

Battle Creek Queer Oral History Project: Roger Ballard Interview

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Interview Date: April 19, 2022

Narrator: Roger Ballard (**RB**)

Interviewer: Lucy Blair (**LB**)

0:00

Lucy Blair: Okay. Put that there. I am here today with Roger Ballard, I'm Lucy Blair, and we are at Roger's house on April 19, 2022. I'm going to have you start by spelling your name for the recording.

00:20

Roger Ballard: R, O, G, E, R, B, A, L, L, A, R, D.

00:26

LB: What pronouns do you use?

00:29

RB: He and him.

00:30

LB: Great. Let's go ahead and jump right into the questions. When and how did you know you were gay?

00:40

RB: Well, I would say I suspected that I was gay when I was nine or ten and I found the Sears catalog or JC Penney catalog, I can't remember, underwear section, exciting. *[laughing]*

00:58

LB: *[laughing]* That's how it happens.

01:00

RB: I mean, how else do you start?

01:02

LB: Right.

01:06

RB: And then, as far as — we'll advance from there to when it was more realistic. Because nine and 10 is just a thought process and feelings. I was probably 16 when I had my first encounter. Was not a pleasant encounter. I don't know how much detail people are going into on these interviews. But—

01:55

LB: Whatever you're comfortable with.

01:57

RB: Yeah. Rest areas used to be outhouses, if you want to call them that. I had stopped by one on 131, and this older gentleman - older, I'm 67 now, so. This gentleman was probably in his 50's, I don't know. But I was only 16.

02:30

LB: Right, older for you. *[laughing]*

02:33

RB: Yeah, pretty old to me. *[laughing]* He approached me and I said no, that I wasn't interested, or something to that effect. And the funny thing is, it sticks to me this day, what he said, he said, "You will be old someday." *[laughing]*

03:02

LB: As if that's — *[laughing]*

03:06

RB: But I knew what he meant, and nothing happened, but that was the first experience that I had. Then of course, rest areas were primarily a meeting place because there was not bars and things in the early 70's.

03:32

LB: And where were you living?

03:34

RB: In Berrien County. Then a second incident, let's see, I was probably a little bit older at that point. Maybe nineteen or so. I discovered that there was a bar in Grand Rapids. In 1972, the law was changed that you could drink at eighteen. That lasted for about three to five years, and then they reverted back to 21.

So, I went to this bar. I think it was called The Apartment in Grand Rapids. It's still going, but it was by the bus station back then. I ran into a guy there and he says, "Oh, hi, how are you?" I said, "I'm, fine." And I said, "Do I know you?" He says, "Yeah, I met you at Ruth Anne's." Well, evidently, Ruth Anne's was a code word for rest stop, or rest area, Ruth Anne, R A.

04:45

LB: No kidding.

04:47

RB: So, I thought you'd find that kind of interesting.

04:48

LB: One hundred percent. That's super interesting.

04:52

RB: But it was unknown to me until he mentioned that. So that was part of my learning experience as far as code words. That's where I came from, as far as that's concerned.

05:13

LB: Code words, would you say, were much more necessary, then?

05:17

RB: I definitely think that code words – because you wouldn't want to say – because I was using the word, “Oh, you mean the rest area.” And it was like, “Oh no, don't say that.” You know? *[laughing]*

05:26

LB: Yeah, right, right. *[laughing]*

05:29

RB: So that's why they called it Ruth Anne's. But then, I still wasn't sure. I had a best friend that I associated with, or became involved with, if you want to say that, sexually. But that was always very on the down low. I guess that's a word some people use in our society today.

Trying to keep my thoughts going where I was going with this. Then, in the early 70's, things were taught to you or expected of you to marry, have children, and go that direction. So, at 20 I got married. We didn't have children until I was 25.

06:34

LB: How did you meet her?

06:37

RB: I had gone to school with my wife since I was, seventh grade. Junior High.

06:46

LB: Growing up?

06:47

RB: We didn't date until our senior year, but then we dated in our senior year. Then two years following, we were in a fraternity and sorority together at Lake Michigan College. It was a sister sorority to the fraternity. Certain fraternities match up with certain sororities, is how that goes. Then, as I stated, we were married at 20, and then we started having children at 25¹. I do remember a conversation in

¹ This number was changed to 25 upon review by Roger Ballard, 11-16-22

that five-year period of her feeling like we were brother and sister. We had relations, but maybe it wasn't as often as she had anticipated, or not. Or maybe I just wasn't attentive enough.

We had our first daughter in '81. Yeah, '81, '85² and '87 was our three daughter's birthdates. They were all girls. We did have thirteen foster children over a period of time. I think by the time our third daughter was born, we only had one. I don't mean we have thirteen at one time. They came in batches that were either single, two or a family of three. Generally, they were always boys, only because I always felt the threat of women calling rape, even way back then, if you were to take them home, like a babysitter. I don't know why I had those feelings.

All of the kids we had in foster care, there was never any desires or anything like that. That would be more at a pedophile level. We did have two long term foster kids, meaning they were with us for more than a year but less than five. One stayed with us until he was eighteen, graduated from St. Joe High, worked at Little Caesars and ended up marrying the manager from Little Caesars. Come to find out he was gay. I never knew that until he was thirty, after they had a son. Then they had a second son and the second son died of SIDS within three months. I think the marriage dissolved after that, which is not uncommon. He moved on to Atlanta and acquired around 25% ownership in a Little Caesars franchise, which they had a Little Caesars, so it was a pretty good thing. But he knew nothing about the gay world as far as I knew and ended up coming down with AIDS. I don't believe he was ever treated.

People live twenty years, we have friends that are alive twenty years after they were diagnosed with AIDS, or HIV and then AIDS, I should say. I don't think that he ever went for any treatments. He actually did get it, and then passed away within a short period of time. Now, I don't know the time period, because I don't know when he got it, or how he got it, but it did seem like it was less than five years and probably closer to three years, the time period that I knew that he had it until he died. He ended up dying at forty-two or forty-three years old. That's my story from a family background.

This may flow, and you can probably pick and choose what parts you need to put in to what parts. It came down to that I drank a lot, and I think I drank a lot to cover my feelings and the non-acceptance of myself as a gay person. Ultimately, in 2002, I'm jumping quite a bit, but in 2002, I lost my house, I lost my job, I lost my relationship, marriage relationship. There was some other stressor, I can't remember what it was. Normally, people are pretty whacked out at just one of those things, and to have four out of five was pretty traumatic. I went on a sedative, I guess you would call it, some type of drug that makes you feel like you're doing okay. That seemed to have worked. I went through AA. I didn't become sober until 2004, and it took me twenty-one months to find a new job.

Once I found my new job, I was out at that point. I was telling everybody who I was. I didn't want any confusion about me being gay or not being gay. It was very well accepted at the bank that I went to, which was PNC Bank. I worked in the call center, and I had no desire to be a manager or in finance or loans, or teller or anything. I had done all of those things and I wanted to sit back and help people that are in the branches. It worked out that that was a perfect position for me, which I stayed for fifteen years. I'm very thankful for the time that PNC gave me to retirement.

² This number was changed to '85 upon review by Ballard, 11-30-22

14:08

LB: And that's where you retired.

14:09

RB: And that's where I retired from, two years ago, in 2020. Just about the time that COVID hit. I was already working from home. I worked from home for about five years. I was already used to it, where COVID had thrown people into a loop as far as working from home and everything that they needed to do. Then when they added responsibilities that had nothing to do with what I would consider my department, it was like no, that's enough, and then I retired.

Fortunately, and I'll come back to meeting Jim in a minute, but about the same time, a month later, in July, Jim worked for the city and they had cut back. We didn't know what they were going to do or not. It was okay as long as he was working, but when he could retire and take home as much as he was making working, which is what his coworkers that retired often told him, it didn't make any sense to go for the unknown, which ultimately was the best thing for him. I'm sure he probably discussed that in his interview as well. It's something that you don't know if you're ever ready for. We grew into it together, a month apart.

15:56

LB: It sounds like it wasn't necessarily something that you had planned for. This is the time you were going to retire, that's just how it happened. Then it happened at the same time for you guys,

16:05

RB: It happened at the same time, right. We lived through frugally for a couple years, then I finally, just this year, starting maybe in July or August, I get my first social security check. I waited for the full amount that I could draw without going into the excess amounts. That's where we met there. Now, as far as going back a little bit, I don't know if I'm jumping pages here, about meeting, Jim, then or – ?

16:40

LB: I'm interested. Let's go to 2002 when things kind of –

16:46

RB: Fell apart. *[laughing]*

16:47

LB: Fell apart. *[laughing]* It sounds like coming out at that time was a big part of that for you. How would you describe coming out at that time? Was that scary? How did you experience that?

17:02

RB: I'm one that just jumps in the pool and drowns or not. I just came out yelling that I was gay, probably to the dismay of some family members. But I had to do what I had to do to accept myself. I left out a very important part of that part, I did try to commit suicide. Mainly because I didn't want to put family and everybody through it. That's when I called the police on myself with a knife in my hand. They

took me to a hospital, where they decided that I was not suicidal, which was great. I didn't know if I was or not. I mean, I had the knife, I just couldn't do it. Then we had, what do they call it when they bring all your family members together?

18:13

LB: Like an intervention?

18:14

RB: An intervention, yes. The majority of my family came together. My sister, who was in Tennessee even, was on the phone at that time. She even told me about her breakdown. It helped me to understand it wasn't just me. That's when I went to an everyday AA meeting type of thing. It was before AA, it was a counseling thing that was required by the court.

I never lost my driver's license or anything like that. I was still able to drive, but I had to attend these meetings, and these meetings were every day, which was a good thing, because you're in a fog at that point. In my case, I think you're in a fog for six months or nine months of really not knowing. Sometimes when you're on a drug as well, it makes you kind of foggy as well.

That's what the tipping point was. That's when I just jumped off and said, I am who I am, and if you don't like it, that's too bad. There's nothing I can do about it.

19:49

LB: You had to go in that direction in the path of yourself.

19:52

RB: Exactly.

19:56

LB: So, then you're out. *[laughing]*

19:58

RB: Yeah, then you're out. *[laughing]* Then what do you do, right?

20:02

LB: I know we've talked about how you met Jim. Tell me how you engage in terms of, what activities did you do? How did you be out?

20:14

RB: Then I learned about Saugatuck, and The Dunes Hotel Resort restaurant. I would venture up there. I ended up meeting somebody up there. It's like what they talk about in divorcees, there's a rebound person and then there's the person you really end up with is the third person. I had a rebound person for about a year and a half. He lived way up in, oh gosh, is it Holgen? Or Holden? Somewhere near Muskegon. It was a fair distance from Kalamazoo where I was living.

At this time, I had moved to Kalamazoo to work for PNC. We hadn't gotten divorced, my wife and I had not gotten divorced, but we were living separate. We didn't get divorced until, let's see, I started at PNC after 21 months, I started in December of 2004. I think it was 2007 before we actually got a divorce. On my side, we're very amicable toward each other. Her and Jim get along very well. I'm sure that she has angry feelings that, hopefully, she's gotten over those I don't know.

21:52

LB: And you have a good relationship with your kids.

21:55

RB: Yes. All three of my kids. Yeah. Yep. Matter of fact, our oldest daughter had moved to Hawaii during some of this time, which was kind of tough. She ended up meeting her husband, who was in the Navy, who happened to be from Mishawaka, and she was from St. Joe. It was like 30 miles away from each other.

After his tour in Hawaii, they moved to New York, still with the Navy. Then from New York, he retired or left the military after eight or ten years and took a job with a nuclear company south of Rockford, Illinois. Even though Rockford Illinois is fairly close, it's still a number of hours away. My oldest grandson was born in New York, and then my granddaughter was born in Rockford, Illinois. My other two kids had children after that, both of them having them within about three months of each other for the first child, about three months apart from the second child, which was after another two years, so we have six grandchildren.

23:14

LB: So tell me how you met Jim.

23:16

RB: Well, I had met a friend in Grand Rapids. Truly just a non-monogamous relationship, just a friend. They were going to have a party - "they" meaning a group of gay men - were having a reunion/invite party, which was nothing more than a cookout at a friend's house in Augusta, I want to say. So, I invited this friend of mine down from there thinking maybe he could meet somebody. Come to find out, I'm walking around and meeting people and Jim happened to be at a table with a couple other guys. We just casually were talking. He was there with his friend who was doing some cooking and stuff, but it was somebody that was much older than us.

Somehow the conversation developed into exchanging phone numbers, and that's how we met. It was maybe a week after that or so that I called and invited him to get together. So we did, and I was renting a basement from one of my coworkers who happened to have a pool in their yard, an in-ground pool, so he came over and we made hamburgers. He always remembers this; a slice of onion, about that thick. You can't see my fingers, but it was about an inch thick. Munched right down on that hamburger with that big old onion. Our relationship from there flourished from Kalamazoo to Battle Creek where he lived. I think that was in November, I get dates confused, but I would say we dated probably six months or so. Then I decided to move to Battle Creek.

I got an apartment out there on Dickman road. I got a year's lease, and we continued to date during that year. Then my lease was up, so I had to renew the lease or move, so if I wasn't going to be involved with Jim here, I didn't really want to live in Battle Creek. You could call it a shit or get off the pot type of thing, to Jim. He decided to ask me to move in with him here. When my lease ended, and I did move in here, and I do remember that date, because he mentions it at different times, in November of '07, which would be fifteen years ago now. We've been together since.

The Supreme Court allowed gay couples to marry. Then in 2015, on September 19, is when we got married. We had a small wedding, family, friends, fifty people or so. Our church didn't allow gay marriages, still doesn't. It's working toward that now, the Methodist Church. We were married in the Leila Arboretum, with that new thing they had up on the hill and had three ministers in the service. One that was an elder that served communion, one that recently had left the Methodist church, but he ended up marrying us because he could. Ultimately, he has returned to the Methodist church, but it was just kind of ironic. Our current pastor was in the congregation as well. We had a lovely wedding, it was a beautiful day.

Then we had a nice reception at Barista Blues, which isn't open on Saturday nights, so you were able to rent the whole place and provide your own alcohol, that kind of stuff. Which, even though I'm in AA, it doesn't bother me that other people drink. I can even taste it today. It's not like I want to drink, I don't crave the drink, but I also am grateful for the people that I've served AA with, and always remember that, even though you may be in AA twenty years, if you slip and you go back, one is too many and a thousand is never enough. I don't drink, mainly because I don't want to see myself the way I was before.

29:06

LB: Right, right. And you have a different situation.

29:11

RB: Yes, yes, definitely.

29:14

LB: So, why was it important that you did have some of the Methodist folks involved in your wedding? Can you talk about the religious side of your wedding and wanting to bring those parts to it? Even if the church institution wasn't necessarily saying come get married here. It was still part of your day.

29:37

RB: Yeah, it was and it is to this day, because we both belong to Christ United Methodist here in Urbandale. The church has always been a strong thing for both of us. Neither of us have ever given up hope of what could be. Because the church is a vital part of what we do, we wanted them to be there. We wanted them to be involved. We wanted it to be that. Would we have had our choice to have it in the church? Sure, we would have had it in the church.

30:20

LB: So you're still involved in the church.

30:22

RB: Very much.

30:23

LB: Can you tell me about that, and the community that you have at the church?

30:29

RB: Our church is an open church, as far as welcoming anyone. It's not a very big church, it has less than a hundred members, but it is in the works of becoming what they call a reconciling ministry church, which is an acceptance of gay people, full inclusion in the church, not only for gay couples, but for ministers to be able to be open, who they are. As much as some people may not want to admit it, there are a lot of clergy that are gay.

We just enjoy the church services themselves. Jim is very involved in leading church worship, as far as music is concerned. He plays the guitar, and he sings fabulous. I mostly work on the keyboard. When I say keyboard, I mean tech booth. The voices go up and down, and that kind of stuff and making sure everything's in line. I'm also the finance chairman for the church.

31:58

LB: That's a big job.

31:59

RB: Yeah, but I really enjoy it. Our congregation has come a long way. Before Jim and I being together at the church, there was some resistance, don't get me wrong. Some people left the church because they saw where it was going, in the acceptance of us, and that was okay. That's their choice. Some people say, "Well, why don't you just go to a gay church?" Well, because I don't want to go to a gay church. I want to go to an all-inclusive Church that happens to have gay people. If more gay people happen to come, that's great. We do and have had several couples that have come to our church, and I hope to see, in the future, more. Mainly so that, just like we fly a flag here at home, a gay flag, it's not for us to necessarily be proud that we're gay, not that we're not, but it's to show anyone that's walking or driving by, hey, it is acceptable. You don't have to commit suicide.

There are so many young kids, particularly ones that are banished from their home, once they tell the truth of who they are, and their parents can't accept them, kick them out. Then they're on the street. I want to say it's something like 60% of homeless youth are gay. It's because of family relationships that kicked them out. Just like on our car, again, it's not a sign that, "Oh hey, we're gay, where is everybody at?" No. *[both laughing]* It's just to give a meaningful sign, to somebody that may be struggling with their own acceptance, that they're not alone, because it is a very lonely feeling. I can remember back in, must have been junior high/early high school, going to the library and having to look up homosexuality without having to ask the librarian where the homosexuality book is. Did they even have one?

34:35

LB: You couldn't even ask. You didn't feel comfortable

34:36

RB: No, you couldn't ask, yeah exactly. Or, who would she tell? You know what I mean? She's not a doctor. We didn't have HIPAA. *[laughing]*

34:48

LB: Library HIPAA. *[laughing]*

34:50

RB: Yeah, we didn't have library HIPAA. *[both laughing]*

35:04

LB: It sounds like you guys have had a role in helping your church become more inclusive.

35:11

RB: Yes, definitely.

35:13

LB: Or at least participating in the church and even showing that you can contribute. That's really powerful.

35:26

RB: You would have thought, when I first came, that nobody ever heard of a gay person. Now, as we unthread everything at the church, we find out, oh, this person's son is gay. This person's nephew is gay. This person's daughter is lesbian. But they didn't ever talk about it. They were frightened to talk about it. I don't think they were ashamed, but I think they were uncomfortable even mentioning it. It was up to us.

Refreshing that these people can now embrace their own children, and even bring them to church and say, "This is my son's husband." To us, it's super exciting

36:13

LB: And to the family, it's huge.

36:15

RB: Yes, yes, right.

36:20

LB: So here is a question. You and Jim are active in Battle Creek Pride, including hosting dining out events monthly. Why is that something that you wanted to participate in? Or help host?

36:30

RB: Well, we started eight or ten years ago with the dining out. I believe that Larry might have organized it originally as part of his presidency at the time, but then we ended up taking it over. We do it

as a social outlet, not so much as a — Well, is this restaurant supportive of us? Our idea was to go to the restaurant, display the flags, enjoy ourselves and see what kind of reaction we got. We've never had a negative response. They enjoyed our money as much as the next guy's. *[both laughing]* But sometimes, people want to put restrictions on it and say, "Oh, well, you can't go there, because they don't support us in another way." We don't agree with that. We agree that sometimes you have to break away from the mold of being concentrated on just the thing about being gay and having fun as a gay group. That's what we're going to continue to stand up for. Would we go to a place that would have anti-gay signs on it? Probably not. I haven't seen any of those either.

I do know that there are restaurants that – Republicans and Democrats think, sometimes, differently. I mean, there's Democrats that don't like gay people, too. Don't get me wrong. There are also very right-wing people that support right-wing things and we don't necessarily want to support them financially. Yet, *[sighing]* it's hard to describe. If they treat us okay, that's what I'm looking for. What they do privately – and I will go a step further. If they come out, like Chick-fil-A, and broadcast that they support anti-gay stuff, no, we don't go to Chick-fil-A. But a privately owned restaurant here in town that doesn't publicize that part of it, I don't see anything wrong with that.

39:12

LB: It sounds like you're also emphasizing the socialization of a group of people that want to connect. We want to connect with each other, and that's the emphasis, less so than value judgments on restaurants.

39:29

RB: That's correct. Exactly. Exactly.

39:33

LB: So, what have you liked about helping to lead that dining out?

39:39

RB: Well, we love to eat. *[both laughing]* We like to try new places. It's enjoyable to do that. It's enjoyable to personally invite people. We average somewhere between twelve and fifteen people. Sometimes as many as twenty, and sometimes as little as seven, but on the average it's twelve to fifteen. That mix is different. It's not only twelve to fifteen people, it may be twenty-seven people, but some come sometimes, and some come other times.

We also have a group of people that don't have a lot of money, so they gravitate toward the less expensive restaurants we go to, and then we have a group of people that really like to spend some money and go to a higher end restaurant. It's not that we don't want everybody to enjoy, so we try to pick a different place every month. We also threw in, each quarter, a breakfast, for people that may work the second or third shifts who are not able to come. We do that on a Saturday versus the first Tuesday out. Another thing that we really enjoyed was creating the dog park.

41:01

LB: Yeah. I would love to hear about that. Tell me about how that even started.

41:07

RB: Well, I kept pushing in our area. I also serve on the Neighborhood Planning Commission. I wanted a dog park right here in Fell Park, which we're adjacent to in our backyard. It actually came in number two of all the spots that we searched out. We looked at a place out by the electric company on Michigan Avenue, I think there was a plot of land out there. It was near downtown, which is what we wanted, but the cost of it was a little bit prohibitive. We'd have to tear down a house or two, that kind of stuff. Then Bailey Park came up and it just seemed to be a natural fit. I mean, it was already there. It was already grassed. All we had to do was fence it, water it, put water in. I make it sound very easy *[laughing]*. It actually did flow very well. I have never seen such a group of people from left to right, to ornery, to sweet old ladies, that all got together and made this happen. There was no politics in it, which was really fun, because so often it comes down to that in our in our area, it seems like.

The dog park has been a very, very successful community orientated project. There were six of us that started it, and we ended up starting meeting at the library. We had gone over our plans, what we thought we wanted, from A to Z that you can think of. We did get pushback – the major thing we got pushed back on was not allowing kids under ten years old to come in and be with their dogs. We still stand by that, as most dog parks do, simply because we don't want the liability of kids getting bitten, kids being trampled over. I know the other side of it that, we know what our kids can and can't do, but ultimately it came down to no kids under ten. Are they there? Yeah, they're there. Are they not supposed to be there? No, the rules say they aren't supposed to be. *[both laughing]*

43:59

LB: So, what was your role in that? I got a sense for how you got involved, how did you help through that process? What did you do?

44:07

RB: Well, we had bi-weekly meetings, twice a month meetings, deciding, first, where we were going to find a place, and then if the city would even allow it. We didn't have any money, per se. We would have to do some fundraising. We came along for a grant or matching funds from Michigan Economic Development Corporation. They were willing to give us \$50,000 if we would raise \$50,000. There was two ways you could do it: You could accept the \$50,000 and raise \$50,000, or you could accept just matching funds up to a lesser amount. If you took the fifty and you didn't make it, you didn't get it. Well, we did accept the fifty grand, and we did raise it.

We did things at Sam's Club, we had hot dog sales and things like that. Pop for sale, water for sale. Sam's Club was very helpful to us. One of our board members was an employee of Sam's Club. Then we did other fundraising. Ultimately, it all came together. It's been six years or so now, so I'm a little foggy on the details of it, but three of the six people that served on the board originally are still there.

46:02

LB: Are you?

46:03

RB: Yes.

46:04

LB: Okay.

46:05

RB: Is it time to get off? I don't know. *[both laughing]*

46:09

LB: So, why did you want to do that? What do you like about that project?

46:12

RB: I wanted somewhere to take my dog off leash. There's nowhere in the city that, legally, you're supposed to have your dog off leash, except at the off leash dog park. We decided we would build a large dog park and a small dog park. If you've been out there to the a dog park –

46:33

LB: I haven't yet.

46:34

RB: Okay, if you have a chance, drive by, it's a good size. It's almost a football field. About a third, maybe a little less than a third, is small dogs, and two thirds is large dogs. We wish we had more volunteer help. People like to complain, but they don't seem to always want to help. That's where we're at right now. Exciting new news is there's a second dog park that's going to happen this year. Now, we're only advisory on it, because it's the city of Springfield. I don't know if you know where Rothschild Park is, but if you go out to Helmer Road here, you'll see a sign for the Elks club, and then you'll see Behnke trucking on the left. Well, right across the street, on the west side, is Rothschild Park. A lot of times in the spring, in the fall, when it rains, you'll see it's just swamped with water, but there's an upper part near the road that is dry. It'll probably be about a third of the size of our park, but it's going to be nice. It's less than two miles from here. The dog park in Battle Creek is only two miles from here, also. This just seems a little more in our direction. So, we'll utilize both.

Sometimes we get some people afraid that “Oh, we're going to lose people from here to go there,” but that's okay. When you have two restaurants, they flourish just as well as one restaurant. So, that's supposed to happen. I would think they would have groundbreaking this summer, because I just talked to Jeff Breedlove, he was over here today, he was one of the six. We're going to be building the agility equipment for them, putting it together out at his construction business. That would be our help in that. Michael Delaware set everything up in motion for Springfield, going out and measuring and seeing what type of landscape would work for that, but it's all on an advisory level. They haven't asked us to do fundraising. So that's great. *[laughing]*

49:21

LB: You guys were successful, so you're able to –

49:25

RB: Pass that along.

49:26

LB: Yeah, exactly. Spread the dog park goodness. That's great. Well, the last question I have is, tell me about the fun things you and Jim have done since your retirement.

49:36

RB: Well, before I do that, I have to tell you, the name of the Home Run Dog Park, it was a contest. It was my name that I put in the contest, Home Run Dog Park. Which went over it really well, because of the park right next door.

49:54

LB: Right. And so how often do you go out there?

49:58

RB: Not as often as we used to, but I know on Facebook we have over eight-hundred Facebook people that follow the Home Run Dog Park. I'm also the finance person for the dog park, so I know the bills that I pay for poop bags and poop service. Kalamazoo poo service. *[laughing]*

50:24

LB: How much they increase – *[laughing]*

50:26

RB: Right. So, quite a few people are using the park. More so on the big dog side, which makes sense, because you can let a little dog run around a little bit anywhere, but you can't let a German Shepherd or a – I forget the name of some of these dogs but some of them are two hundred pounds. You can't just let them run without it being fenced in. In Battle Creek, a lot of people don't have the yard space to do that.

51:01

LB: That's true, you're providing access to an opportunity that people might not have at their homes.

51:07

RB: Yes, exactly. Right.

51:09

LB: That's nice.

51:11

RB: There's upsides and downsides. In the process, we've learned that you got to keep people from putting buckets of water out that dogs share because if one dog has a disease or something and it drinks out of there, it can cause other issues. We put in water service, and if they will stand there with their dog and press the button, the dog can get fresh water. That's not standing water, therefore they

don't get disease. They've got to remember, no buckets of water unless it's just your dog. Those big dogs lap up a lot of water.

51:50

LB: Interesting. The things you learn that I wouldn't have thought of. It's interesting. Anything else about the dog park?

51:59

RB: No, I think that's pretty much it for the dog park.

52:02

LB: It's a big addition to Battle Creek. I was very aware of that whole – at least once you guys announced and started, then the opening, I was very tuned into that.

52:17

RB: Matter of fact, we have a community program that we're working with, with the baseball park. We are going to have two outings to promote and sell tickets for, which will give us fundraising for the year for the dog park. The tickets are \$30 and provides free drinks, food and entry into the park and you can bring your dog. So, for dog lovers, it should be pretty fun.

52:54

LB: I'll be there for that. That sounds super fun.

52:55

RB: We're going to have a contest to have a dog that's going to be able to bring the ball out to the pitcher or something like that. Bark at the umpire. *[laughing]*

53:08

LB: Whatever the dog wants. *[laughing]*

53:09

RB: Yeah, exactly. I think that's May 30th, and later in July we'll be doing those too.

53:24

LB: I feel like you really found fun niches for the things that you're passionate about and interested in, and you're bringing people together in those things.

53:33

RB: Yes, absolutely.

53:35

LB: Which is very cool.

53:39

RB: Yeah. Let me think. We also like to go camping, so we have a pop-up camper and our Hummer there we pull it with.

53:49

LB: Where do you like to go camping?

53:51

RB: Gay campgrounds. *[laughing]*

53:53

LB: Awesome. *[laughing]* Might as well be welcome.

53:57

RB: Well, to be honest with you, the feeling is so freeing, that you're around people that actually like you. Not that people don't like us, but it's a different feeling. You don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to pretend. Not that we do, but I mean, to an extent, you're not always open. You don't always open your true self to everybody.

54:25

LB: When you don't know.

54:26

RB: Yeah, exactly. So, Buckwood, south of Indianapolis, is a really nice campground. We just made plans to go to Jones Pond in New York because Jim wants to go see Tig Notaro. Do you know Tig?

54:52

LB: Oh, yes, I do.

54:53

RB: Okay. Well, she was here in Grand Rapids, and that was supposed to be his birthday present and I missed it.

54:58

LB: Oh no.

54:59

RB: Her next performance is in Toronto.

55:02

LB: So, are you going up to? –

55:03

RB: Yes, we got tickets for Toronto.

55:04

LB: And you'll camp nearby?

55:07

RB: We found a Mr. B&B Bed and Breakfast to stay at. Jones Pond, as it turned out, was only three hours over through Niagara Falls and down. We wanted to go there, but it's seven hours from here. We're learning. My Hummer only gets sixteen miles a gallon, I'm used to my white Hyundai Ioniq that gets sixty-one miles to the gallon, and with gas prices up. We've also learned by going to other campgrounds in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, that they also have cabins you can rent. So, Jones Pond, we're just going to rent a cabin. If you figure it out cost wise with gas and everything else, it probably comes out very similar. We're excited about visiting that way. The Michigan campgrounds we'll take our camper with us.

56:14

LB: What other stuff have you guys been active in?

56:19

RB: Of recent, we've been bowling with our grandchildren, nine and six. Well, soon to be 10 and six now. That's been fun, because I don't know how much they bowled before, but they swing the ball down there and the six-year-old, our granddaughter, she uses a little slide type of device that you put up there. They have the rails as well. I bowled many years since high school, so I enjoy it as well. Jim can take it or leave it. He enjoys it, I mean, he has a bowling ball. It's got to mean something right? *[laughing]*

We enjoy traveling to our grandkids in Redondo Beach, California, and our other grandchildren in Austin, Texas. Our grandkids in Redondo Beach, their parents have lived in San Francisco, Seattle, Kansas City, as well as where they're at now. Those have made very nice vacations. We enjoy it all the way. As well as, we have a good friend from growing up, with me, that lives in Las Vegas. It's convenient to stay with her and drive the five hours to LA and spend a couple days there, come back.

57:57

LB: Lots of travel.

57:58

RB: Yes, we love to travel. Planning a trip to Germany, probably in 2023.

58:05

LB: Sure, great. Well, that's all I have for the interview. Is there anything else you want to add?

58:13

RB: No, I don't think I've forgotten anything. I probably will once you – *[laughing]*

58:18

LB: *[laughing]* I know. I appreciate you talking with me.

58:21

RB: You're welcome. I'm hoping that your queer oral study comes to fruition. It's really a nice thing.

58:34

LB: Yeah, we're going to collect these interviews and make them available. I think helping people understand, especially, a history. This is a different environment, then being gay in the past. Helping people understand what it has been like, and also that that carries through, that those things didn't happen in a vacuum. They happened in our community. So, I appreciate you sharing.

59:05

RB: One thing I would like to see us expand on, as I also serve on the Battle Creek Civilian Police Academy³. It's a really long name. I would like to see, as some of our gay members have also shown an interest of more communication with the police department. I would like to see something come out of that.

59:37

LB: Yeah. That's great.

59:40

RB: A liaison, or whatever you want to call it.

59:43

LB: Absolutely. That's a big deal.

59:47

RB: Yeah. So I think that's all the things that I serve on. Well, I also serve on the election advisor area. Election – what the heck is it called?

1:00:04

LB: Is it for the city?

1:00:05

RB: Yeah. I'll find it here in a second.

1:00:12

LB: Delegates?

1:00:19

RB: Election inspector. Which was fun because I was there in 2020, when the ballots had to be recounted in the state of Michigan. We went to Jackson, Marshall? It must have been Marshall, the County Seat. I don't know why I was thinking Jackson. Anyway, to recount the ballots that were added

³ This was corrected to Battle Creek Civilian Police Academy upon review by Ballard, 11-16-22

up, and the discrepancies were so minor. I mean, like, one in a thousand or something. It's just, it made me really believe in the election system works. So, as much as people scream and holler that things are rigged, they're not rigged here.

1:01:06

LB: Right. You were part of that process?

1:01:08

RB: Yes. Yes, I saw it from voting to helping people facilitate through the voting system to actually recounting the votes.

1:01:21

LB: Wow.

1:01:22

RB: Yeah, it was fun.

1:01:23

LB: Interesting. And are you going to keep doing that?

1:01:24

RB: Yeah, we just sent in this thing, she was just asking today. We have an election coming up in August for primary and what they call gubernatorial election because the other ones call it presidential election.

1:01:42

LB: And this one's governor.

1:01:43

RB: Yeah. So that's something else that I do.

1:01:49

LB: You're very busy.

1:01:50

RB: Yeah. Enjoy it, though.

1:01:52

LB: Good.

1:01:53

RB: That's what life's about. Right?

1:01:54

LB: Cool, that's awesome.

1:01:56

RB: All right.

1:01:57

LB: Well, thank you so much.

1:01:59

RB: You're welcome.