

Jo Henderson Oral History LGBTQIA+ Interview

Interviewers: Emily McNett, Nathan Reesman, Allison Letcher, & Katie Ferguson

November 19, 2021

00:00:00.000-00:14:48.770

START

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00:00:13.880

Emily McNett: Did you start recording?

Allison Letcher: Yes, I started recording.

EM: Okay. So. Are you good, Jo? [thumbs up]

Jo Henderson: [laughs] Yes. I'm good. [thumbs up]

00:00:27.320

EM: Do you want to just give like a standard introduction so name, pronouns, and then your affiliation to Stout?

JH: Okay, I'm Jo Henderson, I go by she/her/hers and I'm a freshman at Stout. [laughs]

00:00:45.070

EM: So, we are the members of the queer studies class, and we're doing an oral history project on the controversies around campus pertaining to the queer community. So, would you be willing to share any examples of campus controversies when it comes to the LGBTQIA+ community?

JH: Yeah. So, I work in the archives at the library, and I overheard my manager talking to another student about some things happening around campus with the Qube and things like that and she had mentioned that apparently Westboro Baptist Church had like come to Stout at one point, and so I did my own personal digging and it's true. In 2008, Westboro Baptist Church visited Stout after three students died in a fire and their campaign was, Stout supports homosexuality, so it's their fault that their students died. And that's yeah, that's not that's not okay. So, students all around campus rallying together, I believe they arrived around 7:30. Over 1,000 students rallied around Westboro campus, like Westboro Baptist Church and protest-counter protested against them, getting Bible verses to give back to them saying that you know what they're doing is wrong and that it's not because of you know their reasons and so 15 minutes after Westboro, like set up camp they left. They had to leave and were escorted away by police, so I just thought that was really fascinating because like so many students, like rallied together to support these families because it was, I believe it was just over a week after these students passed away. It was so soon that, like everyone was so supportive of the families and just it was great seeing like all- all different communities, even like the LGBTQ community and the Christian, they were coming together to support these families and to counter protest and I

just thought that was really cool because we kind of saw that. Was it about a month ago with the protest on the corner? Like people all over campus- it wasn't as big as the 2008 protests, but it was still like a kind of a testament to like how united we are as a campus and how supportive we are of our fellow students that I just thought that was really cool.

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Katie Ferguson: Yeah, so about like controversies. Why do you think it's important for people to talk about them and to keep that conversation going?

JH: Well, I think it's important because like we all have different opinions, you know, and even I come from a very Christian household, so me being LGBT like in the community as well, it's- I see from like both sides of the perspective. So, I think talking about these controversies and things will help you understand where someone is coming from and can help you like I don't know the word for it, but like help, you just understand, because people get really upset about these things because it may go against their beliefs or something someone said may go against their beliefs and that's understandable and you can get upset about it too. But you just have to understand, like where they're coming from and understand that, like, yeah, I don't know, it's just knowing the other person's perspective and being able to like talk about these things and like a very dignified like instead of arguing about them, being able to sit down and talk to them and just yeah. [laughs]

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EM: So, you obviously heard about this controversy from your boss, but do you know, just like how it gets out to the community and how people like catch on to it? Like you mentioned, the large rally of support that came behind-

JH: Yeah.

EM: -like how that got out?

JH: I don't- I didn't research like how people knew about it because it was like 7:00 o'clock in the morning. How people were out there, but I guess, like the protests we had about a month ago, I didn't know about I was in my room like on the other side of the building. I didn't know about it until one of my friends texted me and mentioned that that was going on and so I feel like just word of mouth people saying, *oh hey, this is going on, maybe we should go do something about it, we should do something*. So I guess just like a word of mouth is probably the fastest, and of course we have the Internet now, so that's like split second everyone knows about things.

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KF: Yeah, so do you like have a relation or connection to like controversies and like the conversation about them?

JH: Yeah, so as I said, like my family is very Christian, they do not know that I am gay. So going home every time they see something related to the LGBTQ community, it's always some

sneering comments, some little arguments, and I either have to keep my mouth shut and like be safe or say something and risk coming- accidentally coming out to my parents so it's kind of kind of risky situations sometimes, but I definitely- it kind of gives me like insight into both sides of the argument, because here I'm around LGBTQ people like all the time. So, I hear their experiences and their opinions and things like that. But when I go home, it's all like the Christian perspective, so I've been able to come like kind of separate myself from my parents point of views and being able to like view things with my own eyes instead of through my parents as lens. So, I've been able to, not justified, but like being able to be like *oh well, God doesn't say gays are bad*. I've been able to research things and been able to be like *oh, it's not a sin that I like girls*. [laughs] So, it's just like I found it really cool being able to see from both sides and being able to like find my own path I guess, yeah.

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EM: So, not just your story, but also like going back to the controversy. What is the importance of getting this information out there for like the larger community to know?

JH: Like what kind of information?

EM: Just like even like your story of just like coming from a different background and being able to understand.

JH: [nods] Yeah. I guess like a lot of people if they like knew that *oh you're Christian and you're gay, how does that work?* Like that would be- I feel like that would be very confusing for a lot of people because Christians do have a bad rap of being anti- like very homophobic, very homophobic. So, I guess like if I mentioned that to somebody, I guess they'd be kind of confused about that and so being that I have like my own perspective on Christianity, I'm able to explain to people that, *hey, this is what my parents believe, but I believe this, which is not homophobic*. So, I guess like I'm able to give some insight into things. Like my sister was very confused on her sexuality as well, so I was able to help her and explain to her that these verses were mistranslated and these verses don't mean that, and she was able to like kind of clear up- I was able to clear up some things for her so she was able to kind of more accept herself as she is, and so I feel like that's really cool that I'm able to do that.

00:10:32.510

KF: Yeah. So, if a campus controversy were to happen today, how do you think you would react to it? I know one happened recently, but still.

JH: I don't know, I feel like, I'm trying to think. I don't know. I would- I would obviously have to get as much information as I could immediately. That's what I did a few months ago with the protest. I- I went there and I got as much information from as many people as I could trying to figure out what was said, what the person was doing and then from there choose like my course of action. What I wanted to do, whether I wanted it to be there in that situation or if I wanted to leave and ignore it. So, I feel like that's usually my course of action for things like that, is like do

I get involved based on the information I have, or do I just stay away, and step away and not let it bother me?

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EM: That's why you work in the archives.

JH: Yeah.

00:11:44.320

EM: So, you've already like reflected a little bit on how like having a community here and then going back home but just how is your time at Stout like- How has it made you feel appreciated or underappreciated?

JH: Oh, I love it. It's so much better than back home because I come from a very small northern town, so I believe in our entire town there are three people in the LGBTQ community that I that I know of and the rest of everyone else, like very strict, goes to church, very- [laughs] so, it's just- it's very refreshing to be around people who are like me and accept me as I am and I'm able to just be myself around them instead of having to like suppress myself. So it's just it's very free. It's very freeing. I really like it here.

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KF: That's good. So, with these controversies, how do you think that it will affect you or the campus and other students in long term?

JH: Well, I know the protests a few months ago, that's still affecting people now and I know the Qube had a lot of like resources available for people who were affected negatively by it, who were like I guess triggered in some way by it they were able to help them and get the help that they needed. So I just, yeah, there are a lot of things that happen. There are things that happen and there's no getting around it, but Stout has a lot of resources to just help, and there are a lot of people who are just willing to be there like we're such like a united campus. It's really cool because there's just always someone who has your back. [laughs]

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EM: Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?

JH: I don't think so. This was fun.

00:14:12.800

KF: And then I guess I don't know how, what, how well, you'll know it but did you have any recommendations of other like students or faculty you think would like to interview for this, or would know more about this?

JH: I don't know.

KF: That's totally fine. [?]

JH: I guess like my boss at the archives, would probably know a lot because she works in the archives so. But yeah, I'm not sure.

KF: Okay.

00:14:46.720

Nathan Reesman: Okay, thank you so much for interviewing with us, Jo. Okay, I'm going to stop the transcript now, if I can figure out how. Okay, perfect.

END

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