

Marc Maxwell Transcript

Adam Nickels: Hello. Thank you for being here today. Could you start by introducing yourself and giving a brief background of who you are and what you do?

Marc Maxwell: I am Marc Maxwell, and I am the eternal problem of what order in which you describe yourself. So, I am American. I am Jewish. I was raised in the Midwest, in Cincinnati, Ohio, moved to Boston in 1981 to go to graduate school, and I have never left. I had a long-term partner and husband from 1980 until 2014, when David died. I was raised in a Reform household that had a fairly strong family, home, and synagogue-based observance through Hebrew school – religious school – as long as I lived in my parents' house, which was through the end of high school, and in Cincinnati. I think one of the things that makes me who I am is that I find my parents and their neighbors' choice [inaudible] to the Cincinnati Public School, even though we lived in an, at the time, predominantly Jewish neighborhood that was not in Cincinnati proper. It was a first-line suburb, but it didn't have a public school of its own; it] didn't have a school system of its own. So, the choice was for me and my siblings and all our neighbors to go to the Cincinnati Public Schools, which even back then was a quite diverse and integrated school system. So, the possibility of being in a suburban white, all-Jewish neighborhood, and schools was a possibility, but that was not the choice that my family made, and it was a great one. In my daily life, I am an architect; I have always done this. I have both degrees in urban planning and architecture, and I've been running my firm for about thirty-one to thirty-two years now. So, a long time of being self-employed, with a staff and a lot of different, varying projects. But being self-employed has also allowed me to be both mindful and generous of my own time and how much time I put into community activities. I think that sort of brings us back to my level of volunteerism, and I have never worried about work. I have never worried much about the ramifications of my being out in

the community in all ways. So certainly, most of my clients, over time, if they get to know me, they get to know that I am Jewish, that I am gay, that I am widowed. All those things sort of being who I am today. That's always out there. I know early in my career, when I worked for other people, it was not so simple to be in that circumstance. Part of it being timing, and then part of it being my security, self-confidence, and certainty about my life and where I was going, so that I hit all the points I should have.

AN: You've shared that you've been involved in quite a few different volunteer roles and some activism work in your life. Could you share some examples of this? I would love to hear about the work that you've done to support LGBTQ+ work in the communities and organizations that you've worked for.

MM: It started when David and I got together in the late '70s, early '80s. David was very politically active, and just hanging out with him meant that I was present at lots of things that happened at the University of Cincinnati. It wasn't the overlay of the Jewish community at that time in the activism, but I'll sort of talk about a piece of that in a moment. Then, when we moved to Boston, we got involved with Am Tikvah, which is a gay and lesbian Chavurah [that] met in the basement of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] Hillel, and it was really across the denominations of Judaism. It was what was common to everyone – everyone was gay or lesbian. But everyone's observance, everyone's background, everyone's knowledge was much broader than I had ever experienced before, although I had a little bit of that, it was – I used to say it was like from your Yeshiva Bochers, who had come out and were wrestling with that, to nonwhite, non-Jewish born people who were seeking Judaism. So, it was this. It was across the spectrum. I always remembered that in activism that was more Jewish than gay, that one of the things was this group, labeled me and David as being a rabid reform, that that they had never experienced a bunch of these folks who, Yeshiva, New York – they had great knowledge of Torah and observance, but they had never really met Midwestern committed reformed Jews, who were very sure of our Judaism and what we believe and

what we dispelled and what we held, and they just found us – we were such an anomaly to this group. I felt like sometimes the placard we were holding was about this sort of – it was more progressive than classical reform. But it was a Midwestern, reformed camp-based family-based; we don't stone our wives anymore, and we don't poke people's eyes out when they poke us in the eye. It felt like we were – that's what we were proselytizing, was that we allowed other people to have their beliefs, but we're sure in ours. One of the things that I didn't mention to you when we spoke before, but I wrote it down later that day, was through Tikvah, David and the group put together a gay and lesbian speaker's bureau. It was in the infancy of getting the Jewish community to recognize that there weren't gay people in their myths, and some of us wanted to be part of a more organized community. Tikvah was great. We were there for probably ten years, we took leadership roles, but we also missed having a rabbinic leader or teachers. We were at that moment in our life. HIV was entering everyone's understanding, and we had friends who were getting sick, and we felt like we couldn't get the pastoral care that we needed from this lay-led group. They were very supportive of us, but the whole group was sort of collectively grieving, but doing it on each other's shoulders, and never had any sort of more trained and spiritual leader guidance that we felt like we needed. We always said we knew that we were going to keep seeking because we wanted a more organized education. We knew we would need pastoral care at some point. But the speaker's bureau sent out pairs of members to obsessively straight congregations in the region. It was a fledgling group, and everybody volunteered. For David and me, it was easy to send us someplace because we were happy to go. Often, it was as part of a Shabbat, couple of Shabbats [inaudible], or it might be a study group, a midweek, Thursday morning study group of various congregations. It was that first dabbling in, or for me, the first understanding that simply standing in front of a group and saying that I was gay and Jewish, and standing there with my becoming long term partner next to me, was powerful and it's just being – in the irony, I don't remember how many, six or twelve, congregations we did over a year or two periods, usually by ourselves sometimes with a woman friend

of ours, lesbian friend of ours, because we felt like it gave a better flavor that all gay people were not men are from the Midwest. This woman, whom we often spoke, is still a dear friend. She has all of that Boston accent and attitude about herself and her Judaism, and so was a good foil. But in sort of zero degrees of separation, one of the places we went was a temperature tick, but in Wayland, and I got to be in the '90s – and relatively early '90s. I remember we spoke to a Thursday morning Torah study discussion group in what was their board room, and we didn't know anybody there, as we never did.

Typically, the Rabbi introduced us. We had a little spiel that we gave about who we were, and then we would take questions from folks, and this was a very engaged conversation. I remember it was before Seder, and by the end of this presentation and conversation, everyone wanted to know where we were doing Seder. They were all good. They all wanted to invite us to their home. We had plans already, and that was fine, but I realized that we've sort of made these folks at least understand us and sort of beginning to love us at the end of this ninety minutes. I learned how powerful that was to go by yourself. From that day forward, when I talk to a group, when I present myself in all my volunteer work, it's just being myself. That is the most powerful tool of getting people to understand that [I am?] more similar than dissimilar from them, that the only descriptor that's different is probably that I'm gay, and that otherwise, I fit their concept of somebody who was raised Jewish, stayed involved with the community. Their wrongs need to be righted, and so that speaker's bureau gave me a set of tools, which I then used in three other places in the Jewish community. One is Temple Israel, which has been sort of my largest ongoing commitment and involvement. When we left, we didn't leave Am Tikvah [inaudible], but when we felt we needed more than Am Tikvah, through both rabbis that we knew and rabbinic interns that we knew who were at Temple Israel, we ended up being invited to join the [inaudible], and it was clear that the senior rabbi and the rabbi educator were directly under him. They knew that there were gay Jews out there in Boston. They wanted a place – both their knowledge about Tikvah and individual knowledge of people. They knew that there were people who wanted a place to be part of

a community to pray to learn and that if Temple Israel of Boston being who it is, who has invited in refuseniks in the '80s, Jews by choice, single parents, Jews of color, and if they could not invite gay and lesbian Jews, which became LGBTQ Jews, if they could not, then who could? So, they had the resources. They believed that the community would be accepting and, sort of in the global sense, they had the space for us to join. It became political in an instant. I was fearful, but David was never fearful about it. I was fearful about being different in that old German, Jewish, wealthy, huge congregation. I was assured by two of the rabbis that there was a lesbian staff member there, and there had been a rabbinic intern who would come out. I believe that the rabbinic team was sort of getting in touch with what they didn't know about us, about the community in general. This is in the mid-80s, so, again, the HIV/AIDS crisis was sort of coming to everyone's consciousness. There were losses, and the Jewish community was trying to figure out how to respond to that. It wasn't always perfect in their response, but I think their heart was in the right place; just their brain and their emotions were sometimes a little skewed to where they needed to be. We had gotten involved in some of that work with CJP [Combined Jewish Philanthropies] and the AIDS Action Committee here in Boston. So, we ultimately did join. It was controversial, and even the membership form said husband, wife, and then the next line was children. I know that for us, the watershed moment was all our questions about will it be accepted. Will the congregation accept this? Will all this work out? The senior rabbi just kept saying, "If you don't try, we'll never know," and it was his kind of pushing us that it was, they sent us a membership application, which we sat at our dining room table with Wite-Out and whited out "husband and wife" and wrote "Adult A and Adult B" and then put our names there. We were later told that all members were voted on at the board meeting and, usually, it was pretty pro forma; there are fifteen new members this month, and their names were on a – it wasn't a spreadsheet, but there was a list. Someone said in the board meeting, "Who approved this family?" because we insisted on joining as a family, [and] the first names are Marc and David. "Those are two men, two boys. Who approved this?" There was silence in the boardroom, I'm told. Then,

from two corners, the senior rabbi from one corner and the rabbi educator from the other corner simultaneously said, "I did." Someone else called the question, and the roster of new members was admitted. But that was just the beginning of our journey there. We really did feel at the beginning like there was rabbinic and staff support, but that there wasn't huge communal support. There were people who politely [inaudible] oxymorons, politely other [inaudible] to us. They were at the end of Shabbat service, and you are inclined to turn to the loved one you've come with, and to say Shabbat Shalom and to give them a kiss. We noticed that there were a few people who turned to see what we were going to do each week. With David being who he was, we embraced [with] a big kiss. Then we turned to our friends who were with us that did the same thing, and it didn't matter male or female, whoever was sitting with us, but we greeted them just like everybody else. We sort of – I feel like the first year or two, we sort of bludgeoned [inaudible] though. That's not fair. [It] wasn't that hard; it was mildly uncomfortable. But it was so great to be there. Because one of the things that certainly when we first joined, I always describe, people would say, "Oh, you've joined the congregation Temple Israel. How is it there?" David grew up in the Isaac M. Wise Synagogue in Cincinnati, and I grew up in Temple Shalom in Cincinnati. I said if you put them on top of each other, that's what we found. We found an even bigger congregation that had both the formality and the resources of Wise and the [inaudible], the family orientation of [inaudible]. So, that's what we found. So, the activism part. I've come to know that there's activism and simply joining the [inaudible] to be there as a family. But then, we brought probably two other gay people, a gay man and lesbian, both single at the time, to join with us before it was joined at the same moment. Before long, there were ten or twelve gay households. Then there were twenty gay households. Then there was someone from our immediate circle who was about to transition from female to male, and that person ended up in Temple Israel with us. We, at one point, had this as we moved the Chavurah we had into a new space, a more organized space. For a couple of years, that gay and lesbian Chavurah met in people's homes. We saw each other at Temple, but we also did create our little study and

support, and Shabbat dinner and holiday observance stuff. All the places where people would go be with their families. We ended up being with this Chavurah and in various configurations and it's when I realized that – and I have great familial support as does David, and I was accepted by David's family and he was lovingly accepted by mine – but we always said we have the family that we're born into, and the family that we choose, and the family that we chose was predominantly gay and Jewish. Those were our friends, our dear friends. I know that's more social and personal. I do believe that those ties become political and advocacy in their own right. So, the fast-forward is, we used the same tools at Temple Israel that we use with the speaker's bureau: just be ourselves and do the things that felt right to us. We dug in, and we joined committees because that's kind of the way it is in a big place. The way to get to know people is to sit in some sort of working/teaching classroom. That's how you meet ten or twenty people, because you can't meet four thousand people. I always found that giving of my professional skills, so I joined building and grounds. I became, within a very short time, the chair of that committee because the people that had preceded me had no background in building operations or how they're put together or how you maintain them. That's what I did every day. So, I sort of gave up the things that I could give. David had gotten involved in a number of different [inaudible] committees and social justice work, and the relationship to community services, which still provide meals to folks with HIV-related sort of things. So, we sort of crossed over in these, in the Jewish community, to things where we felt we could make a difference. Over that time, we were both invited to join the board of trustees. Ultimately, I became an officer. For me, the distance between 1986, when we joined and we were the other, and 2006, when I was put on the track to become president of the congregation. So, it was essentially twenty to twenty-five years from being people not sure to being asked. It was one generation that I was asked to be the president of the congregation. I didn't do it in 2009-2011, when I was first asked to do it, because of personal and professional reasons, but I had just finished being president of a congregation. Again, while I was asking for twenty years, I did it in thirty years. So when I

sat down to take that role, make that decision, but that's when people would say to me that they harken back to the good old days, the sort of Ozzie and Harriet days of American society and American Jewish society, and I would always turn to them, and I would go, "If we were in those days, I would not be the president of this congregation," or now past presidents congregation, because I'm sure that I was the first. I know that I was the first out gay president in a very long time, the first single widowed president, but there's just so many ways in which I don't fit the mold of who has led this congregation for one hundred and sixty years, but that our presence, our digging in, our working for the community, helps people love us. Once they made that connection, that we were just good people, and were willing to contribute to the community, the gay part fell away. Now, for some people, it probably never did, but for most people, we were just, "Oh, it's Marc and David." I mean, our family has always said, "Oh, it's the boys." It says they didn't see that as being different from all of our mutual siblings who are in straight relationships, but they just saw ours as being just like all those others, if not more involved in our Jewish community. I think that what cemented us there was, in fact, that it became for us important to be present, to be there, to be visible. When I say [inaudible], we use the term about being reluctant about being an activist, but I realized that simply by our presence, and how we present it, and what we got involved in, in our insistence that we never blinked that we didn't belong there or in any other organization, that in itself is an act of activism. To just not ever allow people to have that other – they can have that other opinion, but we just never accepted it. For me, that really came from David and his steadfast belief that we had every right to be there, and that we had every right to be ourselves in that community, in every community. But two other things that I've worked on, one with David, and then I have continued, and then another that I did on my own. The one with David was cashing in the infancy of Keshet. David was intrigued by that multi-Jewish denominational outreach to the community, and even in our time with Am Tikvah, we had kind of run up against walls and fences with the conservative community, and certainly, the Orthodox community in Boston. Tikvah was asked, and was quite

flattered to be asked, to co-host a Jewish Book Fair that was being sponsored, I believe, by the synagogue council. Everyone who sponsored it got their logo and their name, program book, or whatever, and when we sent the artwork in for that sponsorship, it included that it was Boston's gay and lesbian community. They said we could use the logo, but we couldn't use the name. We couldn't use their tagline because it included gay and lesbian. That became quite ridiculous [inaudible], that we never understood that, but when it was founded, it was about making these connections across the denominations of Judaism. That the unaffiliated, the Reform, the Reconstructionist, all were sort of getting there, that Conservative and Orthodox were not. Any of those involved with Keshet came out of the Jewish Day School program and more Conservative and Orthodox backgrounds, and knew that that work needed to be done. What intrigued us, and one of the things that I think was part of David and me falling in love and understanding each other, was we were those Jewish, gay teens who knew we were different. We dealt with that very differently. David came out in that sixteen/seventeen-year-old range. I just figured out how to pass and not present as being any gayer than I was, just the things you cannot hide, but with that, which you could hide. I figured out how to do that. Then neither of us had torturous high school years; we were both very involved in our temple youth groups. The importance of that was we both grew up with this leadership in the community; we were presidents of our respective couple youth groups, the same year, David's eleventh-grade year and my twelfth-grade year. We knew each other from things that happened across the three biggest reformed congregations, all part of the NFTY [North American Federation for Temple Youth, formerly National Federation for Temple Youth] back in the early '70s. We knew each other, but we certainly didn't know each other was gay at that point. But we grew up with parents who were officers, board members, and volunteers. That's the difference for me, between that sort of engagement and activism, is a very thin line. You can't be dedicated in volunteering and not have the sort of activist role, and then it sort of moved from the Jewish part I knew, and it was only after befriending David and sort of entering his life

that I sort of got moving, just the tacking into the wind of Jewish and gay, and that was one of those places. But David's early support in [inaudible] because it was that we understood what it was like to be in that young role in a community, and to not be able to be yourself, and that we supported Keshet because they were making the inroads. They were only dabbling in youth activities then, but they were very much educating across the spectrum of denominations, and summer camps, and religious schools, and [inaudible] schools, and congregations and so it fit right into what we were doing with that speaker's bureau and our being, and then there was a group that was sort of bringing all those pieces together. So ultimately, I am still on the board of Keshet. David was a very early donor to [inaudible]. We didn't participate in a lot of their activities because we had other outlets, but we very much supported their existence, and over time, we got more involved. Keshet had a big role in Proposition Three in Massachusetts a few years ago, which was going to turn back the state laws protecting trans people. That the Jewish community, Keshet being one of the very strong advocates and mobilizers of the Jewish community, to politic across the Commonwealth, to vote no on three, which would have repealed the trans protections that had only a few years earlier been put in place and so that, again, is that crossover between the Jewish community seeing a wrong that needs to be righted. It affected all of us. But disproportionately gay, lesbian, trans people, and with that, we were able to motivate the Jewish community behind that effort. We were very involved in equal marriage, and by a fluke, we were invited to be one of those couples that went to the Supreme Judicial Court, bringing suit against the state of Massachusetts, the Commonwealth, when they would not allow same-gender marriages. We didn't get on the docket, if you will. But I knew why we were asked, and it was because of our affiliation with the Jewish community, that there were so many rabbis and Jewish institutions that were in favor of same-gender marriage. They realized that there was not a gay male couple in the eight couples that were bringing [the] suit against the Commonwealth, that ultimately prevailed, and same-gender marriage was upheld by the court. We were involved in that, and through Am Tikvah, Keshet, and Temple Israel, we

were doing that work. So that was just another place that just being yourself – and we realized that everyone in our world already saw us as married. We've been together twenty-five years at that point. The names of David and Marc, Marc and David, they just roll together for everyone in our world. We often would say some colloquialisms, sort of aggravating me and us, and one of them was “Oh, your other half,” and David would always say, “No, I'm a whole person all by myself.” But we were dynamite as a couple. It was that you're not half a person if you don't have a partner. It is another one of those on his bucket list, but that's another matter. The other activism role that I've taken, that was more professional, was my practice has always been around multifamily special needs housing, dementia care, seniors, communities, assisted living, and that sort of thing. Gay and lesbian individuals and couples do not always feel comfortable or safe in senior housing, and men, as my generation has aged, and some traditional gay values of predominantly not having children, so who's going to take care of us when we get old? Our parents took care of us, and we take care of our parents. This is about twenty years ago that we started working multi-prong advocacy, in the gay community, in the street community, about gay people not fitting in, because I did this work with straight providers of straight seniors communities, I actually saw it. It also came to a head with there was a period of time when if someone had HIV, they were not acceptable to live in an independent, communal seniors' circumstance, be that townhouses, cottages, or in an apartment. They know they were thought to have a communicable disease, and they couldn't be there. So, this was like a crossover for me of discrimination against gay people, discrimination against people with HIV, discrimination against couples, and so, for a number of years, I worked on that issue in a number of different places. Ultimately, we were celebratory when, I think it was a cabinet level position, but the Director of Elder Affairs in Massachusetts was a lesbian, which was sort of a culmination of this effort to get the issues of gay and lesbian, and now trans and queer, on the radar of those who provide senior housing and use state and federal money to subsidize that, or even private who have more success at excluding people in their application and admittance

process. But that's another place where it's not as much Jewish as it was gay advocacy for me, but to think about the folks I knew who had run into issues in these communities, or hearing community sponsors, the very explicit bias against gay people and gay couples in these communities. So, that's a lot about what I have done, and I'm sort of threading in a little bit about how life together both injected me, and then bolstered me, to take on causes that needed to be corrected, which was good work to be done. So, I know the second question, I should let you say it so that you get it in the recording.

AN: Your relationship with David was instrumental in building the relationship with the synagogue, but then you became the first gay couple to be married at Temple Israel. So, could you explain how that influenced your relationship with the synagogue and the community, and how being the first gay couple to be married at Temple Israel has impacted the local community?

MM: So, I will say the first twenty years of our relationship, I always said most gay men of my age, marriage is a veiled institution that doesn't apply to us. So, and I have to say that rather cavalier statement, David and I both were brought up, and our parents were both couples who were together for more than sixty years. In fact, I think sixty-four for both of them, years together. So, very long-term relationships have been our parents' first and only marriage, for both sets of them. We always said – we laugh about how you become your parents, despite everything else that's different about you from your parents. All your efforts to not become your parents, you do become your genetics. You could tell, and so we always said to people, straight people, gay people, we just said, "Our relationship looks more like our parents than dissimilar." It is more similar. We don't agree on everything, but we know how to work it out. We try not to go to bed mad with each other. We try to always be in public to be a unified force. We have our differences, and we can figure out how to talk them out and how to get to a good place with that. When same-gender marriage became an issue both here in Massachusetts [and] nationally, and ultimately, we were also part of the conversation in Maine, where we have a second

home. It was before same-gender marriage, we constructed a number of legal documents that made us partners in a legal, financial, governmental way. You probably know this, but with marriage in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts comes fourteen hundred rights just by getting married: the right of visitation, the right of inheritance, community property. There are just so many rights that only your spouse has automatically with that marriage license. When same-gender marriage came to the forefront, we were educated or became educated about all the things that we had tried to construct, owning the house I'm sitting in together. Another piece of property that I used to say, "No, we spent because our parents, our families, were all in Ohio." We used to go back to Ohio a lot. I would always say, "God forbid we should have a car accident in Ohio, as I would not be able to be your next of kin. I would not be able to make medical decisions or directives for you." Because it's what AIDS taught us. It's like growing up in infancy. I'm smiling because I just outed myself about the ageism – youth has become the aged gay person and that at that time, I worried about such things because as my father would describe it, our little bubble sort of lived in Cambridge, Somerville for the last forty years and in our progressive, New England, Massachusetts, Cambridge bubble, the Temple Israel bubble. We live in a place where we're fully acknowledged as a couple and as gay people, and as contributing members of society and colors of our community, all those things. Then, when you get outside of the bubble, all those things get more tenuous really quickly, depending on where you go. When marriage became a possibility, and we educated ourselves on what went with marriage, it's like, "Sure, we want that." I always said, "It's not going to make any difference for our relationship, but it's going to take care of these fourteen hundred rights [that] suddenly, were going to be ours." Things that we have spent time, energy, money to craft agreements, how we own real estate together, all sorts of things, like we own all our cars. Both of us were on the title to the car, and it was just one more little – those were all little activist nicks that, just one more thing, where we're saying, "We don't care what you think. We are a couple, we go together, the things we own, we own together, and that suddenly this was going to be

made easy [through] marriage.” Then there was the fight for marriage, which our activism became. Temple Israel used us and other long-term couples, some of our friends to this day, who are fourth and fifth generation Temple Israel. Two guys married, two kids, put their kids through Jewish Day School – we're just like everybody else. We just happen to be two men or two women. Temple Israel really took up that fight – and our rabbis – about same-gender marriage was just the right thing to do, like admitting gay people or gay families into the congregation was the right thing to do. We became sort of the poster boys of that. Fast forward, it's 2004, it's May 17, the Supreme Judicial Court, and on the 17th Sunday night of that year, same-gender marriages can happen. Lots of our friends got married at night in Cambridge, as Cambridge City Hall stayed open all night. We know rabbis who went there, who are supportive and the marriage license. That's a formality that happens in thirty-two seconds, and then you're done, and now you get all those rights. That's not the religious part, and so we had a bunch of rabbi friends who were doing the religious ceremony as people stood in line the day after, and we thought we were going to file on the first Monday. The first day, we went and filed the marriage certificate for the license. We went and did our blood tests, but no one [inaudible] do before you can get married. We then scheduled to be married [with] our best friends, one of whom had married, who had [inaudible]. The plan was that we were going to get married by our rabbi in his study, three o'clock on Friday afternoon, then we're going to switch positions with this other couple, and they were going to get married. We were going to witness theirs, and they were going to witness ours. Then the four of us were going to go to dinner, as we regularly do, and probably that evening, drink too much. Then that Sunday night in Cambridge, all of that became national news. All our family always thought of us as living in Cambridge, said, “When [are] you guys getting married?” because we just said, “When it becomes legal, we're going to do it. We're not going to make a big deal out of it. We're in our 24th year of being uncomfortable.” That was our plan, and over the course of that week of May, our friends' family said they were coming to witness our wedding. Our family said they were coming to witness ours, and I said

everybody was going to be traveling to Boston for this. I said to all of them, "It's not what we plan. It's fine for you to come. We'd love to have you here. But you may just come and have dinner with us," because the Romney governor of Massachusetts was trying to get an injunction to stay the issuance of this marriage license. So, I said, "We might get married on Friday at three o'clock. It might not happen." Ultimately, they all did come. Very last minute on Tuesday of that week, a rabbi said, "Can we talk about the ceremony?" We were like, "What's their [inaudible]? We're going to come in, you're going to – you're going to say this stuff. We're going to say yes, and yes. Then we're going to switch places and do it again." "I think it's going to be more than that. I think you're going to be surprised." So, we sort of put together a hastily put-together ceremony and vows to each other. Our friends got married on the bimah with our senior rabbi and cantor. Then we switched positions, and we got married. We were surrounded by fifty friends and family on the bimah. It was surprisingly moving and one of the things that I carry forward to this day. It was my siblings, David's siblings, our parents, our friend, our best friends, their parents, about ten friends in common. There was one fourteen-year-old I could not look at, who was a kid, a younger child of dear friends of ours, who were there. This kid, David and I already had figured out he was gay, whether he knew it or not, but a teenager who was gay, and I could not look at him during this ceremony, because I knew if I looked at him, I was going to cry. Because I realized that our standing on the bimah in front of our family and friends in front of our community, under the narrow [inaudible] in front of the ark, was a statement to this kid, which was when you grow up, you can find a partner and you can be part of the Jewish community and you can have the same gender partner that we knew he was going to seek out. It was that moment that I just couldn't look at him. I realized that even our wedding became this act, this activist event, that we stood in front of other people and committed to each other in that traditional way. To this day, I believe it made a huge amount of difference to us as a couple because, all of a sudden, a much larger community understood how we were related to each other that they never really got when we were just two men who lived together. Straight people

understand when you get married that there's that commitment, there's that love, there's that friction. That's a circumstance they get. They don't understand two guys living together, two women living together, but that part they don't get. Somehow, [it] made, it made a bigger difference. Fast forward, that fourteen-year-old is now in his thirties, married to a man and they just had a child, and then have the support of that child's grandparents, who are our dear friends, for whom it was us standing up [that] made his parents understand when he came out that it was okay. That they could be supportive of his long-term relationship, which resulted in marriage. Now that they have grandchildren from this same-gender couple, it's like that's only one example. I have three other couples that follow that same pattern, and I know that our standing up made them understand their kids, and while they're now adults, make their lives easier because of what you know. I always say it's that Nachshon moment. We stood in front of the sea, and we believed that [it] would be parted if we just walked forward. We worked forward. Me, kind of kicking and screaming sometimes, but David not letting go of my hand and just pulling me along until it became me who was not pulling him along, but we were walking side by side.

AN: Thank you. My next question is, despite everything that you've done and the different roles that you've had and being such an inspiration and a role model to younger people when you got married, you've often told me that you're reluctant to call yourself an activist. Could you explain what makes you feel so reluctant to do that?

MM: I don't know. To me, I would say you are, and it's surprising to hear because I think the work that you've done is fantastic and paves the way for so many people to be so free and comfortable in themselves and get what they want in their lives. So, I can tell you where the reluctance comes from. I'll start there. The reluctance comes from me. As I said, you turn into your parents, and the part of me that comes from my mother, who only recently died, was raised in the south. Southern Jews, conservative community, conservative observance, shopkeepers, and born in the Depression, and she carried with

her, all of her ninety-two years, that feeling of being invisible, bringing no attention to being Jewish, while they were very involved in the Jewish community. She was a dedicated volunteer [at the] Jewish Hospital, at the preschool, in our synagogue; my father even more so. David was more like my father, which was sort of this infantryman, carrying a rifle and just marching into battle like, "This is the right thing to do." I'm more like my mother, and that it was like, I want people to not take notice of me, to not make waves. I want people to like me. I do want to highlight my differences. My reluctance to see myself as an activist in part is that it's hard in that – I've mastered it over time. I'll admit that, but to stand in front of twenty people, thirty people, one hundred people, one thousand people, which I now know how to do. But that didn't come easily to me, and I had to learn because I do think it was that sort of southern-acclimated shopkeeper Jew attitude that not all our customers are Jewish, so don't make a big thing about the fact that we're not open these two days of the year. I get that, that's part of me. I'm sort of wired that way. Then I live between David and my father, who realized there's right and wrong. When you see something wrong, you must right it. You must work to right [it], and there's no other avenue but that, and so the reluctance was that I am not really wired that way. But I have been taught – I was going to say taught myself, but that's not true. I've been taught how to do it, how to be out there, and that's why I say reluctant. I realize I've been out there. It's going to lead us to the next question that you gave me, but my father, my father-in-law, and my husband were all people for whom there wasn't a lot of grays. Everything was very black and white. It was right and wrong, and there was no path other than to seek right. I didn't always agree with them about what was right, but when they saw it, they could only go that way. So, I think that's why I use the word reluctant. I know in my own public persona, being a leader in a synagogue community, and it's a large synagogue community, and often standing up in front of hundreds of people, if not thousands of people. But part of it is, I do it professionally. In my work, I have to stand in front of zoning boards and community meetings, and that sort of thing, and they don't always like what you're telling them, and then the other is this is just a sort of life

experience. People always have said to me in the last four or five years that there's this marked difference about when I stand on the bimah, have a microphone in my hand at the end of [inaudible] or a Martin Luther King celebration, or there are a thousand people in the sanctuary. "You seem so at ease, you seem so natural at it." I think, one, it's not natural; it's a learned behavior. The second is that I say to them, privately afterward, without the mic, I say, "After you've stood in front of a congregation of six hundred fifty people and given your husband's eulogy, you can talk about anything." The fact of standing up at David's funeral in front of that community was – there's absolutely nothing else I've ever been asked to do that comes anywhere near that level of both difficulty and just finding your place and speaking to the group. It's way easy to talk about temple budgets or clergy contracts or any of that because saying goodbye to your best friend in that circumstance in front of that many, one hundred people, is a watershed moment, I think, for almost anybody. That turned the other work that I do much easier, because everything since then has been easy, or not always easy, but easier than that, than that simple act. So that's sort of, again, the intricacy of my activism, my public persona, my being able to lead. It came from all these people that were around me, behind me, before me. Then, events in my own life have just made me keep having that. Those moments at the edge of the sea, where I can't go backward, just got to go forward. So that's what you do, and I think that comes with age and life experiences.

A: Thank you for answering that. My next question follows nicely. You mentioned to me previously that your relatively privileged life empowers you to do the work that you've done and what you're doing at the moment. Could you please explain that in a bit more detail, and what that looks like in your work?

MM: I'm very clear that in my own life, I've had advantages that not everyone is born with or given, and that is not to minimize my own success or work in my life, but [I was] born into a very stable, loving family. I was born into a family that was tied to their Judaism, but not dogmatic about it. Born in a time when Jews moved from being other, to working-

class, to middle-class. That's where I enter the picture, and then moving from middle-class to upper-middle class, a very stable, communal environment, temple environment, in the United States, in this period of time. It is not the circumstance for most Jews who came before me. Then, when I came out, I came out into a family that – my parents didn't quite understand it, but they were not repulsed by it. The same phrase I used earlier; they loved me. As my grandmother said when I came out to her, when she said, “I loved you yesterday. I love you today. I love you tomorrow.” I learned that the power of knowing and loving someone makes finding a way to understand them when they're different possible. That's not everybody's circumstance. There are people from – my coming out, and I really came out sort of at eighteen/nineteen years old, but I wasn't living under my parents' roof. I wasn't cut off from my parents. I wasn't kicked out of my house. I know high school kids who've been kicked out of their houses from, in air quotes, “good Jewish families” who don't know how to deal with their gay kids and just put them out one way or another. When folks got HIV or had AIDS, again, being thrown out by their family, none of those things happened to me, none of my experiences, not that there weren't rocky moments, but my family never let me down, my community never let me down. My in-laws accepted me. I was able to graduate from my undergraduate with no debt. I was able to do graduate school with very little, because again, there were economic resources that I didn't have a free ride. But it was a balance of support and fending for myself. And then finding a life partner at twenty-two to twenty-three years old and being with that person until his death, which was not related to HIV or AIDS. How we navigated that period, that time, and that illness, and didn't [inaudible] in that circumstance, that we never had to fend off our family when something happened. That we both had jobs and were able to support ourselves from a very early age. We had a college education. Our family got us through our undergraduate. There are so many privileges in this society, and I know that what we did with that over our time together, some of it is good fortune, some of it's making good decisions, some of it has been good health for thirty years. Familial support, communal support, all those things, those are all privileges; none of

those things are rights. So, you're not destined to get all of them. It felt like that put me in a privileged – put us in a privileged place, and we also knew from our parents, who were philanthropic to the limit of what they were able to do in their various communities. Again, we learned from them that if you have the resources of time, of commitment, financial resources, and you can help other people or other institutions, that's a laudable cause and so I feel like that has motivated me to support Temple Israel and [inaudible] and some more communities and to do these things, whether it's time, money, expertise because I have them to offer and there are so many people who do not have all of them, some of them, any of them. I think that for me, that comes with a responsibility to leave the place better than we received it, which I know sometimes it's hard to imagine that that's where we're headed. But that doesn't mean you don't keep fighting for what's right, and donating what you can donate, and contribute where you can contribute. So that's why I say that, that I know that there's a huge amount of work, but there's also a huge amount of luck, and sort of where you get born, and the color of your skin, and what society, and where you are in that arc of history. All those things that gay people, Jewish people who lived before the '60s, '70s, '80s lived in a different universe than I grew up in. Now, my example of the young man who's now married and has a child with his male partner. I have another set of dear friends, a little older, married, two kids. Live in a Jewish community, wired into them from their family life, their extended family, their nuclear family, and their communal family. I think they're in their mid-thirties. I know they don't take for granted, but I feel like they are the fruit of our investment. Our labor, our struggle, is so that those guys didn't think twice about getting married in a very traditional Jewish circumstance. Their parents thanked us for showing them that just because they were gay didn't mean they had to give up their [being?] Jewish, and just because they were gay and Jewish didn't mean they had to give up their communal affiliation, or that they couldn't use the JCC for preschool, or that they couldn't belong to congregations and be leaders. Because before they were out and gay, they were all those things. Then you get to that moment, and you think, "Oh, if I want to be out and gay, I can't be Jewish

and the leader of the community,” and, by example, I believe we showed them that they could be, and they are. When I think about a couple, and then I think about somebody else, and one of those kids kicked out of his house in high school – he's now on the board of his synagogue in the community that he lives in with his husband, and I don't think of those things as acts of activism. But I know that others perceive them that way, and so that goes further back to that reluctance to use the term of an activist, because what I see is that I've simply lived my life, not in the past tense, but I have been living my life in a way that feels right and being myself and that I've had the privilege, the opportunity, the advantage to do that without too many stumbling blocks. That makes it my responsibility to both make the world a better place and also to be the example for all of these – I'm going to say kids even though they're adults – but all these kids that came behind us, that we helped their parents understand, we helped their communities understand, we helped them understand that they didn't have to close any door just because they walked through it. They could leave it open behind them, or they could walk through the next door. It was still open. It didn't close because they did this or declared that. I think that's not a very straightforward answer. But I think that's why the privilege and the responsibility for me have come together. But the reluctance is to put the label of an activist because all I've done is live my life in the way that felt right, the way I was taught. The way that I have, my being, is to simply be holding the door open, whether it's in the synagogue, or wherever it is, but I'm always wired to hold the door open. So, how is that activism? Describing it, what I've done, and what I have done over time, I get that I'm often holding open doors that somebody is on the other side trying to push close. So, I guess there is activism there.

A: My last question was going to ask you about how David, your parents, and wider family influenced your life. Though I think you would agree that you have spoken about that in great detail throughout this interview. So, in the last few minutes, is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

MM: Oh, so one is: everything that I've said is about my parents, David's parents were even more committed to their synagogue community, to social justice in all sorts of communal and non-Jewish ways, his way as well as Jewish. More philanthropic than mine, because they had fewer mouths to feed and more resources. Just like my parents, both of our fathers were relatively poor. My father was very poor. But David's parents earned the resources that they came to possess, and through their work. But that example of giving back, being part of something bigger than yourself, it's not just about obtaining resources or loving your family or supporting your community. Both of our fathers were fundraisers. David's mother was president of her congregation. So, I don't want to make it sound like it was just my parents because I had this, again, in the privilege advantage department. I married into a family that was even more exuberant about that community responsibility than mine was. The example was not only looking into a mirror, but looking into a mirror that enlarges the image. I think that that's important, that it wasn't one or the other of us. We started with this common platform. Then it was a good reflective – I don't want to say an echo chamber – but it was a very good reflective chamber, where, when we did good thing, it spread to other people, and their families picked it up, and then we did more. So, David's parents became the stop on the railroad for intermarried couples in their community, and then once we got so involved in being a gay couple who happened to be Jewish, they became a place where, in Cincinnati, Ohio, in their congregation, all the same-gendered couples passed through their living rooms, their kitchens. They just became that resource. The grandparents became supportive of same-gender couples who wanted to be part of the Jewish community. We know that was a direct reflection from our work, that we got from our parents, and then our parents picked up that mantle and went with it. David's father was the treasurer of the direct service HIV/AIDS Support System in Cincinnati. Yes, we worked with the AIDS Action Committee here and CJP on their reactions and their response to HIV and AIDS. But those were six hundred miles away. David's father took that up and gave his resources and time to an organization that his only connection to was by looking at what we were doing, realizing that there was a need that was out there

in a community that wasn't exactly his, but was his. I just want to be [inaudible] that advantage, it's – I'm going to say serendipity. It was not one family, but two families, who had this deep-seated belief in community service, and that was transmitted to us. Back to my comment about “you turn into your parents,” and this is you turn into your parents in a good way. So, now I'm the one that's doing fundraising from his synagogue, which I never thought I would be doing, or being in a leadership role, which I always thought was David's to do, but it became mine. Sitting in board seats that I thought were going to be his. But I proved useful to those organizations and got some joy, satisfaction out of that. So again, it's a woven tapestry of reluctance and privilege and knowledge that it's the right thing to do, and individual skills, and being in this bubble. That's been a really good bubble for me, and it was for us, and it has been for me, and it continues to be for me, that I'm still – I truly believe that everything I've done in all of these communities was simply paying it forward and that I have reaped – and I've said this in front of my rabbis, for my [inaudible], and my friends, that everything I've given, I've gotten back three-fold, in that when I needed something I've had community, family, friends to support me. Again, that is an incredible circumstance; that is a gift. In some ways, I add that word of it's a privilege to have done all these things, not expecting to get anything back from them. Then you find that when you do, you get back multiple times where you gave in ways that were never expected. So that's my story.

[END OF INTERVIEW]