

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Clyde Lee Harrelson

COLLECTION: 4700.2117

IDENTIFICATION: Longtime educator in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system

INTERVIEWERS: Brandy George, Hope McPhatter

SERIES: Baton Rouge's LGBTQ Community: Then and Now

INTERVIEW DATE: November 2, 2009

FOCUS DATES: 1960s - 2009

ABSTRACT:

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Introduction; Harrelson is a native of Baton Rouge, raised in the Istrouma area; father and grandfather worked at Standard Oil; graduated from Istrouma High in 1964; has a BA from Southeastern Louisiana University and two advanced degrees from Louisiana State University; has taught in East Baton Rouge Parish for thirty-three years, has numerous awards; he'll turn sixty-three on November 20th; left his Southern Baptist faith to become Episcopalian after his mother supported the change; is a very liberal democrat; was never married although most gay men his age were at some time; doesn't have a current partner; came out later in life; first time going to a gay bar was just to see other people like himself; his naiveté about sex, even as a college student; got by in high school because he wasn't effeminate and had many friends; his first gay experience when he was in his late-thirties and met a man at a Christmas party who seduced him; he didn't come out completely until he was in his fifties and close to retiring from teaching; running into former students at gay bars; he questions what it means to come out, to him it meant not giving a damn who knew; didn't know other gay men growing up, but now knows he has four high school classmates who are gay; his college roommate of two years was gay, but the topic never came up between them at the time, and he learned years later; now the community is much more open than it once was; he's amazed at gay characters on television; his grandmother's suspicions about Liberace; learning that other actors and comedians were gay only after their deaths; young people are more accepting these days; as a Christian, he focuses on Christ, feels God created him different and he accepts that; gets angry at Bible-thumpers who don't live their life according to Christ, they don't realize that Jesus was a radical; in college, didn't know what the phrase, "Don't drop the soap" referred to; knowledge of gay bars in Baton Rouge including George's Place; bars were the only gathering places he knew of, they were a place to meet people; recalls Lafayette Park (at site of current Shaw Center) being a place where men were arrested for prostitution and solicitation; organizing in the LGBT has only become noticeable in the last five to seven years in Baton Rouge; gay rights rarely comes up in

presidential campaigns; doesn't know who leaders in the LGBT community were, they may have been in the closet; gays back then were more silent, knew they were a minority, didn't want to expose themselves to ridicule; Hollywood directors and actors who kept their lifestyle hidden; is a strong supporter of equal rights, supports gay marriage and feels people should not be fired for their orientation, that has nothing to do with job performance; "coming out means different things to different people"; difference in his behavior in his thirties and forties versus his fifties when he no longer cared if people knew; ponders what his parents may have known or suspected about his sexuality; he was one of four boys and his father left him alone if he didn't want to go hunting or fishing, respected that he was different than his brothers, Harrelson thinks he would have accepted him; believes his mother knew, she relied on his taste when clothes shopping, got his help with flower arrangements; is sure his brothers know, but they don't about their private lives with each other anyway, and he doesn't bring it up; Harrelson's experience is different than other men who came out earlier in their lives; didn't frequent bars for fear of jeopardizing his teaching career; conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T3969)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 40 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 20 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Obituary

RESTRICTIONS: None