

Interviewee: Paul Richmod

Interviewer: Anna Lindberg

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Q: So my first question would be, can you tell me like this story about behind your name and who gave it to you.

Paul: Sure. My I was named after my dad, who's name was also Paul Richmond and he. So technically, I guess I would be Paul Richmond, Jr. But I never liked Jr. So I'm just Paul Richmond. Um, but my dad is Paul. My mom is Karen they lived in Columbus, Ohio. That's where I was brought up and I was named after him.

Q: Okay, so you said you you were born in Ohio.

Paul: Yes, and Columbus, Ohio, and I lived there. Actually, my, my whole life. Just until three and a half years ago when my husband and I moved to California. So for the majority of my life. I lived in Columbus or in kind of outlying suburbs around Central Ohio.

Q: Okay, so can you tell me how that's going up in Ohio in Colobus, in your town like

Paul: Sure, like well you know it. It's interesting because I had a wonderful supportive loving you know family and we lived. For the early part of my life. We lived kind of right in the city of Columbus and when I was just a little kid, like two, three years old. Every morning I would get up really early before my parents even woke up and I would go down to the dining room table. And I would sit there and draw my mom would bring home. Scraps of computer paper from her work and I all I wanted to do was sit there and draw. They said I would. Do about 200 drawings before they even got out of bed and. Neither of my parents are artists. My dad worked for the railroad, my mom worked for a mortgage company.

And they both, you know, had grown up without much money difficult, you know, circumstances in both of their families. So they really wanted to create a good life for their kids. I was their first kid. And then I have one younger sister. But they had no idea what to do with this young artist. And clearly, I was just meant to be an artist from the time I was, you know, little because something in me wanted to draw constantly so I am forever grateful that they connected with an artist in our community named Linda and she started teaching me private art lessons, when I was three and a half years old. And I think that that is so so much a part of who I am and and what I do today. It's because I was encouraged at a young age like that. I remember it's hard to, you know, I'm 40 years old so it's hard to remember a whole lot from when I was three.

But I can clearly remember walking into Linda's she her studio was on the top floor. She lived in this big Victorian house downtown. So we had to walk up. Two flights of stairs to get to her studio and the walls were just covered with her paintings. I remember walking up the stairs and just staring at those big colorful paintings and thinking, I felt like In the movie Wizard of Oz when Dorothy shows up at Oz, for the first time and everything's in color. That's how I felt it was just a whole. New world that I loved. And so she and I really connected and I started taking lessons from her in her studio once a week.

From the time I was three and a half until I was 18 years old I took art lessons with Linda and that made such a huge difference in my life. When I was young, I was really happy. I had friends I, you know, was very encouraged and supported in in being, you know, creative, I thought of myself as an artist identified myself as an artist. But I guess I would say that things started to become difficult for me around fourth or fifth grade. When some awareness about my sexuality started to to show up (laughing) and made me realize that I was there was something about me. That was different from. From my peers. So when I was in fourth when I was starting into the fourth grade. My parents switched me into a new school that was a Catholic school and

It was because my sister was just starting school and it was too expensive for both of us to go to the school that I had been going to so we both sweat started at this Catholic school and it was very different. The school that I had gone to previously was a Montessori school. I don't know if you're familiar with that format, but the in a Montessori school you don't sit in desks and, you know, have to like talk. Listen to the teacher talk all day, you're kind of roaming around and doing projects. It's a little bit more independent and it

Q: Okey

Paul: It worked so well for me and then I go into this Catholic school where we have to sit in these desks and everything is really structured. And and I hated that. But then also, because I was starting to go into puberty and all of these hormonal things were happening. And becoming aware that there was something about me. That was different from everybody else and the people in my class could

Could sense that too. And they really just made my life very miserable from all throughout middle school. I felt like such an outcast such an outsider, I would. I remember sitting on the steps. Outside the school building during recess. I hated recess, because you know that's the time of the day when you're kind of like the least supervised and. Outside the school building during recess. I hated recess, because you know that's the time of the day when you're kind of like the least supervised and the kids were just so mean. And I would go sit on the steps. By myself and read or draw because I just wanted to, you know, be kind of away from from everybody else.

And and it was really it was hard. I was bullied very badly at school and I at the same time, I did not have the vocabulary or the understanding to know what gay meant definitely not LGBT Q. I didn't even know gay. I didn't know any of it. When they did begin to teach us about some of those things in our health class because it was a Catholic school. They put a very negative slant on it, they would teach us what you know homosexuality was but then quickly follow it up by saying, you know, if you do

this, then you're going to go to hell and this is not what Jesus wants, and it's a terrible sin and so

Q: How did that. How did that make you feel?

Paul: Well, you know, it's so interesting because I think when you when you are in denial or I guess I shouldn't say you when I am in denial about something. And I, and this is something a lot of LGBT people have said. Denial is a really powerful thing. So, you know, I really wanted to make my parents proud of me. I really wanted to be a good person and so. As I was learning this stuff about homosexuality from these authority figures who I believed, then I just convinced myself. That, that wasn't me that there was no chance that that could be that could apply to me. So even though I was constantly having all of these you know fantasies about guys and, you know, listening to music that other gay people seem to love and have all of these kind of queer identity. Things going on.

I was absolutely convinced that, you know, when they would talk about homosexuality in school and stuff that that was not me. And I can also remember. Because my, my parents were very homophobic as well. It was just a very homophobic time and I think going back to your first question, what was it like growing up in Ohio. That's where maybe it might. It was very different. Probably than what it would have been like if I was living in a. In a bigger city or like somewhere in California or New York or something where people might be a bit more open minded, but in Ohio. At that time, it was very close minded place. And I can remember.

My dad saying every time that there was any sort of reference to something queer on the news or on TV, he would just throw a fit and talk about how horrible, those people are and how they're spreading diseases and. Even though, like I was saying I even though denial is a powerful thing. And I was convinced that I was, you know, not gay. At the same time, there's still some part of you that does know there's something inside of you that knows that this horrible thing that they're talking about.

Is you in so you know i think that i internalized a lot of that. And there was. It was just a really interesting kind of contradiction because I was very proud of who I was as an artist and I'm so grateful that I had such a great art teacher and a way to express myself. So on the one hand, you know, I was very fortunate because I had support and I had. I had this creative outlet. But then on the other. On the other hand, I had such a low self image and such poor self esteem and I was being treated so badly at school that it was almost like when I think of my childhood. It's like two different worlds.

In and trying to bring those together and then and become one whole person, I think, for me, was one of the biggest challenges. Of of coming out because you start to get into this habit or I did. I just found myself kind of losing touch with the real me and trying to just pretend to be what I thought. Other people wanted me to be because I didn't trust my own instincts, or my own. My own behaviors.

Q: Do you think that was like a part of their religion, you had been growing up in. Did that shape or have an impact on you?

11:50 Paul: It definitely did it absolutely did because. You know, like I said I was a people pleaser. I wanted the people around me to like me and to respect me. I wanted my teachers to be proud of me. You know, I was not a rebel at all. When I was a kid. I'm much more of a rebel now. But when I was a kid, I was not rebellious. I wanted to make people happy and I trusted the teachers and the priests who were teaching all of this Catholic doctrine and and so I wanted them to think that I was a good person. I was involved. I was like an altar boy. I was involved in the church youth group, you know, I was all in with all of that stuff because I thought that was what would make me a good person. So I definitely. You know, and that's been actually like a really interesting thing to to sort of a thread that goes throughout my whole life. I after I did come out. I became very distanced from religion I it's hard for me to really connect with any kind of organized religion. After that, because I just had such a such a bad experience with it, but my husband is a very is very devout Jewish.

He's, he's very involved with the synagogue. He was the education director and I was very leery of that. At first, I was kind of afraid to go with him because I thought it was going to be like. What it was like when I was a kid in the Catholic school but you know he goes to a reform synagogue, where they're very open minded and they, you know, perform. Gay and Lesbian wedding ceremonies and it's just, no big deal. So it's actually been kind of healing. I'm still, I wouldn't. I'm not

You know, converting I'm not, I'm not really interested in having an organized religion for myself, but it just has helped me to heal some of the wounds from the Catholic upbringing, that's for sure.

Q: Um, so you mentioned your I want to go back a little bit to your art teacher like how does she had a relationship with her. Help you, I know you said arts like really helped you and made you like feel stronger and

Paul: Yeah, well I, you know, this could, we could talk about this for hours. Because for me, I think that. Mentorship is one of the most important things in my life. And it's because of her and what she taught me not just about art, but about life. When I was a kid. She was my role model. I wanted to grow up and be like, Linda, she. Linda herself had a horrible childhood. She grew up in extreme poverty abusive, you know, Father. Her mom ran away. And so growing up, I would see Linda's paintings and her artwork was actually about her life. She didn't just make pretty pictures you know to hang on the wall to decorate. She was really telling her story through her paintings. And when you look at them.

You, you understand the story. You can feel it. You can sense that you know what she went through. And so I remember as a kid I would look at the work that because my class was in her studios. So whatever she was painting was up on her easel.

And I would ask her about them, and she would tell me these these stories and it really helped me to understand what art. Can actually do that it that it's a way for you to express something about yourself and to communicate that and share it with other people. And and also like find healing through it. And I think, you know, seeing Linda and seeing how she overcame such terrible obstacles in her own life. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. I mean, she had an incredible story of her own. She has she fell from a 40 foot. Barn and broke every bone in her body and was recovering in the hospital for a year. And that's when she learned how to paint. And then when she recovered, she went back to college and became an artist, she's just a very inspiring.

Person so seeing that she could overcome all of that. I think it really gave me the motivation and the strength to kind of go to work through the challenges in my own life and also around the time around this time that I was telling you when I was in middle school. She could tell that something was changing with me because I was always just a very happy kid when I would show up at her class I was, you know, Joyful and giggling and happy to be there making art and around the time I was in middle school things took a really bad turn for me there were. Several times when I had a lot suicidal thoughts and just didn't but but I never did it. I never, I never followed through on it because. For me, I was like, well, but I have this painting. I want to finish first. Right. I can't do. I can't kill myself because I want to go to art class next week. It was really the thing that helped me to hold on.

And I can remember going to Linda's class and she she asked me, you know, Paul something doesn't seem the same with you what's going on. And I, I couldn't really tell her I did. I didn't have the vocabulary to tell her that I was gay, or that I felt, you know, something like that. But I told her that I was being bullied at school and that I felt like such an outcast. And she told me something that I remember to this day, she said Paul, you can't always control what happens to you or what the people around you say or do. But you always have the choice of what you're going to do with that. You can either, you know, believe what they're saying and let that define you and and you know.

Become what they are accusing you have or just feel badly about yourself or you can use it as motivation to go on and do bigger and better things and to express yourself and be creative and just and be who you are. And so I actually started making paintings around that time that.

I think I was probably 12 or 13 years old I started making paintings that really kind of dealt with a lot of those feelings, one of the very first paintings. I did. Was called the piece that doesn't fit and I painted this puzzle with kind of stick figures of all of my classmates and they were all. Playing basketball and being cheerleaders and doing all the things that, you know, middle school good middle school kids do. And then there was one piece of the puzzle that was missing. And floating down at the bottom of the canvas. I painted myself inside of this puzzle piece that did not fit into the hole. And inside of my puzzle piece was me sitting on this. The steps by the side of the school drawing because that's, that's what I did all the time.

And doing making that painting, which was absolutely modeled after the paintings that I saw Linda making about her own life. Making that painting for me was such a powerful way to take all those thoughts and feelings that were in my head that I didn't have a way to express and to just get it out to put it up somehow. Putting that onto a canvas, it made a huge difference. And I think that for so many people who are bullied. They carry around a lot of hurts. A lot of things that they don't have a way to talk about. I was too ashamed to tell my parents. You know, I just had it all inside. And so having a way to express it, it just, it changed my life. And I know that that's number one. Why I'm alive today. And number two, why I'm an artist.

Q: That's very inspiring. So, so. Art have always been a part of your life. And is that why you chose the College of Art and Design or why did you choose that.

Paul: Yeah. Well, it was interesting because I knew that I wanted to be an artist. It's what I did, from the time I was a child I you know I just there was no other no other choice for me. But it was really funny because my parents, especially my dad, like I said, they both were very. There were a lot more practical. They didn't have an understanding of the art world at all. So even though they fully supported me my whole life. They drove me to art classes they bought me art supplies they did all the, all the things that good parents do. When it when it was time for me to choose a college. My dad was freaked out when I said I wanted to go to art school, he was like, you're not going to be able to make a living, you're not going to be able to support yourself. You know, you're just going to. People in art school, just do drugs, all the time, and lay around and throw paint on a canvas. He was really against it and once again.

This is another fun story about Linda my art teacher, she was really good at handling my parents. She went over to she we had her over for dinner one night when I was right in the midst of looking for art colleges and stuff. And she told my dad. My dad was kind of going on a rant about it. He said, I just don't know where he gets these crazy ideas why he wants to, you know. Pursue being an artist and stuff. It's so non traditional that was what he said. And then, Linda responded to him. And she said, well, I know where he gets these ideas of being non traditional he gets them from you because my dad when I was when my sister and I were little. He took an early retirement from his job at the railroad and he stayed home.

And raised you kind of did all the the housework and the cooking and the stuff like that. And at that time in the 1980s men were not doing that. It was still very much a mentality of the man goes to work and the woman stays home. So my dad was non traditional in his own way. And so when when Linda said that to him when she told him, you know, you're, you're probably the one who's to blame for this because you showed him it's okay to be non traditional been that really changed. His tune a lot and he became more supportive of it, but I actually originally wanted to go into animation, because I always loved

Like Disney movies and all the interesting cartoons and stuff. And I thought it would be really awesome to, you know, work in that field. And I applied to Columbus College of Art and Design, which was very right right in Columbus, Ohio, and it's a great school very well well known a lot of the animation studios recruit from there. So I thought it would be a really good choice and i like i said i got a scholarship and I went there and I took one animation class and I hated it so much. It was. It turns out making cartoons is not as much fun as watching. It's so much work and it's.

Like I don't mind work, but it's so much math and it's so technical and it's just not the kind of creativity that I like. You, you have to do so much like just math and geometry and timing and blah, blah, blah. So anyway, I took one class and I despised it. And I really it I panicked because that was my plan that was the way I kind of convinced my, my parents that. Art School was okay. Because look, I could graduate and get a job at Disney and make great money and this is my, this is a solid plan. And then when I realized that class was. Showing me that that was not a good choice for me. I really panicked and I felt like, oh no, people are going to.

You know, think of me as a failure. If I don't do this, and I was still closeted when I was in college, by the way, I was still very much in worried about what other people thought of me. So it was hard, actually for me to. To switch majors and I tell that story. I do a lot of like talking to like high school art classes and different groups and I always tell them that story because I think you learn so much more in life from feeling. At something than you than you ever do from succeeding. It's all about resilience, you know, and if I had stayed in animation, I would probably be in some job that I hate right now.

But thankfully I switched over to illustration and I took a lot of fine art classes, too, and I just kind of found found my way, there's no there's no clear path and in the art world of how you it's not like you decided to become a doctor and you have to go and get this degree. Then you go and get this degree and then boom, you're a doctor. With an

artist. It's very different. You have to really find your own your own way. And so I'm, I'm so grateful for the art school that I went to. It was a great choice for me, even though I didn't end up doing at all what I thought I would

Q: So when you moved away to college. Was that like a relief. Like did you, did you have a mindset of thinking that you could finally be who you wanted to be and show yourself or?

Paul: Well that would have been nice. But I'll tell you what actually happened. I since I was going to school in in the town kind of where I grew up. I mean we lived in a small town at that point outside of Columbus, but it was close enough. Where I ended up staying at home with my parents, while I was in college, so I did not have that it was almost like an extension of high school really because I was still living at home, you know, I'd go home every night. So I was I stayed very much in the closet. And it was interesting. Because even then I was still very much in denial.

You know about my sexuality and although I was in a college and there were people there who were out and who were more open. There were also surprisingly still a lot of very closed minded conservative people there too. And because those were the people that I grew up with, and felt more comfortable around those were the people who became my friends. I even in college, I was kind of hanging out with a lot of very sort of conservative homophobic people and I had girlfriends. When I was in college.

Not it wasn't great. No. The truth is, I mean, I've always connected with girls, you know, most, most of my best friends are females. So you know I had wonderful relationships with girls, but we should have never dated. We should have just been like, you know, girlfriends. Done each other's makeup and stuff not actually trying to date each other. So most of the girls that I dated. I'm still very good friends with because it was really.

More of a friendship honestly than anything, but I do, I can tell you that when I was in college. That was when I actually did first began sort of experimenting a little bit with guys, but it was very much. It was so under this code of denial. I guess is the best way to say it, because the guys that I would end up experimenting with were also closeted and so we might. Hang out one evening in their apartment or dorm room or whatever work on homework together and then maybe drink a little bit and then end up doing something.

But then the next day we would never talk about it and we would pretend it didn't happen. And, you know, meanwhile we both had girlfriends or whatever. And so even though college was a time when I first did kind of dip my toe in the water a little. It was actually, it didn't really amount to a whole lot because. It's amazing what you can convince yourself of when you don't want to believe something is true, I would go i would i would go and and hook up with with guys. And then the next day be absolutely convinced

27:49 That I was straight and that it was only because I, you know, had been drinking or something, and that we were just like messing around. And it didn't mean anything.

27:58 I so did not want to be a disappointment to the people in my life who cared about me that I somehow managed to convince myself and I think that, you know, as I as I look back on it.

28:11 I think that my entire college experience would have been so different. If I had gone away somewhere else where I would have had the chance to be. More independent and figure out who I was. But because I didn't do that and I stayed close to home and stayed closeted I think it also really impacted my artwork. I, I learned a lot of technical art skills. When I was in college, but I didn't make any good art because you can't make real honest art. If you don't know who you are, you know, your art, art is about expressing yourself. And if you're in denial about who you are and you don't want people to see the real you than that, then your art is going to remain very superficial so

28:58 I'm grateful for my college experience. I think I learned a lot while I was there, but I don't think that I actually started making meaningful art until after I graduated and came out of the closet.

Q: And so when did you when you came out.

Paul: So right after college. Um, I one of my really good friends from college. Melissa foreman, she was. She's just an amazing artists. We're still like best do to this day.

29:29She and I started a mural painting business together where we would go and paint, you know, giant paintings on walls and businesses are in homes and stuff. And so for about a year and a half. She and I just traveled all around painting murals together and we became really close, really, really good friends like we just both could tell each other, anything. And I remember so clearly it was this is a crazy coming out story. But one night after we finished painting. I walked over to this bookstore, that was near my apartment at the time.

30:05And I just randomly picked up this book of short stories I bought it and went home and I flipped the book, open to one of the stories that was about halfway through just randomly picked it. And it was a story about a game in coincidentally. And the story was written in this really unusual point of view, instead of it wasn't first person where they say I and me and it wasn't third person where they would you say they. I don't even know what the it might be second person. I don't know what the right term is for it. But every time they talked about the character.

They said you so like you went to the store, you did this, you did that and they're talking about this game and they continually are saying, you, you, you. And so I'm reading this story and and i remember it's plain as day. I just thought that is me right there saying, you, you, you, and I'm like, Yeah, that's me, me, me. So the next day. Well, listen, I were painting a mural together. And I said, Melissa. I've got something I have to tell

you, and she got kind of nervous. Because she just didn't want to respond wrong. I think.

31:22And I told her, and of course she was not surprised at all, but she was very supportive and it just strengthened our friendship so much she meant she told me some things from her life that. She had never told anyone before and it became a really great bonding, you know, experience and then I remember we went back to my apartment and we painted a giant mural of share together on my wall that was the way we celebrated

Yes, it was great. It was a really good coming out. But it took me quite a bit longer before I told anybody else in my life, but the media friends that I yes she was the first. Okay, and then. How did you go from there. I told a few other friends because it's sort of like. Once you once you like. It's like a dam and once a little bit of water comes through. Then it pretty soon it just burst, because I would just, it felt so good to tell her, and to be myself. And to be honest, really, for the first time in my life. And so I just wanted to tell everyone then and it, it was kind of a challenge because I was not ready to tell my parents. I just there. They had.

32:36My parents are so loving and were so wonderful, but at the same time, I knew that they had these really strong homophobic ideas. So I was terrified of telling them. So I told my close friends. First, and I started to really just kind of openly well semi openly.

32:57Experiment with what it meant to be a game in, you know, I would go to clubs, I would meet guys I I. Just really got to. To be myself and to be around other people who accepted all of me and it was amazing. It was really just so so incredible. And it was about. I think about a year before I worked up the nerve to tell my parents and what was kind of interesting. I told you how, you know, Linda and her art class had always kind of helped teach me to use art. To explore and deal with whatever was going on in my life. So I started making these paintings just alone in my apartment on canvases.

33:49 That dealt with kind of everything. I was thinking about and going through and what it was like coming out and who I was and exploring this new world. I just did all kinds of paintings about that, but I didn't want my parents to see them. So I couldn't really I didn't feel like I could share them. So the this is the most ironic thing after I finished a painting and it would dry I would peel it off the structure bars and roll it up and put it in the closet. So even though I had started to come out. I was going right back into the closet. And then. I don't know. It was probably about maybe six months or so I'm just doing that because I was making the paintings for me. You know, I wasn't trying to do shows or anything with them. I just, it was truly just art therapy and. But one day, Melissa came over after a day of mural painting.

34:46 And she saw one of the paintings. I was working on on my easel and she said Paul, these are really good. She said, I think other people might be able to you know relate to these and get something out of it, you should think about. Sharing them maybe submitting them to some shows or doing something with these paintings and I was at first, I was just like, well, I can't do that because you know what if somebody sees it that I don't want see it. And she said, Well, Paul, you can always control that. But you just need to think about sharing it you know your art could help people. And that and that's kind of what did it for me really was just thinking about knowing what my childhood had been like, and knowing that there's so many other people out there. Going through the same thing, or worse, and I so I did start submitting the paintings for at first, just to group shows where they would put out like a call for submissions and. They would pick you know one piece from a select number of artists to have in these groups shows. And so my work started to get accepted into these shows and and what Melissa predicted absolutely happened people did.

35:56 Relate to the paintings, I would go to the openings and they would, they would come up to me and say, wow, how did you know what was going on in my head, or what my life was like what my experience was. And it kind of blew my mind because even though I always knew that's what art could do and I saw that happening with other artists. It was the first time that I made something myself that really impacted people. Like that. And it really made me want to do more into find more people that I could help with my work. So I started to get involved with this LGBT youth center in Columbus, and I would go there and do art with the kids. And through all of that. I think it just gave me the strength. Finally, to tell my parents and to be open about who I was with them and it did not go well, at first, I'll be very honest. I thought I would tell my Mommy.

Q: Can you tell me more about that?

Paul: Oh, of course. I thought I would tell my mom first because I've always just been a bit closer with her. And I thought, between the two of them. I thought she would take it better.

37:02 And then she could help me figure out how to ease dad in. So I went over to my parents house and I went for a walk with my mom and I told her. And it did not go like I thought she was devastated. She, she just had no idea. And I was just crushed because, you know, I could see she was so upset and she was so kind of I guess indoctrinated in a lot of the stereotypes and the things that she had learned, probably from her own Catholic upbringing and just the conservative media that she was exposed to. I mean, my dad was listening to all the like republican talk shows and things all the time. So, you know, she just had this idea that what I was telling her.

37:58 Was meant that I was a totally different person than who she thought I was in and it was devastating. So she was crying. She was so upset and then she was like, you can never tell your dad. She said he will. You know, he will disown you he won't

want anything to do with you if you tell him this, you're, you're just going to have to keep it a secret. So So I was so upset. I remember I went home. Actually, I went home and then I went over to Melissa's apartment and was just kind of just feeling so down about it. And then my my cell phone rang and it was my dad. And apparently, um, he could tell after I left that mom was upset because she had been crying so much.

38:45And he he tried to get her to tell him what was wrong. And at first she wouldn't, but then finally she just broke down and she told him that she came out to him for me. And he even though I know because of all the things that he said throughout my childhood. I know that it was devastating news for him to hear. He when He called me. He said Paul, I just want you to know that we love you. This doesn't change anything about how we feel about you. And then he said, I've, I've suspected this for a long time and I was just like, what It was, it was the exact opposite reaction of what I was expecting. There they sort of flipped roles. I think that if mom hadn't taken it so badly. I think. He probably would have taken it worse. But I think actually the way it ended up playing out, was he had to pull it together in order to try to help her through it.

39:52And in that process. I think he kind of made him realize that you know he had suspected this for for a while and it's not like everything was miraculously okay after after that it took a lot of work, but the thing is. I knew in so many other ways how much my parents love me. And I always felt so supported by them in so many other ways. So I believed that it was worth the effort. In my case, to try to help educate them because they did have so many. False understandings of what it meant. You know, they thought being gay meant that you would never be in a committed relationship with someone that you're just out sleeping with everybody you know all your life.

40:39Different guy each night which I mean I was kind of doing that at the, at the time, but I didn't tell them. But, um, it was just breaking down a lot of the stereotypes that they had. And helping them understand that this wasn't a choice. You know, they first were trying to convince me to do like the conversion therapy and and you know cure

myself. And I said, fortunate. I see. I'm glad actually that I waited to come out to them until I was a bit more secure in my self. Because I think if I had if I had done it sooner I might not have been strong enough to say no, you know, this is how it is. This is who I am. You have to accept it.

41:25 So I think that it's wonderful that there are so many young people who are exposed to a lot more information now and they're coming out sooner. But I also know that it creates a lot more challenges for them if they're living. In family situations where maybe they don't have that ability or that autonomy to be able to say, you know, this is who I am. So it was it happened the way it was supposed to. And here's the the best part of the whole story about a year after that my sister came out as lesbian. (Paul laughing)

Q: I was just about to ask, you mention your parents a lot, you never mentioned your sister.

Paul: Yes. I actually told my sister just before I told my parents, and she didn't say anything to me, it's, it's so funny now looking back on our childhood. Are we were our. We were very much kind of reversed in sort of what society expected our gender roles to be so like we could basically swap Christmas presents because I wanted all of her Barbies, and she wanted all of my like dump trucks and stuff.

42:36 But, you know, until somebody says, I don't believe in labeling people. So I just didn't, you know, when she until she said, I'm gay. Then, then she was but prior to that, you know, it was just whatever. I just think everyone has to have that opportunity to decide who they are, for themselves. So when she came out, I can't say that I was surprised. But you know, I think that my doing it first probably helped in some ways, but I think it also put more pressure on her too. Because then, my parents started to sort of look at her as being the. Their last hope for, you know, a normal child or like somebody

that could give them grandchildren or, you know, just all of the things that they were hoping and then when she came out to you. I'm sure that it was. Probably difficult for her as well in a different way. But then my, my parents came so far, my dad's passed away, but before before before that happened that was that was about three years ago.

43:36 But before when he was still with us if I would go over to my parents house and I didn't bring my husband Dennis. My dad would be upset because he liked Dennis so much and he loved talking with Dennis. Dennis could kind of relate to him more and talk about. Tools and, you know, the things that my dad like that. I never cared about. And so for me it's just been really it was an amazing process to go through that journey and see how far. Both of them came, you know, my mom has gone to drag shows with us, she's she caught, she calls Dennis, sometimes more than me so. He's very much a part of the family, and she and loved and seen for our relationship is seen for what it is. And that is something that.

44:31 My younger self could have never ever imagined happening. I mean, I was ready to be closeted my whole life. And just because I wanted to spare them that so it's, it's kind of unreal that we got as far as, as we did it's, you know, it gives me a lot of hope and I know that not all families are the same. And unfortunately, not all parents are capable of making that kind of a, of a leap. But I do think that if you think that there's a chance. It's worth it, because as long as you are hiding who you are, even from from someone in your life as long. If you can't be yourself 100% of the time. Then you your life becomes segmented without you even realizing it. I mean, the doors so many doors open for me as soon as I came out to everyone and was just able to be my authentic self all the time.

45:26 I just kind of entered into the flow of my life where I'm supposed to be and what I'm supposed to be doing. And I think if I hadn't done that. Who knows where I would be right now. So, it happened the way it was supposed to. Write a story.

Q: 45:46 Yeah that's a story. Um, can you tell me how you meet your husband?

Paul: Sure. Um, so at first, after I came out, I was not interested in a serious relationship at all. I was just having fun going out to clubs meeting guys hooking up doing whatever I wanted for a few years. And I think that that was a really good thing for me to do at the time because I had always like I said I would. I had been such a people pleaser. And I wanted to be like a really good kid. So it was, it was fun to just kind of be bad for no way I can put it, I did not worry about any rules. I just did whatever I wanted. And I do not regret it at all.

46:28Um, but, and. And interestingly, I was not looking for a relationship when I met Dennis. We met 14 years ago online. I had logged into this chat room and the name of it. It cracks me up the website was just gay.com. So you know what you're you know what you're shopping for if you go on and on. But I went on to gay.com and I went into this chat room. It was New Year's Eve. And I was just asking where there was a good party that gives you a sense of where I was at, you know, mentally, at the time I was just, I was just looking for a party. But this guy pops up, and he starts chatting with me and he he said that he saw I was an artist from my profile. And so we had this really. Kind of deep wonderful conversation in this gay.com chat room and I had no idea what he looked like because his photo. He was wearing sunglasses and like a hood. He looked like the Unabomber in his photo. Normally I would never meet somebody unless I saw their picture.

47:38But our, our, he said that he was you know you doing that to be discreet because he had a job where he didn't want people to know that he was online, you know, meeting guys and stuff. So anyway. I said, all right, you know, the conversation was interesting enough, I'll meet you I'm not going to meet you tonight though because it's

New Year's Eve. And I want to go party and he did not want to do that he wanted to stay home with his dog. So I said, I'll meet you in a few days. So a few days later, we met for dinner and Dennis and I could not be more different in many, many ways he even at that time. He's 12 years older than me. So I was, I think, 25 he was in his, you know, mid to late 30s and he just he he had his own house. He had this, you know, good job. He was very responsible, he was involved with his synagogue. He had a dog. He was just very together. And this was at a time when I was not. I was just playing and having fun. I was not worried about any of that and he's also very reserved and quiet and thoughtful and smart and I'm loud and obnoxious and colorful and all over the place.

48:52 So I remember sitting there at that restaurant thinking, this guy is not going to be interested in me at all. What am I even doing here, but I stayed because I thought he was so hot. And I thought, we really. You know, did have interesting conversation. And it, it just clicked something just worked so we continue to see each other and the relationship just got stronger and stronger and I forget how long it was but we moved in together. Probably within that first year of knowing each other. It just, it just all happened the way it was supposed to, I guess, but um I think for me I dated a lot of people. Previously, who were a little bit too much like me and that was not a good. Combination so Dennis and I are opposites and we balance each other out really well. He helps ground me a little bit. He helps me to like be. To plan and to, you know, set goals and to be, you know, strategic and then I help him to kind of dream and to be more spontaneous and to have fun. And it's been a combination that worked really, really well for us. And I'll tell you that one of the most amazing moments of my life was when we got married because for the majority of our relationship. It was not legal for, you know, gay couples to get married.

50:17 And so we within the first year we knew we wanted to to be together for the rest of our lives, and he proposed to me. And I said, Yes, but we didn't have the money or the anything to do like a ceremony and it will like I said it wasn't legal so wouldn't have changed anything. But so, when was it I think it was about. I'm bad with numbers. So

we'll say like seven, maybe seven years in. To the relationship we heard about this group that was organizing a bus trip to Washington DC. And they wanted 25 LGBT couples who lived in states where it was not legal for them to get married because at that point in time. It was this really strange thing that some states were starting to legalize it and other states were not. And of course, being in Ohio. It was never going to happen there until they were forced to so you know it was not legal where we live.

51:18But they wanted to get 25 couples who all lived in states where they couldn't get married and ride on this bus to Washington DC. And do a group wedding ceremony in front of the US Supreme Court Building, kind of like almost a protest, because that was when they were the Supreme Court. Was debating DOMA the Defense of Marriage Act, which was what, one of the things that was prohibiting. Gay couples from getting married. So this was a real hot political issue at that time and right when we went there for our wedding, it was that was what everybody was talking about. So it was a zoo. We We We did it. We got on the bus. We went with the other 24 couples. And I'll just never forget that being there in front of that that building where so many historic things have happened and seeing getting married in the middle of. All these protesters around us who were, you know, unhappy about the fact that we were getting married. But then there were also like all of these supportive people who were there to, you know, cheer us on and the coolest thing that happened was.

Original originally we were planning to do the wedding ceremony right on the steps of the Supreme Court Building. But because there were so many protests and so many things happening because of the marriage equality issue they the organizers of the bus trip. Got a message from the Supreme Court saying were banning anybody from being on the steps. You're not allowed to to do any kind of demonstrations or anything on the steps. So you're not going to be able to do your wedding. You know, like you. So, um, so instead of being on the steps we did it on the sidewalk it right in front of the steps,

basically because that's public area and what after the ceremony was over. One of the guards who was standing up in front of the door came down.

53:22 And he told us that all of the guards were so moved by watching our ceremony that they had gone inside and talk to whoever they needed to talk to to get permission. To allow all of us to go up inside the Supreme Court Building to walk all the way through inside the building up the stairs, and then we got to each. Each couple one at a time came out the front door. And walk down the steps together, sort of like our first you know moment as a married couple while everybody could see us. So I have this awesome photo of Dennis and me standing right there on the steps of the Supreme Court kissing each other right after we got married and it was just the most amazing, you know, moment ever. And then five days after that the Defense of Marriage Act was overturned by the Supreme Court, which is what opened the door for marriage equality to happen across the country. So being a part of, of that whole movement.

54:25 Was was really powerful. You know, I miss I miss a little bit. I guess I regret that we didn't get to have like a wedding ceremony with all of our friends and kind of a more traditional thing, but I would never trade it. You know, for anything because we got to be a part of something really important and meaningful. Mm hmm. Well that's, that's amazing.

Q: 54:51 So you said you guys lived in Ohio at the time. So how did you guys end up hearing from that.

Paul: Yeah. So my so Dennis is a nurse practitioner and he works in oncology, so he works with cancer patients. And he was working at a cancer hospital in Ohio. But he was interested in trying, you know, look, looking elsewhere, finding some other

opportunities. So I told him you know I'm an artist, I can work. I can do my work anywhere. Because primarily what I do is make my paintings and sell them in galleries and do shows all around the country. So it doesn't matter where I live for that. And then I also work. I'm the art director for an LGBT Publishing Company.

55:42 Called dream spinner press and all of that work I do from home on my computer. So I could live anywhere. So I said, why don't you just put your resume out and see see you know where where we land and he got a. Some interest from this cancer clinic here in Monterey that reached out to him and I had never even heard of Monterey, California. I'd love, you know, I'd been to LA a bunch had been to San Francisco. We'd even talked about moving to San Francisco. At one point, but I've never heard of Monterey, but I said, hey, if you want to. So he came out for the interview and really liked the people and the clinic. So I so I said, all right, we'll do it. So it was a big change for us. And, you know, we had so many good. We still do we have so many great friends and family members in Ohio. So we go back there, a lot, but it's been a really good thing for us moving out here. I think that it's. You know, we, I think sometimes when you make a big change in your life. It can just spark a lot of new

56:47 creative ideas. And for me that has definitely been the case. I've had so many artistic, you know, opportunities and things come along, that would not have happened if we had stayed there. So it's been a really good. It's been a really good move for us. I would say.

Q: Do you think you guys will stay here in the future?

Paul: I have no idea. (laughing) I can't even say, I don't know. I would be fine if we did. I'd also be fine with moving, so we'll see asked me in five years, and we'll see where where I'm at. (Paul and Q laughing)

Q: Well, thank you for a rich conversations and great stories.

Paul: Good. I'm glad you asked. Very good question. So.

Q: 57:40 I'm going to stop the recording.