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Interview with Stephen Lovegrove

Stephen Lovegrove

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LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview #126
LOVEGROVE, Stephen

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Religion major, member of Safe Zones, and LGBTQ activist

Interviewed: December 11, 2014

Interviewer: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 1 hour, 14 minutes

Series: LGBTQ Oral History Project

Abstract: In his December 2014 interview with Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard, Stephen Lovegrove shares his story coming to Winthrop as an “out” student recently kicked out of a religious college. Lovegrove details his perception of the attitude toward LGBTQ people and issues in Winthrop and Rock Hill. Lovegrove identifies resources in the community that are beneficial to LGBTQ people. He also comments on the LGBTQ social movement in terms of growing acceptance and the challenges it will face. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Safe Zones, LGBTQ, churches, religion, social movements, Human Rights Campaign, Disney internship, LGBTQ rights

Interview Session (December 11, 2014): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer’s Introduction

00:00:22 *Question:* Where are you from and why Winthrop? *Answer:* Parents are from the west coast. Parents ended up at Bob Jones’s University. First went to a Christian University – Charleston Southern University. SL came out online – school did not receive this well. SL had to find a new school to go to. SL knew very little about Winthrop, but knew that Charlotte had a lot of culture.

00:02:50 *Question:* Was it a struggle to get into Winthrop? *Answer:* SL had missed a lot of deadlines. There was no opposition to SL being a student at Winthrop. When SL visited campus, he sensed that Winthrop felt right.

- 00:03:40 *Question:* Who helped you get here? *Answer:* Joshua Bistromowitz, De Wells and Michelle Jaworski. SL had to have people on his side to have it work out.
- 00:04:50 *Question:* How did that feel to be kicked out of a college? *Answer:* It confirmed a suspicion. SL questioning if there is a place for an LGBTQ person in a faith community. “I had a false sense of security.” That’s when SL realized his identity shouldn’t be a secret.
- 00:07:10 *Question:* How did they confront you? *Answer:* SL on his way to RA training, called in for a meeting. Confronted face-to-face.
- 00:08:20 *Question:* Initial perception of Winthrop’s attitude towards LGBTQ people and issues? *Answer:* SL didn’t have a lot of perception from students. SL’s first impression came from authorities. SL needed some form of employment, worked at the front desk of two buildings – both bosses were open and affirming. SL talks about Mary Kay Hill and her “Safe Zones” sign. SL talks about the support from faculty and staff at Winthrop. SL talks about the shift in himself.
- 00:11:45 *Question:* How did you connect with students? *Answer:* SL getting used to being an “out” person at college. SL wondering what life is going to be like being an “out” person. SL was surprised – seen as an equal.
- 00:13:50 *Question:* How did you make friends on campus? *Answer:* Made friends through new student activities. SL stayed open and didn’t feel threatened.
- 00:14:55 *Question:* How did you get involved in Safe Zones and what is Safe Zones? *Answer:* It is a part of GLoBAL (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Ally League). It’s goal is to create safe places for students and it equips everybody to do what they can to make it safe and inclusive. SL talks about speaking with Dean Bethany Marlowe, who invited SL to a Safe Zones meeting.
- 00:16:55 [no question] SL’s first Safe Zones orientation was slightly nerve racking. SL discusses the fascination he experienced at his first orientation. That was the first time SL really talked about his hardships. SL left with a sense of all of the resources available to LGBTQ people in Rock Hill and Winthrop.
- 00:19:10 *Question:* Say more about the resources? *Answer:* SL was able to find a place of worship. There were useful videos. Safe Zones didn’t push SL into any opportunity, but showed him all of the options.
- 00:20:40 *Question:* Is Rock Hill accepting of LGBTQ people? *Answer:* It’s 50/50. Rock Hill for Equality is an organization in town. SL talks about a historic gay club in Rock Hill and other organizations and businesses. SL is selective in choosing the places he

- goes to. Winthrop has changed the city.
- 00:22:30 *Question:* What is the name of the historic gay club? *Answer:* The Hideaway. SL talks about the name of the Hideaway.
- 00:23:35 *Question:* Other businesses and churches? *Answer:* There aren't a lot of businesses that are extremely vocal allies. SL talks about Amelie's (local coffee shop and bakery) and its owner. People learn about allies through word-of-mouth. SL talks about Catawba Care and their resources.
- 00:27:24 *Question:* What areas in Rock Hill would you not feel comfortable in? *Answer:* SL talks about the representation of people's opinions in The Herald (Rock Hill's newspaper) and the internet. SL talks about negative imagery in the South. SL talks about the connectivity of prejudice.
- 00:29:40 *Question:* Have you ever felt unsafe? *Answer:* SL had feelings of discomfort at Greek Life settings. SL talks about "unsafe" environments.
- 00:31:45 *Question:* Does Safe Zones reach out to all students? *Answer:* Safe Zones is voluntary. If someone is going to actively change the atmosphere on campus, then that person needs to care about the issue. Safe Zones will do mandatory sessions for organizations, but it is still voluntary for students to attend those sessions. There are individual students who have stepped up to help change the climate in their organization. In the Athletics Department, the track and field coach asked Safe Zones to do a training session. Safe Zones has worked with the campus pride index.
- 00:35:55 *Question:* Have you witnessed a lot of change? *Answer:* Yes. A little less than 30 gender neutral bathrooms have been identified on campus. A conversation has started about the topic. SL talks about a change in the atmosphere and tangible changes – additions to the bullying section of the student conduct code.
- 00:39:10 *Question:* Talk about the relationship between churches and LGBTQ people/issues? *Answer:* Christianity and Islam are the two religions that have an issue with the LGBTQ lifestyle. SL discusses a split in the church community – there is a clear group of churches that are and are not affirming. SL talks about the shift in the conversation about gender and sexuality – it's becoming harder ignore. SL talks about a piece he wrote about a church in Charlotte. SL says it's a good thing for people to have this conversation, even though it may be painful for some people. "It's not vague or ambiguous anymore."
- 00:45:15 [no question] SL continues his thoughts on religion and LGBTQ issues. "It's just becoming very obvious that some people are accepting of equality and some people are not."

- 00:47:27 *Question:* National participation? *Answer:* Year-long internship with the Human Rights Campaign called “Emerging Leaders.” It started with a 3-day summit. SL worked with and communicated with people his age that were passionate about LGBTQ rights. SL talks about marriage equality press and the lack of attention to other important LGBTQ issues. Laws won’t automatically heal a lot of the struggles LGBTQ people face.
- 00:53:20 *Question:* Can you anticipate where LGTBQ issues are headed? *Answer:* Marriage equality is at the tipping point. Trans rights is a conversation being had. There is a spectrum of LGBTQ issues to deal with. SL talks about his generation’s general dislike of judgment. There is a strong sense of individualism when it comes to morality. SL discusses where the LGBTQ debate is at now and comments on how much more open minded his generation is.
- 01:00:30 *Question:* Do you think we’re at a good point? *Answer:* This social movement has moved faster than a lot of other social movements. SL theorizes that, “there is no easy way to physically segregate sexual orientation and gender identity.” Media and technology has brought people together and made LGBTQ discrimination unacceptable.
- 01:04:30 *Question:* How have you used the internet? *Answer:* It’s made everything less lonely. “It’s given context to every moment of my life.” SL talks about the Trevor Project. SL’s story online has reached other students and made people aware.
- 01:06:50 *Question:* What are you future plans? *Answer:* Doing an internship at Disney Land in California. SL speculates that Disney is the next step. SL talks about wanting to share his experience and help others find wholeness. SL has worked as a mentor. SL is passionate about helping LGBTQ people finding a life of meaning. SL has started the process of becoming a life coach.
- 01:10:45 *Question:* Any final words? *Answer:* “Fifty years from now, ten years from now, five days from now, it will be a challenge for every person to still love themselves. I think that is universal. I think that is human. And for me, so much of the challenges about that was being gay, being a boy that was considered feminine growing up in a home of a lot of toxic religious shame, so those were the unique challenges I faced in loving myself and loving my life. But, I found out that those things weren’t true and those things didn’t have to be something I carried with me for the rest of my life, and I found out that I could accept myself and that life worked best that way. I think if there is any message that I think is timeless and universal to leave with people is, out of the love that you are experiencing in your own heart and in your own life, you are able to love others and to have compassion for the world. I used to start out with the message of, listen to other people’s experiences and try to understand and try to feel them and

care about them and be open to them. But I think for a lot of people, they're inability to do that stems from the fact that they have never been able to do that for themselves. I think it's got to start with honor the life that you have been given and have compassion towards yourself, for your quirks and insecurities, and your mistakes. If you sit with yourself long enough outside of a relationship, outside of the community where you belong, if you can sit with yourself long enough, you get to a point where you realize that you are OK and that you are worthy and that your life can be anything you want it to be. I think it's worth doing the work to get to that place, and I think from that place you are able to show up in a way that says to somebody else, "What's in your heart? What are your dreams and what is your pain?" You're able to then listen and care and receive their experience coming from the deep love you've already gotten to yourself. That's the work we're here to do. That's always going to be the work of being human."

01:14:07 *End of interview*