

Rupert Kinnard

SR 11362, Oral History,

By Marissa Gunning & Ellen Tobias

Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN)

2013 February 14



KINNARD: Rupert Kinnard

MG: Marissa Gunning

ET: Ellen Tobias

Transcribed by: Marissa Gunning & Ellen Tobias, ca. 2013

Audit/edit by: Pat Young, ca. 2013

Reviewed by Rupert Kinnard, ca. 2013

This oral history interview was conducted as part of the Portland State University LGBT History Capstone course, Winter Term 2013, with Instructor Pat Young.

Introduction

Rupert Kinnard is a cartoonist/graphic designer who has been involved with the gay community in Portland through working at *Just Out* and also nationally with his comic strips that take a humorous slant on the issues of gay people of color and other marginalized communities. He discusses a few different subjects that include the accident that left him a paraplegic, his experience and career in cartooning and graphic design, working for Just Out, his new venture The LifeCapsule Project, and his feelings on gay marriage.

Session 1
2013 February 14

ET: Okay. So, basic questions to begin. I guess we should –

MG: [inaudible]

ET: Yeah, state who we are. I'm Ellen Tobias.

MG: I'm Marissa Gunning.

ET: And we're –

KINNARD: Rupert Kinnard.

ET: Here with Rupert. It is February 14th, 2013. We are in...Kinley Manor?

KINNARD: The Kinley Manor Coach House.

ET: Okay, great. So, we're here to ask you questions and collect your oral history. So, when it all started. Where were you born and when?

KINNARD: I was born in Chicago, July the 21st, 1954.

ET: Okay, great. So what was your childhood like?

KINNARD: I grew up...I was born—when I was born my family lived on the West side of Chicago. My mother and father had migrated from Mississippi to Chicago in 1952. And, I had an older sister, and then I was born in '54, and after I was born, eventually...I, my mother and father had three other girls. And each of my siblings were, like, two years apart.

ET: Are you still close with your family?

KINNARD: Yes. My father passed away in 2000, my mom still lives in Marks, Mississippi. I have a sister who lives in Texas and then two sisters who live in Chicago. And another sister lives in Mississippi near my mom. And I feel like I'm pretty close to them. I talk to my mom often; I really feel close to her.

MG: How did you end up in Portland?

KINNARD: I attended college in...at Cornell College in Mount Vernon Iowa, and I graduated from college in '79. And I had every intention of going back to Chicago, my home town. But, I had the opportunity to visit Portland during the summer of '79 and I pretty much fell in love with Portland as a place that I really felt was a lot different from Chicago. I felt like it was a lot friendlier on many levels and I really appreciated Portland as a smaller city. I spent time in this small town in Iowa going to school and that kind of made me appreciate living in a smaller place. But I was from a bigger city and when I visited Portland for the first time, Portland seemed to be a really great compromise in terms of size and, you know, just...I think people treating one another better than they seemed to treat one another in Chicago.

MG: What got you started in cartooning and graphic design and...all of that?

KINNARD: Well, cartooning came first and as a kid I drew...well, as a kid I was really interested in comic books. And I...I read Superman, Batman, Flash, Green Lantern, and at some point I feel as if I graduated over to the Marvel superheroes that were certainly more sophisticated and they were widely read by college students. And those heroes included Spiderman, Fantastic Four, Thor, Daredevil. And so, I really was very interested, very enamored of superhero comic books. And eventually I started drawing the comic characters that I really enjoyed. And then bit by bit, I started creating my own cartoon characters, superheroes mostly. And at some point I realized that the superheroes that I was creating were all white superheroes like the superheroes were in the comics I was reading. And upon really becoming more and more influenced by Mohammad Ali and a number of other black media figures of the day, I feel as if I became a little more aware that there was an absence of African-American superheroes in comics so I started creating my own. The first, one of the first superheroes that I created was a superhero called Superbad. And he was...I really considered him to pretty much be like the black Captain America. And so I would draw his adventures for quite a while until I end up creating the Brown Bomber who was based on yet another boxer. The Brown Bomber was the nickname of the boxer Joe Lewis. So, for the longest time I really enjoyed just cartooning and I think the first time I really got into graphic design was in college when I ended up becoming the editor of the yearbook, the school yearbook. And, it was...I really felt that I enjoyed arranging the pages and trying to make the yearbook a lot more dynamic than it had been in the past and that really involved elements of graphic design and typography and, you know, cropping of photos and the usage of photos. So that was really, I would say the beginning of my graphic design career was really there, was really in college doing the yearbook.

ET: What did you originally go to college for? To major in?

KINNARD: An art major.

ET: An art major? Okay.

KINNARD: I graduated from high school in '73, and I lived on my own for two years...and during those two years I worked at the Chicago Sun Times newspaper there. And I really wanted to become an illustrator for the newspaper and finally I got a chance, one of the first drawings that was published by the paper was a drawing of the comedian Redd Foxx. And I really thought I was on my way to becoming an illustrator for the newspaper, but I was told at one point that they would never hire me as an on-staff illustrator without a college degree. So, I was very frustrated by that but that was the thing that I think really prompted me to drop everything and enroll at Cornell College.

ET: Aside from the comic books that you read, are there any artists in particular that have influenced your work; your style?

KINNARD: The artists that influenced my work, they fall into, obviously, two camps. There are the illustrators, the artists that drew comics, and there were a number of graphic designers that I feel as if I, even as a young person, I really realized the power of their work. The comic book artist, clearly, one of the most influential comic artists would be Jack Kirby. And then there's a number of others: Gene Colan, John Buscema, John Romita. Those are really big names in the comic world. Neal Adams is a really huge influence also. In the world of graphic design and graphics and illustrations, there's Jack Davis who was an illustrator that did a lot of caricatures of media figures of the '70s, mostly I would say 60's and 70's. There was a graphic designer, Milton Glazer...that I started noticing his work. And, there's a number of others that I basically feel as if I followed their work. I would see something that was a magazine cover design or a movie poster design and I would start noticing the same name attached to it. So, a number of folks really stood out to me as really good designers.

MG: What's your favorite part about cartooning, graphic design; just being an artist?

KINNARD: Well, as a young person my favorite part about it was that I feel as if I gained some degree of notoriety, you know, as “the guy who can really draw”, and so I think that that really boost my ego and just made me feel pretty good. Once I started drawing the Brown Bomber in the summer of '77, and then went back to school, and ended up being able to draw my very first comic strip for my school newspaper on a weekly basis. The thing that I really enjoyed about that was that I was committed to not making the comic strip just a series of funny jokes. I really wanted to use the comic strip to bring up issues that were, at that time, issues that were prominent or things that were going on, on the campus. And so, I think I really started embracing what I felt was the power of conveying some kind of message through the medium of cartooning. And, to that end, I was really influenced by Garry Trudeau of Doonesbury fame. And so, I really enjoyed being able to point out the absurdities of a lot of things that were going on and really taking a lot of subjects that were really serious and finding a humorous slant in them. And so for me, there was a great novelty in being able to do that and having people really appreciate the humor and the insights.

ET: I think you wrote the mediums one...

MG: What mediums did you end up preferring?

KINNARD: Excuse me?

MG: What mediums do you prefer when it comes to...like, a computer, or pen and paper?

KINNARD: Well yeah, desktop publishing in terms of the graphic designing. In terms of the illustrating, I actually haven't done very much illustrating for quite a number of years now because I've been so devoted and committed to designing. I've designed CD covers, posters, fliers, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, and I remember when I first

started, the kind of manual way of doing that with typesetting and going to photo places and having photos turned into you know...stats—photo stats. So now I've been really taken by the advancement of desktop publishing. I'm fascinated by the fact that one can also illustrate on the computer but I've never taken to doing that. I keep thinking someday I would really like to kind of get my feet wet in that arena, but as it is I do all of my design-work on my computer through a program called InDesign and I also work with Photoshop.

ET: The LifeCapsule Project. Can you tell us more about it?

KINNARD: The LifeCapsule Project for me is a kind of bringing together of almost every element of work that I've done in the past. It's meant to be a graphic memoir, a time capsule, an oral history, photo album, scrapbook. I was very much influenced by an artist, Alison Bechdel, who does a, who used to do a nationally syndicated strip, if not internationally syndicated, Dykes to Watch Out For. She's a friend of mine, and a couple of years ago she released her graphic biography Fun Home. And I was really blown away by it. And really felt like I really wanted to do something in that direction but I knew that I couldn't be disciplined enough to do that kind of illustrating. So, I realized that there was a way that as a graphic designer, to pull together a lot of the cartoons that I had worked on and my graphic design background, and incorporate posters and newspapers and different things that I had done in the past and...movie posters, ticket stubs, all kinds of things to represent kind of, periods of my life as time went on. And so, as much as it's meant to be a biography, it's meant to be a celebration of the communities and the kind of social phenomenon's that I feel like I've been involved in. I feel as if I've been really affected by the southern migration of African-Americans from the south to the north. My family in particular migrated from Mississippi to Chicago. I'm very much a product of the civil rights movement, very much a product of alternative education, the lesbian and gay rights movement, alternative press, and on and on. And even the feminist movement to a great extent. And so I really wanted to put together something that was autobiographical

to share with other people what it was like being a part of each of those situations. And it's just been a joy; it's been very therapeutic to do. It's been a really good way of really taking a look back at one's life and really embracing everything that went into making me the person I am after, within the last 58 years. So it's a very important endeavor for me, but I think ultimately really what the purpose of the book is for me is to share a certain way of looking at one's life with other people and hoping that other people will look at the format of the book and in some way use the book to embrace all of these different aspects of their lives. And I don't think that there's very much that is more exciting than breaking your life down in chapters and really examining the major periods of life when you've made a life change. I think for everyone a major period of a life change, a new chapter in everyone's life, is when they leave the comfort of the family home. That point where you get a new address that's only your address, you know, from the address that was your parents' address. The first time you receive a telephone bill or the first time you get a dorm room. There's all of these periods that are you know...it's like one door closing and another one opened as you go into a new chapter of your life. And so, if the LifeCapsule project in any way can encourage people to really embrace those different sections of their lives and really appreciate them and appreciate the people who are a part of that chapter...I think it would be a really worthwhile book for people to read.

ET: I was really interested in this question. How does being less-abled effect how you feel like you approach expressing yourself? Does it effect that at all?

KINNARD: Of all of the questions that I knew you...I got the form of questions to anticipate...and that was the one that I probably had never been confronted with before. First of all I don't...I believe in self-definition...very strongly. And I don't even think of myself as disabled, I think of myself as less-abled. I don't have any problem with people referring to me as being disabled, I'm not, you know, insulted by it or...even handicapped. I just don't think that it describes the way I feel about myself. I do feel like I'm less-abled. I'm certainly not disabled in that I'm not able to do anything, I'm less-abled taking into

consideration that I can't do everything that I used to be able to do before my accident. I don't think—I mean obviously, being less-abled effects my everyday life. In terms of my art, certainly, one of the major chapters of the LifeCapsule Project is the chapter that deals with my accident that left me a paraplegic. I think one of the things that has happened to me or for me, as a paraplegic is that it's one more human condition that connects me to so many other human conditions. I like to believe that growing up in a family of four sisters and my mother was at least a basis for me to embrace some kind of aspect of feminism. Being a gay man, realizing that I was gay bit by bit as I entered high school connected me to at least exploring what it meant; what sexuality meant; what gender issues meant. Being African-American opened me up to the world of people of color, empathizing not only with African-Americans but the challenges that other people of color faced. So of course, in 1996 when I was involved in an automobile accident and became paraplegic, I just think that that situation really opened up for me what it's like to be less-abled not only in this society, but in the world. So in a way I feel as if what it does it it's like a pathway to even more empathy, each time you realize these different communities you belong to. And of those things I like to believe that they open you up to even conditions that...opens me up to conditions that I'm not even experiencing, say like, feminism; realizing what the challenges are for women in this society. I'm not a woman, and I don't in any way claim to know, or get any idea of what women go through. But, I think there's a number of things that at least gets me closer to understanding. I always think it's an insult for like, gay people to say, "Oh, I think I know what it's like to be discriminated against as a black person because I'm gay." There are qualities of those oppressions that...I think it's an insult to equate one with the other. I'm not going to say because I'm gay and I've experienced homophobia I know exactly what it's like for a woman to experience sexism. So, in essence what I'm saying is I really think there's a certain way of embracing being less-abled that I think allows me to be more empathetic to the conditions of so many other people. And the way that it effects my art is that I think certainly as a...if I were still doing my cartoon I certainly, I think, would be drawing the

parallels between the discrimination that the disabled experience, and homophobia, racism and sexism.

MG: I believe our professor brought up that you were involved with Just Out. How did you become involved with it?

KINNARD: With Just Out? Well it was in the early 80's...I was actually working as a production assistant at Willamette Week. And I was really, I think, gaining my design chops during that time because I was designing ads for the paper, and I was designing special sections for the paper and at that time when I first came to Portland, the newspaper—the gay newspaper that was—lesbian and gay, well actually at the time I would have to say it was a gay newspaper. And it was called the Northwest Fountain. And they were around for awhile, and I think they were really supported by the bar scene. And I don't remember exactly what happened to Northwest Fountain but the paper that followed it was Cascade Voice. And when the Cascade Voice was being published, I met two people who were working there: Jay Brown and Renee LaChance. And I got the opportunity to do illustrations for Cascade Voice and even to do a little writing. And at one point there was a big controversy during one of the lesbian and gay pride rallies and parades. There was a white gay man dressed in black face. And it's an involved story, but I do think that this is kind of an integral part of what happened with the creation of Just Out. There was a big uproar in the community, especially lesbians and gays of color were really outraged that someone could be involved in a lesbian and gay march; something that really is supposed to be embracing the rights of lesbians and gays, and so blatantly be disrespectful of the people of color who were marching in the march. So the point is, the Cascade Voice ended up writing...there were editorials and letters published and it became really clear how identified that newspaper was with white gay men, specifically. And so, I think at some point Renee and Jay really felt that the community would be better served with a newspaper that really at least attempted to embrace the whole of the lesbian and gay community. So, they had been working for

Cascade Voice and they decided that they wanted to start a new publication. I was working at Willamette Week and I really, you know, was learning design and really enjoying it. And so at one point Renee and Jay came to me and said, "We want to start a new newspaper in Portland; we would like you to design the whole layout of the paper; be art director of the paper." And I chuckled when they first said it because Cascade Voice was the big boy on the block and I thought, you know, Renee and Jay starting a paper would have to compete against the well established paper. But, we pulled together the first issue and bit by bit, it became very obvious just how different Just Out was from the Cascade Voice. And I don't know specifically what happened with the Cascade Voice ceasing publication, but Just Out really started taking off and I had the opportunity to attend a number of lesbian and gay press association functions; every year they have big conferences. And I was really impressed the number of times I got the impression that just out was really well respected in the country as a trendsetter for, you know, a lot of the articles and what the focus of the paper was. So, really throughout the history of Just Out I've just always been really, really proud to have been there from the very beginning. And I've always that Just Out's beginnings were very humble and very well-meaning. Just Out was also one of the first newspapers in the country that really went outside the gay community for advertising. It used to be that specifically you'd go to gay-owned businesses to advertise, but Just Out, one of the strategies was to go to gay supportive businesses. And that's one of the things that really grew the paper.

ET: Is there something during your time you were involved with Just Out that you're most proud of?

KINNARD: Well I think the thing that I'm most proud of is it's legacy and it's longevity. As I say, I was really proud to know what other publishers, lesbian and gay publishers across the country thought of Just Out. I was really proud of, in the beginning, the first year of Just Out feeling as if I really wanted to make the paper as professional looking as possible. And I feel as if it was kind of the early days of my learning the ropes of

publication design. But at the end of the first year I was certainly proud when once again among all of the newspapers in the country, Just Out the first year won the award for best designed lesbian and gay publication in the country. I think we won that award two years in a row. And then when I ended up in the, I think it was '86, moved to the bay area, and I started working for a newspaper there called the San Francisco Sentinel. And I was designing that paper for about a year and then that paper won the lesbian and gay press association award for best design. So just all in all, my career in the lesbian and gay press has been really exciting for me. But specifically Just Out is being a part of the beginning of the paper and it's a publication that's still going strong today so it's just being a part of that legacy is what I'm the most proud of. And the people that I got a chance to work with. Right now as a graphic designer I do a lot of solitary work. I get assignments; I do them on my computer. In the days of working at Just Out it was really, really a thrill to work with other creative people, to work with writers, to work with photographers, to work with other illustrators, even working with the advertising staff. There was something about feeling that you were an essential part of a community. There's nothing like feeling like you're a part of a community when you're a part of a community's newspaper. And you're a part of something that the community is interacting with. To spend so much time on a publication and pull together articles and visuals for articles and work towards that deadline and get the paper out...it feels like you're giving birth to something and then once you're out in the community after that issue is out there's something incredibly rewarding about going to an establishment and seeing a stack of newspapers there. Going to a restaurant and seeing someone reading it. There's nothing like it. It truly is experiencing someone experiencing your art, experiencing something you're passionate about. So anything like that that really has to do with people interacting with what it is you're passionate about is a phenomenal feeling.

ET: What were some of the fun things that happened while you were working at Just Out?

KINNARD: I would say my first thought is it was really, really fun being on the staff of Just Out specifically during Lesbian and Gay Pride. Because we would always have a booth at the, you know, at the rally site. And it was really great interacting with people in the community there. That was a lot of fun. It was generally fun working on a staff with a group of people that you enjoyed so much that you really liked seeing them after work. I really remember many times, it might have been an anniversary of the newspaper and we would, Renee would rent, a spot in a restaurant or something and we would all just celebrate having completed another year. Those were definitely really fun things. When we would sponsor events we would get tickets to special movies that were lesbian and gay related, it was always really cool to be a part of an audience in a theatre knowing that just out was sponsoring this screening of a certain film. That was really fun. In fact I remember when the movie In and Out came out, I don't know if you've seen it, it's a really wonderful movie with Kevin Klein, and the whole premise of the movie is that he's this school teacher in this small town and one of his former students wins an academy award and he's on stage accepting the academy award and he dedicates it to his English teacher in school and he mentions he was gay, and so it starts this really big deal in the town because the teacher doesn't even realize he was gay. But here's this student saying, "All along I knew this teacher was gay." So anyway, Just Out sponsored, a good memory is Just out sponsoring that screening and what it was like being at the Lloyd Center and a crowd full of, you know, gay people in it, In and Out is a comedy and people just having a really good time with it. And that would happen often.

ET: What were some of the challenges that you faced while you were working at Just Out?

KINNARD: Well, in the early days of working at Just Out the challenges were really late, I would say or they were really out there, our distribution of the paper, having people trash the paper during that time in the early 80's it was just a period where the whole idea of a

Queer community was more underground. There were periods where people were, we became really aware how visible where the office was located at that time. I wasn't really here for I think it was Proposition 8, I was in the bay area, I had moved to the bay area for that period but. The challenges really had to do with being a part of a new visibility of Lesbians and Gays. And I think that, there was really something courageous about people who were doing the work, the people who were distributing the paper, the people who had their names associated with the paper. You know, I was listed in the paper as Art Director. I think the biggest challenges were just really being a part of that period of time where we were all really coming out of the closet. And it was a really important time, because I think it really made us part of that visibility, you know. That visibility that's continuing today, I mean certainly during those days, of all the things we felt we were fighting for I think that the thing that was totally off the agenda was gay marriage. I mean that was something that was totally inconceivable. We were, in essence what we were really fighting for and struggling for was just the right to be able to walk down the street and not get beat. You know, let alone walking down the street holding hands. This was just, you know, part of the challenge was for society as a whole was that we weren't even fighting for the rights of Lesbians and Gays, we were fighting for even people perceived to be Lesbian or Gays could be attacked. So yeah, those were certainly among the biggest challenges I think that we felt at that time.

ET: Is there anything that you would change that you may have done or didn't do?

KINNARD: No, I can't imagine that there were any regrets, you know, there were enough signs that we were doing things right that I don't see, I can't think of any sign that there was anything that we were doing wrong or that, certainly, I did wrong. Um, nothing. In my life, I think, I've never had a regret about anything that I have ever done, because as I say there's always just been signs that those things that I did were the right choice. So in terms of Just Out, no. If that's what we're talking about, in terms of Just Out any regrets, there were none. I can't imagine one. But I tend to always look at the positive side of

things, you can probably go to someone else and say were there any regrets and they'll say Oh, tons of them. But no, we were a feisty group of folks. And it's such a testament to what it is, I think that small group of people created that Just Out still exists today.

MG: Where do you see your projects going in the future?

KINNARD: Well, now there is an area of regret. There is all of these things I'd like to do that it's just very difficult to do at this point. There's what I want for the future in terms of the work that I do is to get the LifeCapsule Project published. There's a number of projects that keep coming up that I get excited about but I really feel as if I don't want to move on anything until this one thing is done. One of, certainly something I regret in my life is that I'm easily distracted. So even, if there is another project that I get excited about, I'll actually start working on that and realize that I haven't finished the Life Capsule Project and the frustration that comes with working on this is clearly it's done to this point. I can hold a copy of the book in my hand. So to be this close to having it done is what's frustrating. It's at the point where it really needs to be copy edited and proofed and searching for a publisher and now-a-days there's so many options; there's print on demand, there's self-publishing, so there's a number of avenues that are kind of boggling my mind in terms of how to move forward. So it's really hard. There are just a few other projects that I get excited about. One of them being, I so fantasize, and I've written out this one hundred page treatment of the kind of movie based on like, comic characters I'd like to see. And so sometimes in my mind I just imagine being able to pitch it to some Hollywood producer and have them really get a sense of how totally great the movie would be because once again it would be a movie with a message. It wouldn't be a movie that was just to entertain, it would really be something that I would hope, would spur people to be creative and to be accepting of people who are different from who they are.

ET: Where do you see your future? Here in Portland or anywhere else?

KINNARD: Once again, even my future, I think, is so tied into what I hope to accomplish with the LifeCapsule. And it's a good question because in a way I'm connected to the project that, you know, obviously that I'm really involved with. The future of the project involves not only the publication of the book, but encouraging others to adapt this kind of format. So in the future, I really do kind of, in the best case scenario, I see the book doing well enough that people realize the value of it. And I've had quite a number of people talk about the Life Capsule Project as workshops for people. We're living in an age of desktop publishing and being able to print books in, you know, 15 minutes. I think there is such a value of people embracing their lives to the extent that, I think there are parents that could put together their version of a Life Capsule Project that could be a lasting gift for their kids; grandparents. I just see a real wide open possibility for the validity of a project like this. Especially gift wise. And so, in the future, I would love to imagine that I could spearhead classes, or workshops to encourage and help people develop their own form of a Life Capsule Project. I think it would be really interesting to put something like this together and have them be as popular as a photo album. Because in a way what the LifeCapsule Project is, is almost the photo album to the nth degree. Even in talking to my mother, I think if all of us talk to our parents at any length and you ask them certain questions, you will find things out about your parents that would never come up in an ordinary conversation. So I think having parents and different people have the opportunity to sit down and kind of pull together almost a kind of synopsis of their lives up to a certain point. I feel as if it's a great benefit. It's just a really wonderful way for people to get to know one another and get a sense of their backgrounds and trials and difficulties that people have gone through. As I said it's one of the reasons I'm most excited about the project.

ET: You mentioned that Gay marriage was not really on the table when you guys were working earlier, so what are your feelings about Gay marriage and marriage equality being so prominent of an issue now?

KINNARD: In a word it's mind-boggling. I have the perspective of really remembering what it was like in the late 60's and the 70's and so on. I can't emphasize strongly enough how that wasn't conceivable to us at a certain point. I think, I really want to embrace it as advancement and never take it for granted. The people who've put the work into making it a reality. It's amazing. I've been with my partner for, this October, it'll be 23 years. And we actually feel no need to get married, so our support for Gay marriage is purely based on the fact that people should be able to get married if they want to. It's not self-serving in the way that we're fighting for Gay marriage because we want to get married. I have issues with the institution of marriage but that's my own issues. There are people who truly believe in it and I think they really should be able to engage in it. It really is another major form of discrimination. So I strongly support it and I support it mostly because I'm in awe that it's even gotten to this point. And it really is because of the people who really believe in it. Talk about being courageous and it's phenomenal to approach a change in society as big as something like Gay marriage, and that's why it was something that we never would have conceived of doing when we were kind of working in the earlier stages of Lesbian and Gay liberation. But it's totally important to realize that what we worked on were the stepping blocks to it. I wouldn't even want to have this interview without stressing what I think has been the importance of coming out. The kind of work that was done in the early days of the Stonewall riots, the idea that the Stonewall riots initially was to get the Police to leave Lesbians and Gay people alone in their spaces. I mean, it's phenomenal when you think that that's how Gay liberation started. It was like leave us alone in this small space but what it did was it empowered us to say, no, not only in this small place, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our states, and the growth of what happened, kind of the, how noble that smaller fight was and how it grew into the bigger fight. And even coming out I would say was almost like a subsection of the liberation fight and the idea that when I was growing up, even coming out, seemed like this small thing to do. It was simply so you didn't have to live a life of secrecy. You were coming out because you weren't ashamed of who you were. So the act of coming

out was just your immediate family. But the power of it I don't think we could have anticipated, because ultimately the power was that when so many of us came out, bit by bit by bit by bit—it got to the point where very few people, if anyone could say they didn't know any Gay people at all. That was the power of coming out. And that power is absolutely what has led to marriage equality because once you're out and you say we're Gay and you know Gay people you can no longer cling to the stereotypes that Gay people are these people who are slinking around in the shadows and they're people who feel ashamed of who they are. So coming out to me is probably one of the greatest phenomenons that I've experienced in my life. And it started out so humbly. It was just a humble act and I think it has done really great things and it's interesting to me how it has translated into other areas where you come out as a shopaholic or you come out as someone who likes reality shows. There's all of these; it's become such a part of society as a way of not being ashamed about something about yourself that you will come out rather proudly about something that is a core part of who you are. So coming out and Gay marriage, just the continuum of what the LGBT struggle has been throughout the last number of decades...I think has so much to teach society as a whole. As I say, I'm really proud of being a part of it to any extent that I have been. And even my characters the Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé, they're considered the first, they were a part of the first ongoing Lesbian and Gay characters of color comic strip. And that's something that I'm very proud of, to be a part of that history, because it's another way to bring together these different strands of oppression. One of the major things that I feel as if I discuss and I'm a part of in the community is talking about those connections. The homophobia in the Black community, the racism in the Gay community, the sexism in the Gay male community. There's all of these things that are these great opportunities for us to be more connected to our total humanity. These sections off situations and, you know, in the 70's it was a big deal to me that Gay white men seemed to be fighting for the rights of Gay white men. I don't know if you know anything about that period of history that was really ridiculous when it was considered Gay rights and then women wanted to say well we identify as being Lesbians so it should be Lesbian and Gay rights and the men were

saying no, we're all Gay. And I'm like these women are telling you they want to identify as Lesbians, who are we to say no, you be who we want you to be, you identify how we want you to identify. And it really was a struggle and on top of that there were women who identified as Gay women, they didn't identify as Lesbians and in my mind it was like well, you can still identify as a Gay woman, you can put that t-shirt on. But the idea that you didn't want Lesbians to identify as Lesbians at a certain point they were a big enough group that they were a valid identifiable group of people and even the bringing on of widening the circle and realizing that Transsexuals and Bisexuals really should be included because they're facing so much misinformation and misunderstanding. I'm really comfortable with the term Queer—the Queer community because I think it's that whole group that really has to struggle for a place in society and we know who fits under that umbrella. I'm all for if someone comes up with a new group that involves some kind of struggle with gender or sexuality, if they want to be a part of that movement. But each of the groups of people in that movement I think that they have to have empathy for the other folks. The idea that a Gay man is biased against Bisexuals, I mean, that's a really big issue in our community. The idea that a Gay man would say, "Oh you have to be either be with men or you have to be with women," it's like why? So you know, those are things that are still going on, but I've been a part of a period of time where I've just seen such great advancements. I'm not one to just linger on how far we have to go, of course I want to see every state in the country be for Gay marriage because ultimately once it happens everyone's going to realize it's just not that big a deal, it's just not. Civilization hasn't crumbled in Hawaii and in Washington. Because people start getting used to it and it simply becomes not a big deal; it's like interracial couples. So I know in a way this is almost like a rant but for me this whole thing, when I look back on this particular history even the part that Just Out has played in it. Being a part of being the place where people go for information. It was a real big deal when there was an establishment of a Queer press where finally there was a place you could go for the information; a way you gather the information of places in town that discriminated against Lesbians and Gays. It was great to be able to have a place to go to know where you shouldn't be spending your

money. I mean, that's huge. So yes, I've just been giddy being a part of Portland's Lesbian and Gay community. When I had my accident in '96 I was so fortunate, lucky, blessed, you name it, everything. To have been such a part of the community that in my time of need, not only my time of need, but my time and my partner's time of need, to have this community rally around us the way it did. In a way I feel as if I have to acknowledge that I uniquely benefited from the community here in Portland. In a way that maybe a lot of people don't and a lot of people don't even have the opportunity to understand the power and the beauty of the community. I feel very, very fortunate the degree to which I can embrace it. And the community that I speak of in Portland is such a wide community because it really is embracing the beauty of the diversity of the community and that's what me and my partner Scott embrace when we have dance parties in our home a couple of times a year. We'll just open it up and one of the reasons we do it is to bring in all of these progressive people who are doing all of this really hard work and there has to be more of an opportunity for us to get together and have fun and not have it necessarily be strictly political. But ultimately, I think any time we do get together there is a political element to it. I'm totally honored to be part of a rich community that we have here in Portland. I don't know that I could have ever experienced anything like it if I'd stayed in Chicago. I think Chicago has a really vibrant, strong, Gay community but it's such a big city that I think you tend to develop more enclaves of community and I don't think people are as aware of what's going on in other segments of that community. But I think Portland is just big enough that it's easier to have a more cohesive community here and that's what I've experienced.

MG: We're at about an hour so is there anything that you want to make sure is on the interview?

KINNARD: No I think that all of that last bit, I think is what I'd really like to leave with, the pride in the community and the power of the community and the advancements from the uprising in a little bar in New York to actually having Gay marriage legal. And relatively in

a short period of time. I just think that this community and to some extent society in a whole, we really deserve a pat on the back for doing something that at one point would have been considered inconceivable. So we rock.

[End of Session 1]

[End of Interview]

Keywords

Just Out

Queer Community

Lesbian and Gay

Challenges

LifeCapsule Project

Gay Marriage

Rights

Brown Bomber

Diva Touché Flambé

Gender

Sexuality

Queer Press

Discrimination

Rupert Kinnard

Kinley Manor Coach House

Cartooning/Graphic Design

Desktop Publishing