who were marriage supporters, and that just felt untenable.

01-01:13:09
Meeker:

I mean, that's really tricky, because even at this point in time, 2005, you know, clearly you have done work for two decades by that point in time in Connecticut, but there's still kind of a fledgling element that you're a small

player on a bigger stage at that point in time, and you're getting some of these legislators finally to come around and say, "Yeah, you know, we'll support civil unions." And then your next thing to say is, "Well, that's actually not good enough." That must've been very tricky, to have that conversation with those legislators who, I imagine, you had built a personal relationship with over years.

01-01:13:51
Stanback:

It was the hardest thing I have ever done, and the hardest year that I ever went through, because it felt like we were always walking this incredibly fine line. And as someone who doesn't like conflict, and yet always found herself in the middle of conflict, that was particularly hard. It's hard not to take things personally. We were at odds with our lobbyist. We were at odds with our two chief sponsors who were marriage supporters. That became very hard, very uncomfortable. We lost a couple of members of our coalition. And I remember there were people on the steering committee who were like, "They're done. If they decide they're against us, and they're going to lobby against us, we don't want them back." And my feeling was I didn't want to make a decision, because I knew that eventually whatever happened we would have to bring the coalition back together, and so I wasn't happy with how that played out, but we just had to live in that tension. And people stopped talking to each other. It was very hard. With our members, there were donors and members who were really unhappy with us. There were donors and members who were thrilled with us. And that was sort of where I really felt at a—what's the word I'm searching for—integrated into my core the cliché you can't please everyone. We were not going to please everyone. Nothing we could do would please everyone, so we just needed to do what we felt was right, and to try to keep it on the substantive issue level, and not get personal, and not escalate the hostilities.

And it was a good thing that that was the way it turned out, because civil union did pass, and on the day it passed I did need to make a statement to the press that was a positive statement, and we did withdraw our opposition at a certain point, but we did not lobby for the civil union bill. We actually lobbied for the importance of marriage, understanding that wasn't going to happen, but worked with legislators in hopes of getting as many of them as possible as they made statements on the floor of the House and Senate to say, "I wish I were voting for marriage, but I'm going to take this step." And once it passed, we didn't see it as our bill, and yet people expected us to take the next step. So we became the organization that worked with JPs and clergy to educate them, worked with attorneys, educated our members about what it meant to have a civil union, and that they weren't getting married but it was a marital status, and they couldn't just break up, all the things that people learned in Vermont and that people learned in Massachusetts in terms of marriage. And so lots of educational sessions, but always sort of the broken record of even when we would invite people to come learn about civil union, the nuts and bolts, try to turn them into activists for marriage at those sessions. And I knew we were

going to eventually win when I began hearing people mimicking our talking points about the difference in civil union and marriage. Before we took our position, even our own community didn't understand the difference in civil union and marriage, and they were like, "It doesn't matter. What is the difference?" It wasn't just legislators asking those questions. So I feel like that was a really important educational piece.

It was also the time, there in 2005, where we realized we've got to stop talking about rights and benefits. We've got to talk about something else, and what is that something else? And we did our first messaging poll with GLAD, and were testing what worked with people, and that's where we began talking about love and commitment. And the name Love Makes a Family as an organization—there's a part of me that wanted a harder hitting Equality Connecticut kind of name—but that name worked so well for us, and we kept it through the adoption fight on through marriage, and it really ended up reflecting the kind of value-based messages, love and family, that we continued to use through the *Obergefell* decision. And we realized if we kept talking about rights and benefits, we could as easily end up with civil union as we will end up with marriage. And I think from 2005 through the win in 2008, we had a very different kind of campaign, or at least very different kinds of messaging.

01-01:20:17

Meeker:

You know, that moment when Love Makes a Family gives up its opposition to civil unions, can you take me there? I mean, what was that like? Did you go through an internal struggle at that point? Were you debating whether it made sense to continue the opposition in principle, let it happen, let civil unions happen, and then be in a different position when it comes to we're just going to continue our fight for marriage? And these are like the difficult moments of being a leader, and I'm curious about how you managed that.

01-01:20:59

Stanback:

I talked to lots of people, constantly. And this is when I had worked with Evan a little bit when he was at Lambda, and he had been very helpful once he started Freedom to Marry, and had helped us at Love Makes a Family. But it was the fall of 2004, into the winter and spring of 2005, that—I probably talked to him every week, him and other people, folks at GLAD, Beth Robinson, various people. But Evan was really the one who I would both—You know, I was terrified. Are we making the right decision? And I'm not exaggerating: there was a period where just about every night at three in the morning I would wake up, or I wouldn't have slept, I would wake Charlotte up, and say, "Are we making the right decision?" And she'd be like, "Okay, walk through how did you come to this decision," and I would walk it through, how did we get there. And then I would get to the end, and it's like, yes, we made the right decision. But I second guessed myself constantly, and would try to reach out to people beyond the inner circle, just to get other people's takes, to ask them, "Are we making the right decision?" Publicly, I was trying

to be a strong voice of clarity, without any doubt, but yeah, we could've ended up without civil union, and people would've been really upset, with me, with our organization, with our movement, and it could've set things back. The line felt like it was always moving around and trying to get on the right side of that line with our messaging was challenging. Something else would happen, and we had certain talking points and messaging before the judiciary committee had their final vote and stripped out the marriage language, because it was a marriage bill before the judiciary. Once they stripped it out and it became civil union, then we had to shift the message a little bit more, and just this constant shifting, but then reiterating why marriage, why marriage, and why civil union was separate and unequal.

And sort of being in the moment of the angst and the anger from different quarters, and yet also trying to think about all the benchmarks along the way—okay, we've got this, it's got to go to Public Health, and then it went to the Senate first and then the House—and, okay, when that happens, how do we shift the messaging when those things happen? What about the governor? And then looking ahead to—what are we going to do as an organization, assuming this passes? It'll go into effect October 1. Do we need to have a big celebratory event? How can we not have a celebratory event? How do we maintain our integrity and the momentum, and criticize it, and yet claim it as the next step to get to marriage, and reunify the community? Which, again, there were probably a handful of really vocal activist folks who were speaking out against us, but we hadn't been used to that. We were used to our opponents. I was clear in a way I never had been that it is so much easier to be at odds with those people who don't agree with you than at odds with people who do agree with you. And all those people did support marriage. So just sort of this chessboard, okay, what if this happens, what if another state gets marriage, and how are we going to adjust our framing, and when do we go back to the legislature? And realized that we couldn't go back that next year, and we needed to have a cooling-off period. So I've forgotten your question—just sort of back in the bunkers.

Oh, the other thing, I guess, that we felt was really important—and this is something we did all along in terms of building the coalition for marriage—was finding allies of all sorts. That's continued through the whole marriage movement, from social workers, and child psychologists and psychiatrists, to clergy, and the less usual suspect the better. And doing that with the coalition that was working in opposition to civil union—and I had this sort of kitchen cabinet of folks that included some of the people I respected most at the capitol from different organizations who had been supportive, and I saw as great strategists, and really turned to them a lot, as well. So it wasn't just turning to the LGBT community; it was also looking for folks in labor or in other organizations, the women's community. And I'll never forget those folks. I'll never forget the people who stood with us and took some heat for their own organizations and their own issues—and it's the importance of

coalition politics, and certainly made me want to stand more closely with them than I ever did before.

01-01:28:49

Meeker: So another effort is launched around 2007, but I guess it never went for a vote because of a veto threat by the governor, correct, to get marriage passed? I know Connecticut's a little complicated, right? [laughs]

01-01:29:11

Stanback: Yeah, so you've got the court case going along—

01-01:29:15

Meeker: And that's *Kerrigan*?

01-01:29:17

Stanback: *Kerrigan, Kerrigan & Mock*. So yeah, so civil union goes into effect October of 2005, and so we didn't go back to the legislature in 2006, in part because civil union just was too new. But we were very active in the electoral realm with our PAC in 2006. We ramped up our public education campaign, did more canvassing. And then came back in 2007, really hoped that that might be our year, and for us it felt like a victory because it was the first time we had gotten out of a committee. We won in the Judiciary Committee, and we got our first Republican vote, and those are big deals. To the broader movement, the broader country, it might not seem like such a big deal, but that was a big win for us.

I don't remember the year, but probably 2006, we had gotten money from the Civil Marriage Collaborative that ended up supporting Freedom to Marry and lots of other state efforts, and we had been able to hire more staff. We were never one of the larger organizations, but being able to have more organizers and more staff, where we could get out to more parts of the state, was really important, building more coalitions, growing our list, beginning to use social media for the first time, as Facebook is sort of coming on the scene.

[break in audio]

01-01:31:33

Stanback: And so I think that in 2007—we often did our big pushes in non-election years, in the odd number years, so we knew that, yes, there was a veto threat. I think at that point we thought it is just as likely that this is going to be won in the courts as in the legislature. And the *Kerrigan* case took longer. We were waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting for a decision. But we really moved into decision day wait mode, once we got into 2008.

01-01:32:20

Meeker: And the decision then comes down I guess October 10, 2008?

01-01:32:23
Stanback:

Yeah. I don't remember if we ever had a date, a month where we thought it was going to come down, but I do remember for many, many months, weekly, we had this decision day document that had all aspects of the plan that we would coordinate with GLAD, and we were just updating that every week, and our robo calls had already been taped, and we'd found the hotel where we were going to have our victory party, and we'd reserved the Capitol steps for a rally. And it just took forever for the Court to rule, but it did, and it was a wonderful decision.

01-01:33:08
Meeker:

Right. So, actually, one question coming back up: does Connecticut not have a citizen initiative process, or—?

01-01:33:16
Stanback:

We do not. That was another reason why we were such a prime state. But so that actually raises another little wrinkle: we realized in 2007, I think, that while we don't have a citizen initiative, we have something called a constitutional convention—a question goes on the ballot every twenty years, and voters can vote, "Should we hold a constitutional convention to revisit our state constitution?" And we had this horrible realization the year before the decision came down that that question was going to end up on the ballot in the year when we won marriage. And we didn't know if our opponents had figured this out. We think that we figured it out first. But we began going around and talking to the Secretary of State and the Attorney General, and none of them had any clue that this was coming up. And so we needed to figure out a strategy, and put together a coalition, to get people to vote no. And we actually spent a lot of time the latter part of 2007 and a lot of 2008 building this coalition with labor, with good government groups, with the understanding that if you open up the entire—you know, you have this convention, people could bring any issue. Now, yeah, there are set rules, and the convention delegates would have to decide what actually would end up getting voted on, but we were pretty sure that a marriage question would come out of that.

And we got some money to do some polling and focus groups, and to our delight the issues that were really problematic were not marriage or abortion, which were the two that everyone in the coalition was really worried about. The issues that were more—and it wasn't surprising once we thought about it—that people were more hostile towards were issues of labor union related issues and fiscal issues. So those were the one that we nuanced a little bit more around, but certainly labor played a huge role in terms of providing funding and staffing.

What we did, on election day we had people at the polls across the state urging people to vote no, and collecting names and emails as we continued to build our list. On election night, people are thrilled because we have President Obama as our first African American president, the LGBT community is just

devastated because of Prop 8, and here in Connecticut we end up winning by a really comfortable margin this battle that we thought could take away our newly won right to marry, which was going to go into effect a few weeks later. And we had this wonderful victory that really nobody else around the country knew anything about, but it was the icing on the cake, and sort of the last T to cross and I to dot in the campaign.

01-01:38:22

Meeker:

I think that's really important to tell, because I think 2008 is really overshadowed by what Prop 8 brought about, and this kind of gets lost in the mix. So I think that's an important story to tell. So then in 2009 marriage becomes codified? So marriages already went into effect, but this was just the state legislature responding to the courts in some ways? I guess I'm a little confused about that.

01-01:38:49

Stanback:

I don't even know that the legislature needed to do it, but it was a way to take out some of the bad language that was on the books, and at that point legislators who were not ready to vote for it the year before, they were ready to be on record now in support of marriage, and—

01-01:39:14

Meeker:

To be on the right side of history.

01-01:39:15

Stanback:

To be on the right side of history. That was a message that we drilled into them in 2007, and it didn't quite work, but by 2009 they were ready to be on the right side of history. And we ended up with a religious exemption that we did not want, and are still talking about how to strategically get that, get rid of it, and, as we know, right now getting rid of religious exemptions is pretty challenging, as we keep getting new ones seems like every month. But yeah, that was sort of the last piece of it. The other thing it did was figure out what to do with the institution of civil union, and the way they worked it out was that people could proactively, if they were in a civil union, go and get married, but if they didn't do that by October their civil union would become a marriage. So we no longer have civil union in the state of Connecticut.

01-01:40:47

Meeker:

So why don't you tell me about the process of closing down? Because this is something I think that's important. Freedom to Marry has done it now, and it's a model, I think, like a campaign model, that social movement organizations typically don't follow. They become kind of evergreen, if you will, or maybe slowly [laughter] lose their green and fall off the tree. But this was a very deliberate act on your part. Where did this idea come about that, you know, Love Makes a Family had achieved what it had set out to do and it wasn't going to continue in perpetuity?

01-01:41:36
Stanback:

We had talked about that as an issue for a number of years, about what were we going to do. We were pretty much a single-issue marriage organization, but in 2005 we added in the issue of adding gender identity and expression to our state nondiscrimination laws as an issue that we were going to educate and lobby on. But other than that, we were pretty single-issue. I was a part of the Equality Federation, or Love Makes a Family was a part of the Equality Federation, so we worked with all these other state-based LGBT advocacy groups, and I was certainly aware that there was a model out there for multi-issue organizations, some that were working on marriage, some that weren't as much. And I think for a number of years I just assumed that we would win marriage and then we would sort of morph into an Equality Connecticut, and have a multi-issue agenda. And we hired, knowing that we would probably have a decision sometime by the end of 2008, ideally during the summer, we got some money and hired a consultant to begin helping us think about what was next, and if we were going to transition how we were going to do that transition. And so, we worked with a guy named Mickey McIntyre, and went through a long process with our board and staff of what were the issues out there, how did we see the organization. He used something called a catalyst committee where you get different stakeholders in the community to be a part of a group that will work through the whole process. So there were some Love Makes a Family board and staff, but also folks from outside.

So we did an online survey with our members about what were the issues that were still out there, what did they think we should do, how should we do it, what was effective about what we had done, what was not effective. So that was sort of the broadest but shallowest kind of input we sought. And then we did a bunch of different focus groups with different constituencies, and sort of got a little bit more in depth. And then Mickey and his colleague did maybe about ten one-on-ones where they went really deep, some folks very close to the organization, some a little bit further afield, and pulled all that information together. And the broad consensus was Love Makes a Family should stay around and continue to work on DOMA, and continue to work on youth, or these other issues. But if you looked sort of beneath the general trend of "Yeah, you should stay around," how we would do that—and this came through more clearly in the focus groups and the one-on-ones—how we would do that, and how would we interact with a number of groups that were already on the ground, a great organization working with youth, an organization that worked with the trans community, what would our niche be? And we already had a Congressional delegation in Connecticut where everybody but Senator Lieberman was on record in opposition to DOMA. So what could we do in terms of repealing DOMA?

So we ended up having lots of further, deeper conversations about, okay, what would our mission be? And what would our agenda be? And how would we fund it? And how would we make sure not to step on the toes of the organizations who had been so supportive of us all along the way—and

probably got a lot less attention to their issues because marriage sucked up so much of the attention. You know, it was just a big issue. I remember we had a meeting one snowy Saturday, and our catalyst committee was there, and Mickey asked us the question, “Think about how you feel now. How do you feel about Love Makes a Family and the work that you’ve done?” So this is probably January of 2009. “And now imagine the organization in three years. Sit with that a second, and then imagine the organization in five years, and what’s it going to feel like, and what’s it going to look like.” That was a really great question to have us ask, because we were on such a high. And it’s not like every organization has to stay at that level. It’s impossible to have that happen. But there was such a sense of pride in the community that here’s this group and this issue where we’ve won, we’ve changed, we’ve gone from thirty percent support to fifty-one percent, fifty-three percent support of marriage equality. We’ve just changed so many minds, have so many different kinds of people coming on board and saying, “I’ve had this journey. This is my journey story.” And that’s just so rewarding. To think about being an organization that sort of was in search of a mission, and that didn’t have a niche, that was just not feeling very relevant—that was what we came away with.

And so we had that conversation with the organization, and we began to talk to more people. And then we reached back out. There was a lot of sort of back and forth, because we knew it was a big conversation to have. And there were some people who felt like it was the wrong decision, but by and large I think we did it very strategically, and did it over the course of nine months or so. We made sure that there would be a website in existence for I don’t know if it was ten years, but a long time, that had key educational information. We made sure to educate our members about not just the other marriage organizations that were doing national work, like Freedom to Marry and GLAD and others, but also the state-based and local LGBT organizations, and get our members aware of their work, try to move them on to be supporters, and did a lot of emails just to get people to allow us to share their names with these other organizations. Giving away our resources the way Freedom to Marry has done, we had a whole mini-grant program where we let people apply for smaller amounts of money that we would give away, and then we gave some of our largest assets—we split it in half, half to GLAD to fight DOMA, and half to pay for a lobbyist for the transgender non-discrimination bill—not a lobbyist, an organizer. And just tried to celebrate in that last period of time, and we gave our archives to Yale, and did a lot of gathering of people’s histories, and had a big celebration at the end, made sure that there were other organizations that could pick up the slack, and GLAD was obviously an important organization if people had legal questions after we closed down.

So people were sad, because there were many marriages that came out of nine years of work, and many, many friendships, and just a wonderful feeling from being part of a movement, in something that you could see the beginning and the end, that is so concrete. I mean, it’s not like income inequality. It’s really

concrete. And to see something go from the beginning to the end, and people just felt this wonderful sense of ownership. So there was sadness when we closed the doors, but people just felt this sense of belonging and this sense of pride, and still do to this day. There are definitely people in the movement who I think feel like we shouldn't have gone away, but the feeling in Connecticut is people are very proud that we, and as an extension they, were part of an organization that accomplished its mission and strategically put itself out of business. And I still have people who come up to me and say, "That was one of the best things you all did."

01-01:53:05

Meeker:

Well, it's not entirely unheard of, but it's rare, and perhaps courageous. Is there anything else about Love Makes a Family that you feel like hasn't really been adequately covered in the historical record that you'd like to recall at this point?

01-01:53:26

Stanback:

I guess the last thing I would say about the transitioning out of business is that in the same way that as we were getting close to the *Obergefell* decision the national movement was concerned that the public would see a win as, okay, we're done, we're done with LGBT issues, let's move on to something else, that not only was the work not over for marriage, because, particularly with *Obergefell*, you have a number of states that had not had any kind of public education campaigns going on, and so there was that kind of work, there was the backlash that people knew would happen in one way or another, and then obviously there were all the other issues, both legal issues for our community and what people refer to as the lived equality issues. How can people have better lives, and what did we need to do in terms of our public consciousness, and our not just legislative or court decisions but policies, that make people's lives better? So all of that work still needed to happen, and the messaging around marriage was, yes, this is a wonderful thing, but the work is not over. I mean, you looked at everybody that was quoted the day after the decision. And I feel like with Love Makes a Family, we tried very hard, and I hope we were successful, in saying this was a wonderful victory, and yet there is still so much to do here in Connecticut, not just for the transgender community who was not yet protected, but young people are still bullied and harassed, and trans people are still murdered, and HIV is still a real issue, and there's still poverty and homelessness and all these other issues. And I hope that that message was strong and resonated, and I feel like it was, and it did, and that the feelings about Love Makes a Family are just this was a great movement, and time in our history, but it was just one time, and there was life before, and there's life after, and we cannot get complacent, because I don't think we're ever going to lose marriage, but there are a lot of things that we still can lose, and a lot of things that can still get better.

01-01:56:29

Meeker:

Part of the life after was that you were asked to join the board of Freedom to Marry, I guess Freedom to Marry Action, which was their (c)(4) arm. I mean,

it's interesting: you had talked about the election in November of 2008 as really being more or less the end of the battle in Connecticut for marriage for same sex couples, but around the rest of the country this was just a transformative point. The passage of Prop 8 and the difficulties that followed that, and also, I think, people talked about it as being a wakeup call for people around the country. There was a shock that this would pass in California, and by such a large margin, that inspired the broader public, as well as top-level funders, to sort of rethink, reorganize, and I guess redouble their efforts in order to fund the campaign. And Freedom to Marry emerges as a central place where this campaign is waged. Of course, it happens in the states, but nationally. And I know Evan wrote a paper about that time—I don't know the name of it—but it was basically a proposal to turn Freedom to Marry into kind of what he had always wanted it to be, which was this national campaign to win marriage nationwide. Did you play a role in that process, bringing about what some people call Freedom to Marry 2.0?

01-01:58:20
Stanback:

Freedom to Marry 2.0 had not started when I joined the board, and I feel like I was there when it started, and Evan has so many skills and gifts, and one of them I think that everyone would agree on is his ability to just take these concepts and crystalize them in ways that are understandable, and that provide new insights. I remember back in 2004—because Prop 8 was this horrible loss, but 2004 was equally horrible, because we got all these DOMAs passed in these state legislatures, or at the ballot, and then we also lost all these court cases. We lost New York and New Jersey and I think Maryland and Washington. I remember sitting by our fax machine, waiting to hear these decisions come down, and we thought we were going to win all four of them, and that was just devastating. And I mention that because Evan spoke before the National Creating Change Conference, and that's when he talked about this idea of "losing forward." And it has been a phrase that just, I think, impacted our movement, and it certainly impacted me. And then after Prop 8, he continues to fine-tune the vision of what Freedom to Marry will be. But it was this movement-wide paper, the 10-10-10-20 paper, that sort of figures out, okay, if we're going to win by 2020 we've got to have marriage in this many states, and civil union in these many states. Evan was not the only architect, but was a key architect there.

And this was on the verge of the organization becoming Freedom to Marry 2.0, I think that another sort of frame that he created was the roadmap to victory. So simple, and yet it was brilliant, that we had to win more states, we had to gain a majority of support—and then once we had a majority we've got to grow the majority, and then once we had a grown majority we have to grow and diversify the majority of supporters in the country—and then we've got to end federal marriage discrimination. And understanding that it's not one two three, it's all three of those things have to happen, and it's going to ebb and flow when they happen, and sometimes you're blocked from making changes in the federal level, but you can always keep doing the public education and

building more support, and you keep working on the states. And I think that with the Civil Marriage Collaborative funding coming in, and the philanthropic community realizing their role in this, it all dovetailed so nicely with Evan's vision, and then you have all of these wonderful legal organizations that are doing—Evan's a brilliant lawyer, but that wasn't the role that he played, interestingly, in the latter half of this movement—and that he could work so well with the legal community, that he was just like a dog with a bone, and he just had his message, and it shifted a bit over time, but if you read his early book, which I have upstairs—which I used to read regularly before I would go out and speak—you know, his messaging, it evolved a bit, but he knew early on what the key points were to make, and was still making those a decade later. So I think that with his force of intellect and personality, he pushed to make so much of that happen, and yet with Prop 8 and all the forces coming together, everything came together in the right way.

01-02:03:38

Meeker:

About the time of Freedom to Marry 2.0.

01-02:03:40

Stanback:

About the time, yeah.

01-02:03:41

Meeker:

How would you characterize that? I mean, how would you define Freedom to Marry 2.0, and maybe contrast it with what it had been earlier?

01-02:03:50

Stanback:

You know, first it was just Evan, and then there was a period where he'd have one or two staff. And, I mean, I would describe it the way that he often described it, that he was a cheerleader, he was a supporter, that the organization was a resource, and very much behind the scenes. He said many times, "We're not trying to put our brand out there. We're not fundraising. Here's a great fact sheet. Take it and put your own branding on it, and you don't have to cite us." And I think that's not something that happens a lot in the world, even in the nonprofit political world, for some obvious reasons. But he had lined up very good funding so that he had the ability to be able to do that and not constantly worry about the rat race of fundraising, and did that for a number of years, and slowly grew different programs, slowly added staff, had a great advisory board before the (c)(3) was incorporated, or the (c)(4) came online. And I think that just very strategically, and with a good transition, there was just steady growth. He was brilliant in terms of his hiring, and hiring people like Marc and Thalia and Michael and Cameron. I mean, I don't even want to start naming names, because there were so many fantastic staff people. And it felt like Evan recognized where his skills and his experience were, and what wasn't his area, and he couldn't do everything even if he had those skills. And finding people who could do the political piece, who were more familiar with the campaign pieces of the work, and just was—I was always amazed that I don't think that he went in having all that

campaign experience, and yet got himself up to speed so quickly, and juggling so many different pieces. Really remarkable.

01-02:06:57

Meeker:

So he invited you to basically chair the board, correct, of the (c)(4)?

01-02:07:00

Stanback:

Yes, yeah.

01-02:07:02

Meeker:

When he asked you to do this, what did it entail? Did he say, "Listen, this is what it means, this is how time-consuming it's going to be, this is what the job description is"?

01-02:07:16

Stanback:

I just always had such a fondness for Evan, for all the support that he had given me. And actually, when Love Makes a Family, we had closed down, I was going to take a little time off, and he asked me if I wanted to come work at Freedom to Marry, which is actually not something I've told many people. And it was really hard to say no to that, because I love the issue, I just love him, and respect his work so much. But I had been doing it for nine years straight, and I had promised my wife that I would take a little time off, we were going to do a little traveling, and for some reason I thought I was going to do something completely different in my next job. But I had to think really hard about that decision. It was the right decision, for a lot of reasons. And I didn't want to leave Connecticut and move to New York. But when he then called me maybe a year later and said, "I want someone I know and trust as a board chair. Would you be willing to do this?", I didn't have to hesitate for a moment. I said, "Yes, I would love to do this." And he was very clear that—we're in the process of adding the (c)(4), and incorporating the existing entity into a (c)(3), and that he wasn't quite sure how long that was going to take, he wasn't quite sure what the responsibilities were going to be at first, and it did take—I don't even remember when—I think the final incorporation was probably in May of 2011.

01-02:09:29

Meeker:

I think that's about right.

01-02:09:30

Stanback:

Something like that. So I think there was probably about six to nine months of just sort of regular check-ins, and some meetings with the existing board that would become the (c)(3) board with a few people who were overlapping onto the (c)(4).

01-02:09:52

Meeker:

So you were engaging kind of as a side member or something like that of the steering committee that became the (c)(3) board.

01-02:10:01

Stanback:

Yeah, and—

01-02:10:02

Meeker: So people like Barb Cox and—

01-02:10:04

Stanback: Right, and Tim Sweeney, and a lot of the folks who ended up staying on. You probably know we would meet twice a year in person, and I probably went to maybe three board meetings before we were officially incorporated is my recollection. That may not be exactly right. There would be phone calls that became more structured as we get bigger, and one of the things that—I don't know what Evan was doing early on, but I remember when he began doing these monthly updates—

01-02:10:55

Meeker: The dashboards.

01-02:10:56

Stanback: Well, but it was even pre-dashboard. In fact, I remember the meeting when one of the board members suggested this thing called a dashboard, and I had to, like, Google it. It's like, what's a dashboard? What's a dashboard?

01-02:11:11

Meeker: [laughs] It's in your car.

01-02:11:13

Stanback: It's in your car. It had been just a pure narrative format. And he kept the narrative format, which would actually be wonderful for him to pull all the—I don't know if he's done this—pull all those together and compile them, because he's a wonderful writer, and they were both factual in nature, but also very Evan-esque in terms of just the emotion and the excitement. And then he added the dashboard so you could see a lot of the breakout in detail. And just watching those from the beginning through this last year, and just seeing how it would take forever to read them because there was so much going on, and you'd just shake your head in amazement at how much was going on. And other times I would read them and I would just feel completely exhausted, because I knew what went into one state campaign, much less staff that were all over the country, monitoring both the digital and the on-the-ground and strategic work in these other campaigns.

01-02:12:31

Meeker: And what remained to be done, as well.

01-02:12:34

Stanback: And what remained to be done, as well, yeah.

01-02:12:36

Meeker: So as of 2011, when the (c)(4) is established, did you play a role in establishing that board? What did you do as chair of that board?

01-02:12:51
Stanback:

You know, I've been involved, from the ED side, of a lot of nonprofits, and on the board of a number of different nonprofits. Some boards are very grassroots, and the board members themselves drive the organization, drive the agenda, drive what a board meeting looks like. Freedom to Marry was definitely more staff-driven. That did not mean that the board didn't have decisions to make, but Evan and Scott Davenport would often—we would have pre-meetings, Barb Cox, the (c)(3) chair, and myself, with Evan and Scott, to talk about the agenda. As time went on, the agenda for a board meeting would be more created by the staff, which is completely appropriate, and I've done that, too, and then given to us for input and change, and then sent out to the full board. Barb and I would lead the meetings, and Barb had been chair for so long, and I love—I'm sure you've heard this from her, if not from others—something that she had started early on called “Our Marriage Moment” is how she would start every board meeting, and we would rotate who would chair the meeting, and chair the phone calls in between. But she would ask everybody to go around and share what had been their marriage moment since we had last met six months before. And for some people it was that they had gotten married. Most recently, hearing the oral argument, or the decision that came down, or a state that had won, or maybe someone who was in their life who had had a journey story and come on board. But starting those meetings with this very personal thing helped sort of remind us of why we were all there, and being asked to help raise money, or being ambassadors for the organization, and help us get to know each other better. But yeah, I felt like it was a very appropriate role.

It may have been different in the Freedom to Marry 1.0, and perhaps the board was more involved with sort of structuring, but by the time the (c)(4) was up and running, Freedom to Marry was on a roll, and we were assisting, we were providing guidance and counsel, and there were definitely decisions that Evan would sometimes bring to the full board, more often to just Barb and myself, or to the executive committee, to get our take on something. Maybe it was whether we should sign onto another issue, or a letter, or a coalition, and sometimes it was something to deal with—not typically a personnel issue—but some other organizational issue. But I don't remember a time when we didn't really have the opportunity to give input had we wanted to.

01-02:17:07
Meeker:

So any of those issues that you're talking about, are there any that you could talk about in particular? And I'm curious about the sort of discussion process, and what kind of input Evan was looking for, and how you decided what was appropriate to provide to him as far as in response.

01-02:17:33
Stanback:

I honestly cannot really remember. I mean, again, I think the programmatic side of things was very clearly owned by Evan, and later Evan and other members of his senior team. Issues of things like bonuses and those kind of things that he wanted our input on. Certainly a lot of financial issues got

raised, less with Barb and me alone and more with us as part of the executive committee, but we had some really, really strong board members with financial backgrounds who were very helpful with those kinds of issues. So I can't really remember, to be honest.

01-02:18:41

Meeker:

Well, it's interesting. I've been on a nonprofit board myself, and when an organization is moving along well, the role of the board is, like you said, to be an ambassador for an organization, and to help with fundraising and those kinds of issues. And the story of Freedom to Marry the organization, as well as the broader movement after 2011, is a pretty steep upward trajectory. So it's not surprising to me that there's not a lot of debate or something that sticks in your mind, or difficult moments where you have that "Come to Jesus" moment with the ED or something like that. It's a different context. Well, maybe then walk me through some of these big moments that happened. And in my reading of it, there's at least three major upward moments after 2011. You have the 2012 election, you have *Windsor* and *Perry*, and finally *Obergefell*. From a board member's perspective, and a close associate of Evan, kind of maybe walk me through a few of these, and perhaps what role was the board asked to play in communicating with the public, or helping to drum up more support?

01-02:20:20

Stanback:

I probably am not the only board member who feels this way, that we would go to the board meetings, we would participate in calls, we would do our fiduciary responsibilities. Some of us more than others had wonderful networks in the big cities of funders, and brought some really important donors to the table, and networks. But for a lot of us, it felt like we just got this great opportunity to be in the front row of history being made, and to go to a board meeting, I mean, everyone would agree, the best part of a board meeting would be there was always a section on the agenda where Evan would just talk, and he would talk about where— And it was going to be different. When you mention three big moments, but every six months there was a big moment. Something had come up. And it could be the fight in New York in the legislature, to an election, to something having to do with *Windsor*, to the—

01-02:21:51

Meeker:

President coming out in support.

01-02:21:53

Stanback:

The President coming out in support—I'm trying to think of the name of the book, *Forcing the Spring* [2014].

01-02:22:00

Meeker:

Oh, yes. [laughs]

01-02:22:01
Stanback:

I mean, that was one of the tenser times. But we all wanted to hear his take on it, on all these things. And we had a chance to ask questions, and so it was an exciting board to be on, and I'm still on it, because we haven't folded yet, or signed the final paperwork, so legally we are still a board. But there are boards where you feel like you're working all the time, and this was not one of those. I think that Evan wanted to assemble a group of people who gave him—and not him so much as the organization—credibility in a lot of different worlds, and with different people, and he was mindful of having a variety of different types of diversity. And he wanted people who he trusted their judgment, and he wanted people with access to financial support. But it was not an onerous board to be on. I certainly felt like I got more than I gave.

01-02:23:36
Meeker:

You know, one of the things I think is interesting—and you might know this from working with them closely and being external to the organization—is as 2.0 is emerging, he writes that next concept paper about what Freedom to Marry is going to evolve into.

01-02:23:55
Stanback:

What year was that?

01-02:23:56
Meeker:

I have it up on my computer right now. [laughs] I'm trying to think. I think that was October 2009. There was a draft that I have, at least, just from October 2009, and it was just a year after Prop 8. And then he starts bringing in the new people at the beginning of 2010. Right. And he's bringing in very substantial people who are going to—I mean, there could be a potential for strong, reasoned, expert opinions challenging his own. It seems to me there's a moment that he actually kind of takes a risk, and doesn't take a backseat but brings people who are of a similar level that he is. Did he talk to you about this, and did he ever have any concerns about bringing Marc or Thalia on? For instance?

01-02:25:01
Stanback:

He never talked about it like that, and I don't mean this in a way of his trying to sell the board, but he was clear that it was going to totally change the nature of the organization, change the dynamic. It was more informational. I mean, he had it so clear in his head, not that people couldn't raise issues and push back and get him to take a different tack, but I think that he was so strategic, he was so clear in what he was looking for, and he thought big, which meant that he had money, and he could hire people, and pay them what they deserved to be paid, and just got really quality people. So there were a few instances of staff not working out, but by and large he had just hired such a great team. And I think people trusted him. People knew they were not on that board to second guess and micromanage, and if they were, it became pretty clear that was not the kind of board this was. And I think we all knew that, and we had seen sort of the vision he had laid out, and we trusted that, not

without question, not without asking for—if there was something big, like hiring someone like Marc, and the kind of on-the-ground work, raising the kind of money we were raising at a certain point, where we were doing a lot of re-granting to states, that was very new. And people ask a lot of good questions, and I think Evan appreciated that, but I don't remember—I can't really even name a time when there was such a disagreement over a decision, a programmatic decision, that the board revolted and Evan changed his mind.

01-02:27:46

Meeker:

What kind of issues did re-granting to states in the context of the state campaigns bring up for the board?

01-02:27:53

Stanback:

I think the biggest one was, “Wow, can we do this? Can we afford this?” Because the magnitude of budget shifts over a pretty short amount of time—and I think for me, but even more so for folks like Barb who had been on from the beginning, when the budget was like this, just when we hit the first million-dollar budget, and then we were talking—I remember there was a time right before *Windsor*, and there was a sense, wow, we're going to have to raise \$16 million the next year, because we're going to get hit in these different states, and we're going to have these different ballot campaigns. And the massiveness of that sum was just shocking to people. And yet, it kept going up. We kept meeting the budget, and exceeding the budget. And so I think it was hard to be concerned, because the team kept hitting their marks, so it was awe-inspiring, but there was not a worry that we were over-extending ourselves, because between Scott and the rest of the team there was always this cushion. And we got great programmatic updates, but the development team would come in with a real clear plan of how we were going to get these numbers, and then Scott was very clear as he went through the budget, and here are the real numbers, and here is this projection and this projection, and if we don't hit these, then here's Plan B. And you always felt like you were in very good hands as a board member.

01-02:30:01

Meeker:

You just referred to *Windsor*, and did you attend the oral arguments?

01-02:30:10

Stanback:

I didn't. I didn't.

01-02:30:11

Meeker:

Yeah. And what about in *Obergefell*? No?

01-02:30:12

Stanback:

Nope. No.

01-02:30:13

Meeker:

Have you ever been there, to the Supreme Court?

01-02:30:15
Stanback:

I have not. I have not. I didn't even try to do it, because I was like, I have my own work, and I knew it would be almost impossible. I wasn't going to stay in the lounge chairs overnight. But wow, I would've loved to. I would've loved to.

01-02:30:42
Meeker:

Where were you when those decisions came down, *Windsor* and *Perry*, in 2013?

01-02:30:47
Stanback:

I am pretty sure that *Windsor* I was in the William Way Center in Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. We had a group of folks we were meeting with for the Equality Federation, and everybody had their computers. We knew it was going to be that day. And I actually have a picture of myself right after that meeting wearing my Freedom to Marry "Right Side of History" t-shirt, and I'm pointing to my t-shirt. And that was incredible. I mean, *Obergefell* obviously was huge, but I think we knew we were going to win that, and *Windsor* was a little—you know, we didn't know what it was going to look like. So in some ways that was as exciting as *Obergefell*.

01-02:31:57
Meeker:

When did you get married?

01-02:32:00
Stanback:

We got married in the beginning of 2009. In 2008 I was so busy sort of choreographing what everything was going to look like as people were getting married, and all the press we were going to get, and it was all about celebrating these marriages, and using them, and leveraging them for public education, as much as I enjoyed them, too. And so Charlotte and I thought we were going to wait and get married on the anniversary that we celebrated, which was in October, and then the week before Valentine's Day, in 2009, we were like, "Let's just elope. Let's just—" We had seen Mary Bonauto at something, and she was talking about her elopement, and we ended up having a big party later that summer, but we just did a really simple thing, and I felt like my life had been so public with marriage, and it just consumed my life that it was important to have something that was just really intimate about the two of us. And then we celebrated with friends and family later.

01-02:33:23
Meeker:

You know, that's kind of a story I've heard a few times.

01-02:33:27
Stanback:

Really?

01-02:33:27
Meeker:

Yeah, I mean, because there is obviously this public, political dimension about marriage, and when you're fighting for it it's like part of a social movement. But then, when you actually sort of sit down and start thinking about it, it's like, "Oh, wait a minute, it really is just about the two of us, and the people

closest to us.” And you kind of just want to keep it like that, right? I mean, there is something very private about it.

01-02:33:58

Stanback:

Yeah. Yeah, and there’s a part of me that also wishes we had done a big thing, and had that sort of public piece, but at the moment it just felt right, and we were like, feels right, let’s go for it. And it was a Saturday, and Sunday we brought two hundred cupcakes to the church I attend, and I had had a song commissioned for Charlotte by our director of music, and the choir performed that, and it was a lovely day. It was a lovely day.

01-02:34:52

Meeker:

That’s sweet. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

01-02:34:58

Stanback:

You have hit all the high points. I’m sure I’ll think of things later, but this was fun walking down not just marriage memory lane but going back to the early days.

01-02:35:09

Meeker:

Well, you know, these stories and the work that you do later in your life I think is, by necessity, related to where you came from. It’s a cumulative experience, I think. So I think it’s always important to go back, and talk about where somebody came from, and where they learned their initial lessons.

01-02:35:30

Stanback:

And I love that for the last three years I’ve been working on nondiscrimination in my job at Equality Federation, and so much of that is about transgender issues, because that’s where the battle is these days. And so I feel like I’m going full circle. I loved my marriage period, but I’m back to the nondiscrimination work that I cut my activist teeth on, and that’s great.

01-02:35:55

Meeker:

Well, good luck with that.

01-02:35:56

Stanback:

Thank you.

01-02:35:56

Meeker:

All right, thank you very much.

[End of Interview]