

Laurel Guerrero

April 15th, 2020 6pm PST

Narrator: Randy Buffon

Location: Recorded online via Zoom (Marina to Monterey)

00:00:03

Randy Buffon: Recording is working.

Q: Okay, perfect. We are recording.

Randy Buffon: Great.

Q: Great. Okay. So my name is Laurel Guerrero, I am a student at CSU MB California State Monterey Bay. Today is [April] Wednesday the 15th 2020 and I'm here with Randy Buffon. He so graciously let me interview him, um, for the LGBT community. Um, my first question to start it off, Randy is could you just tell me your full name and if there's any meaning behind it.

Randy Buffon: Okay, so my given name is Randall Woodbridge Buffon. I go by Randy. Randall is a little bit too formal and only goes on documents like when you buy a house Woodbridge is a family name and there are a number of people in my family that have it. My dad has that same middle name. My son. My nephew does. There's a number of people, and it goes back many, many years. It was a family. It was passed on.

00:01:18

Q: Yeah ok. Um, so I know you grew up in Santa Cruz. What was it like back then?

Randy Buffon: Um, Santa Cruz was a different place back in, let's say, that would have been the mid, mid to late 60s and early 70s. So, um, I was born in Santa Cruz. I went to grade school, for I think kindergarten, for second grade. And then from there I moved

with my step dad, who was in the Navy to um, Hawaii. So we got to see some interesting places. And that was like a seven month kind of experience. And that was my myself, my brother and my sister and my mom and from there we moved to Chicago, Illinois. So, and stayed there for about seven or eight months.

So I had a lot of these instances where I didn't stay at a school very long and then had to make new friends, you know, all over again, same thing, obviously, with my brother and my sister and then we ended up in, um, New England in Mystic, Connecticut and we stayed there for the six almost seven years. So that was like that was—that was a long time in one place. So I finished elementary school got into middle school there. Then, um. And then I ended up moving back to see—back to California to live with my dad. And that was an opportunity that I wanted to experience.

There was some issues in the house at the time. My step dad was an alcoholic and he was not at a place where he was in recovery at that point. So I felt like it was, it was just something I didn't really want to deal with.

00:03:06

Q: Um, could you could you tell me a little bit more about your family dynamic.

Randy Buffon: Yeah, so I think that, you know, from an early age because my folks were divorced. I was four years old when they divorced. I was used to having my dad be a part time dad, and then the step dad came in, which was really quite nice and more permanent, um, of course, that the only one there were the issues with drinking and whatnot that became not as stable and I was looking for some stability and ended up again coming to live with my dad and his second wife, at that time, which was really good. That was a good emotional experience for me and also, um, I think allowed me at

that point to question some of the feelings that I had about my sexuality. Even though I didn't act on them.

It was still kind of an open environment where I was very introspective and getting in touch with my feelings and that allowed me to understand that at least there was something underlying but I didn't really know what it was. And I didn't certainly recognize it and go, oh, maybe I like boys and girls, it was well I'm attracted to girls, but I also have this attraction to boys. I can't talk about it with anybody and it wasn't, you know, this was in the late 70s.

And you would think in Santa Cruz, it would be progressive and all that and not as much as by our high school wasn't very progressive. It wasn't very culturally diverse. I think we had one African American student in our entire graduating class. So it was, you know, very we have more surfers than anybody else. Right. But certainly, you didn't really know if there was somebody who was gay or not straight and it wasn't really something that was I guess acceptable at least what I didn't feel was acceptable. So having that kind of understanding maybe and not being able to express it kind of started this whole phase of not accepting it within myself and even though I knew that there was underlying some (stuttering) things there that just were part of me.

Q: Do you, do you have any memories of people being outrightly homophobic back then whether your family or friends.

00:05:37

Randy Buffon: I don't remember anything that was overt or like, you know, (inaudible). But I do remember you know you know (inaudible) they would joke around whether it was about, you know, kid of around school or the locker room or whatever. And there

were always these kind of situations that potentially were like maybe if you were gay that wasn't a good thing. And I didn't really know that you could have attraction to both Male and Female I just felt like, Oh, you're either straight or you might be gay, but this thing that might be in the middle, which I tend to identify in spectrum wasn't even a word I even knew about.

Q: Um, so I know you moved around a lot when you were with your when you were living with your family, but you moved around a lot, also once you left your family was that kind of like.

Randy Buffon: That was not the design we my wife and I she, she was her, I guess, adopted father. He was a contractor for the military and they moved around a lot as well. So she ended up you know in fight about four or five different schools six schools by the time she graduated high school and I was probably more than that and we both said when we got married and we were thinking about having kids with like we will never do this to our kids. Right. And sure enough, I got into retail.

So I work in a home office kind of environment that was in retail at stories first, but then at the home office or corporate office and about every three to five years. I was moving to a different company and uprooting the family and moving everybody to a different place. So we lived in Florida, in Arkansas, in Ohio and Nebraska and, uh, California again. And um so, Alabama. And then here we are back in California, the kids are—the kids are not (inaudible) anything that really hadn't changed was a school's over the course of, you know, my childhood and I would say there's there's good things about that and there's bad things. The good things are you are able to make and adapt to new friends and circles of friends. The bad thing is you don't have this kind of rock and

foundation of people, you know, you want to kill and you grew up with your life lifetime. So definitely, there's that thing.

Laurel Guerrero: Yeah, how do you think that affected you?

00:08:17

Randy Buffon: Well, I think for me it affected me in the sense that I never got that close to anybody. There was not that opportunity and that probably would have helped me be able to be honest, in some cases about who I was from a sexual identity perspective, but I never got that close. And I kind of always thought, oh, well, maybe we'll be here only for a year so I shouldn't really make that many close friends and, you know, then you'd have to leave them and that's a bummer, and you have to make new friends and that.

So I think that probably was a contributing factor in my childhood and I think that it probably continued on into my adult life as well. Just because I did not make many male friends and I always was kind of keeping male friends at a distance because I always felt like perhaps they might find out my secret, and if they did, you know what would happen. And, you know, and that point, again, I don't think there—there was a point I think I really felt like, well, I'm a straight man, I just happen to have sex with other men, you know, and I think there are people who feel that way.

I generally believe that if you are probably having sex with same sex, same sex attraction or you're having sex with the same sex probably you're just not straight. That's probably a given I don't think you need to put a label on it that just saying, well, I'm straight but I have sex with men is kind of weird, in my opinion, but it's a way to rationalize or not accept who you are. So that compartmentalizing yourself. And I did that for a number of years. I think that when when I was first married, I really felt like

possibly these these feelings would just go away. That if I was married, I had a family we raised the family had a house, you know, kind of that American dream thing, those feelings maybe they were just, you know, kind of adolescent kind of yearnings or whatever they would eventually go away.

And I think for a period of about five or seven years they did. After my son was born, I felt like they came back and they came back very strong and that's when I started acting out and actually having sex with- with men and these were all anonymous kind of situations where I didn't know the person—didn't know their name. They were in, you know, an adult bookstore or something like that. It was very physical in the sense that that's really all that I was looking for was a physical satisfaction, not anything emotional and that was initially and I would you know do that once, twice, three times whatever the frequency was that it was available but it was not like it was every week. It was a couple times a year, and I just kept doing that, whenever I felt this urge or the opportunity arose that I had an opportunity and might be on a business trip or something and I was able to you know do that without being found out in a you know, a town that nobody knows me and that kind of thing.

And that went on for you know 25 years and my wife did not know about that. So that that was, that was a hard thing to hide and to deal with. I think at the end—when I say the end, before I came out to her—at least she knew the situation. I think it really started either way. So it was one of those things that I couldn't with stay with stand in terms of long term. You know, it was just not sustainable.

Q: Um, how many, how many years into your marriage, did you kind of start accepting that part of you.

00:12:23

Randy Buffon: Um, I don't think, while I was seeing men anonymously. Honestly, I don't think I ever accepted myself in terms of my sexuality. Again, I was probably I was probably hooked- stuck on the "I'm really sexual male married to a woman and I just happen to enjoy, you know, being with them." And once in a while and part of that was our sex life at home wasn't necessarily robust as it was when we first got married. So I felt like there was this outlet physically and somehow in my mind I rationalized though. It's not happening at home. I can do this.

And certainly wouldn't do that with a woman that wasn't ever interested in doing that with a woman, but I felt like a man was safer, just because they're not looking for an emotional connection. And this is a physical kind of thing. So I think it took me honestly until I actually came out to my s- I mean I recognized in my own heart, that I was who I am, and then I was able to come out to my wife and be able to let her know that this part of me exists, and we had talked about kind of maybe bisexual fantasies early on in our marriage that she always believed that they were just fantasies, even though they were more than fantasies, to me, and we never acted on them, but it was and I brought it up a number of times.

And there was one point where it was kind of like I even suggested we find a man to bring in as a third. And she said, "No, I'm not interested in doing that." And once that happened, I was kind of like I shut that conversation off and it just never got brought up again.

And that was one of those situations where then I just started doing kind of my own thing, but it really was after I think I came out to my wife that I fully accepted

myself because I went into counseling individual counseling for about saw her for about a year and a half. But the first I would say two to three months, the focus of that conversation was all about “am I bi or am I gay?”

And I do remember very vividly being in her office and talking about, well, because we're kind of like hypothetically well what if you were by or what if you were a gay. And the bi part was like, Okay, well, that probably describes me pretty well. I'm probably attracted to both female and male genders and so yeah that makes sense. But when I started to think of myself as possibly being gay she even coined the phrase, “Well, that would be just a shit show wouldn't it?”

And I said, “Well, yes, if I truly was—if that's what I was.”

And that's what the what I accepted myself as” then what would happen when I have to, you know, when I come out to, you know, my family, my friends at my job? Would I get a divorce because gay man should, should a gay man be married to a woman? You know, and so there was all of this angst that I had around that whole trying to put my finger on what my sexual identity was. I've come to a place where I don't really like the labels that much in terms of, you know, saying that I'm gay or bisexual. I do believe I'm not straight so I and I think that to me provides kind of like, well, one day I could be interested in a man.

And one day I could be interested in a woman and I know there's other labels that people put on that. So it's, it's fine, but it just feels more it feels more, I guess, real for me just to say I'm not straight and so once I was able to kind of conquer that and I didn't really get to that not straight piece, but I really felt like was yes I'm probably I am bisexual. I'm not gay. I have interest in my wife. I'm not looking for other female

partners, but at the same time, I know there's an interest there and sexual attraction and physical attraction and emotional attraction and I think there's that attraction piece isn't just about, you know, there are many men. I think that are attracted to other men, you know, maybe it's just a physical thing, just like I did for all those years, and there are others that are looking for something more as an emotional and maybe a physical as well.

Q: So I want to go back. I remember you talking before our interview about I'm currently compartmentalizing, and I just was curious what kind of—what that meant for you what that kind of played out to be.

00:17:01

Randy Buffon: So I got to be pretty good at putting these situations, kind of in a box, meaning that I could lead my life as a family man a career person but all appearances would be that I was happily married as a heterosexual man and but I would also, you know, maybe before work I would I would say I'm going into work early, but I would already hooked up with somebody on Grindr or went on some app, and I was actually going to a hotel room or someone's house to have sex before I went to work. And I was able to put those kinds of situations, kind of in a box in the sense that that really wasn't me. It really wasn't me that was doing that. It was some other person and then I would enter back into my, you know, work life and I, you know, I'd come home for lunch that day and as if nothing ever happened where I go to the gym and I was able to go to the gym, but I never actually made it because I was actually going to see some some man somewhere and so all that time it was easy just to kind of rationalize and put these situations that happened, kind of a way for myself and really kind of almost like I was a person looking down, and I could see the person doing whatever they were doing, but it

wasn't me and that's, I think, how I kind of survived the that time and there was a point right before I came out.

So I would say the, let's say six months to a year before I came out the probably the last six months that I got into this very frequent kind of situation. And I almost think of it as like a kind of a adolescent kind of phase where I was just going crazy. And literally, I would be on apps all day long I would be hooking up with guys. I mean, I remember one week I think I hooked up with six guys in one week and I was like, this is crazy, right, and part of it was I think I got to a point where I was very unhappy in my marriage. And I started, I think the feelings started to creep in that it was really me doing this. It wasn't somebody else. It wasn't like I was looking down and seeing someone else that was me and so the more that I focused on some of that and that kind of appeared to me as being the truth. I started to act out even more because it was a reaction to be able to at least for that half an hour, whatever the whatever the time period was I felt good about myself because I could attract another person. We could have sex, which always felt good, and, you know, but I did that.

And then all of a sudden I would want to do it again. And part of it was this chase thing to which was can I get somebody to agree to go and, you know, have sex with me somewhere. And so it was kind of a gamification of those apps, they're not good in that sense. And I'll tell you that I've met some really nice people on apps. But I've also met some people that aren't very nice. So they probably have a time and a place the way I was using them at that time was not very good. It wasn't very safe. And I think that, finally, all of that kind of came crashing down in the sense that I was feeling like that was not sustainable and it was me doing that. And I remember not because of the

compartmentalizing I really didn't feel that guilty about it, which is very strange and it took me probably that three months that I was working on the sexual identity to fully realize what I had done and the impact of what my actions were and why that was not something that I should feel good about and it was something really that it wasn't—it wasn't congruent with how I really intended to live my life. And to be honest, and to be up front and to be trustworthy. All of those things. And that kind of clash really was, I think at the start there, that's what unraveled the whole thing for me.

And that's why I ended up... I say I came out to my wife, she caught me messaging and other guy. We were sitting on the couch in the family room and she's like, "What are you doing?" And I'm like... I, I remember that moment because it was like, I was like, "Should I lie?"

I mean, I had to think quickly, but it was like, should I actually just lie and say, oh, it makes them story up and then understand that probably that story would never hold up and eventually have to be clean, come clean anyway. And so I felt like the charade has been going on for decades. I need to just tell the truth. And so I told her, I'm messaging. Some guy, and I'm attracted to men. And we just kind of left at that. Later on, there was like, "Well, I've actually seen them" and that was probably the most devastating thing that ever happened in our marriage was being having to admit that I had been unfaithful to my wife, and not just once.

But, you know, many times more times than I mean, the reality is more times than I can probably count or that I even know. So, and I'm not proud of that. I'm not proud of that today. I am ashamed of that behavior. Um, I'm glad I've been able to get past that. So...

Q: After, after you came out because I know now you are willing to—I'm sorry. You're willing to go into the LGBT community and you seem very proud of your sexual identity and your wife seems so supportive. What was the process getting there for you and your wife, from that moment when she first found out?

00:23:15

Randy Buffon: So there I will tell you that it took a little while beyond just telling her, there was a period of about, I would say, let's say, two months that things kind of were in a don't ask, don't tell mode. So even though she knew I was still continuing to see men on the side, she was kind of just, like, “Well, I just don't want to know about that. So just, you know, do your own thing,” kind of thing.

And so that came to a head when we were on vacation in my, my mother in law's in Sacramento and I, when we were at a concert and outdoor concert and I was on an app messaging, guys. And so kind of the shit hit the fan there and it was like “Okay, do you want to be in this” and we had a discussion and it was kind of like, “Do you want to be in this marriage?” on both sides and we agreed that we both wanted to be in the marriage.

I agreed that when I went back home I would start seeing a counselor and that was the start of that process for us and it took again probably that, you know, two to three months of time working with a counselor, we started to see a couple's counselor as well. So that happened around that same time, and I also joined a men's support group.

So that- that was instrumental in helping me helping me get to my identity and mostly just being around other men who had a similar situation. So they had similar situations with, you know, married to a woman, many of them late in life came out and or at least express their “outness”, if you will, and some of them remain married to their

wives and a mixed orientation marriage. Some of them separated. Some of them divorced. But I think that the combination of my counseling, our couples counseling, my wife also started to see a counselor—an individual counselor about the same time to deal with some issues she was dealing with unrelated to my sexuality issues or our relationship issues, which was good—and then this HOW group husband's out to wives helps stimulate a normalcy of “You can be married to a woman. You can be not straight (like I would tend to characterize myself), and that's okay and that can actually work.”

It's not like they're mutually exclusive. And so to see, you know, hundreds of men who have the same condition—same situation in life—being able to relate to them online, physically—we have a gathering every year to be able to actually meet some of the guys that you message with and that kind of thing—I think it just helped. And then we also joined a couples group and went to two gatherings for just couples. There were 25 couples, I believe that each one of those. And being able to see the other side that there's generally a man and then a—who is not straight—and a woman who is maybe straight or not—that doesn't really matter—but that there are some success stories and there are some challenges too. So I think the normalcy of it and trying to create “this is kind of the new normal,” was very helpful.

And it's taken time—mean I remember the first gathering that I went to in San Francisco with my HOW group. Seeing men hold hands was like such a foreign thing to me that's like in public walking down the street or two men kissing. It was like, okay. I was just kind of like blown away. And it was okay. And some of those were with our group, some of them weren't. So that there was definitely this this acceptance of

expressing you know, just this friendship and acceptance of who we are that really I think helped me kind of get to the place I am today, which I do feel proud of who I am.

Q: Um, have you come out to your children yet?

00:27:44

Randy Buffon: I have. So the first well after he came out to my wife, the Christmas after. So it was like, May I came out to my wife, it was Christmas I had all the kids home and I came out to my kids and my daughter-in-law. I also came out to my mother-in-law, and that was—that year also came out to my sister. I came out to my dad. My dad—he was the first one that I actually came out to before my wife, and this was probably about a year before—six probably nine months before I came out to my, my wife, and it was in that phase when I was seeing men and I was actually seeing a man who was much younger than I was. And that was a different experience.

And it wasn't an anonymous thing. He and I saw each other once a week, maybe twice a week and it was not an emotional thing either, but it was a very connected kind of friendship and relationship outside just of the sex. It was just a different kind of relationship and that ended and that almost was the pursip—I think that precipitated my kind of going out on the apps and going crazy because he wasn't available and I'd already kind of seen what that was. And I kind of wanted that even though I wasn't getting that necessarily with these guys on the apps, it wasn't, it wasn't happening but, so I, and I continue just to come out to more people over time, um I have not come out to any of my friends until—let's see—last month.

So, I have a friend. I've known for almost 20 years. And it's funny, he, he worked—He lives in Alabama and he worked at the company that I worked with, I

worked at in, uh, Alabama, and he's worked for two other companies that I've worked with as well. So we've worked in three different work environments together, and have known each other 19 years. He's worked for me, primarily, but worked—maybe worked for another manager who are for me as well. So we have some reporting relationships and whatnot but, um, this friend of ours, a neighbor friend was coming out to visit us, and he was coming out just to visit and have a beer weekend and stuff and he was kind of a pal that I hung around with, in Birmingham. He would come over Friday nights for happy hour. And we go over to their house and he cooked dinner and stuff.

So he was a friend, nothing—we had no connection like that. But he did—he didn't know anything about me and I felt like I wanted to come out to him when he was here at the house, but before I could do that I wanted to come out with my friend who I knew 20 years. And they know each other, so that could have, you know, he could have come back and said, “Oh, hey, I was with Randy this weekend, and guess what he told me!” [chuckles] kind of [chuckles] that's like, my friend Will would be like “What? He didn't tell me in person?”

So I told him. He's like, “Yeah, I kind of knew that. So, but, thanks.” And “that's cool. I have a lot of gay friends.”

[Chuckles] it didn't change anything. The friend from our—the neighbor friend—he, um, was surprised. Let's just put it that way. He wasn't like, “Oh, I knew that.”

Like, my friend Will was. Or, “I had suspected that.”

And the way I did it was—I have a friend now, who is I would consider him a boyfriend, because we're more than just friends. We have an emotional connection and we love each other. We're not exclusive, and that's okay. He's single, and I'm married, I

can't really be exclusive to him because I'm married. So I have an open relationship with my wife, for me. And we have an open relationship, but really we're not interested in dating other people. Um, seeing other people, maybe, but not really dating other people.

So, we kind of dealing with that too, just the two of us, but we ended up going to a trivia night in Hollister, and I picked my friend—the neighbor friend—up at the airport in San Jose, we came home picked up my wife, we went to Hollister, and had a trivia night. Yeah, my, my boyfriend was there and, um, I told my neighbor friend—I said, “Oh, by the way, my friend is gay. Just, just wanted you to know this. Okay. That, you know,” because sometimes he would—sometimes he would say things that weren't—didn't mean to I don't think—that they would just come across them to be, like well, that's not very cool.

That's not very politically correct. So I was like, I'm just tell him, you know, and so he was like, “Oh,” you know, he goes like, “I have a lot gay friends and all this and I'm, I'm cool.” And I was like, [inaudible].

So I just figured better to—better for him to know. We came home—had a great time, came home, and we were sitting around, drinking some beer. And I said—and we're talking about my friend and what a great guy he was and all that. And I said, “Oh, by the way, we're more than friends,” and he was like, “Oh [chuckles] really?”

And so, he said, “Are you bisexual?”

I said, “Yes.”

And he said, “Oh, okay. Well, that's, [inaudible], you know, that's, that's really good. Thank you for telling me.”

So, I ended up coming out to my boss at work as well. Right before this COVID-19 kind of before we left. I ended up coming out to him as well.

00:33: 25

[Call Drops]

Randy Buffon: I think you froze. Are you still there, Lauren—Laurel? Can you hear me?

Uh oh, what do we do now? The call dropped.

Randy Buffon: So it should have, hopefully, stopped at a certain point.

Q: Okay, we're back. I'm so sorry.

00:34:52

Randy Buffon: That's okay. I wasn't sure how much covered before I said “Uh oh you're frozen.”

Laurel Guerrero: [Laughs]

Randy Buffon: You weren't moving so I was like, “Oh, something's wrong.”

Laurel Guerrero: [Chuckles] But I'm back. What—what were we talking about? We were talking about, oh, when you took your friend to trivia night.

00:35:16

Randy Buffon: Yes. Trivia Night. Yeah. So, and then I ended up coming—and I think we got all that on the recording. So you'll—you'll have all of that story to the end.

Laurel Guerrero: Okay.

Randy Buffon: But, it was inter—it was interesting. And then I—you probably didn't hear this—I did come out to my boss at work, um, right before the COVID-19. Kind of, well, the shelter in place thing happened. I was—my boyfriend and I were having some issues, and we were trying to resolve those. And he knows that I'm seeing a couple's

counselor and I told him that I you know, I'm like—earlier in the week he had—or was it the week before? I can't remember. Anyway, he had basically kind of opened the door and said, “You know, if you ever need to talk to somebody about some of your issues I'm here. I've probably heard every story that you know.”

So he opened this door, and it kind of was like, “It's okay if you want to tell me things. Maybe to get better context on what's going on in your life,” and I had shared with then, “there were some personal things in my life that were complicated” and that's kind of how I left it, right?

And so, this was the Friday before—I guess before the—before the shelter in place, and I had had kind of a rough time with my friend and I—I was in good shape. I went Friday morning—went to—went to my individual counselor, felt like I was in good shape, and as the day progressed I wasn't, and there were some things that I needed to deal with. And I finally said, “I need to talk to you” to my boss.

And I said to him, I said, “I know I told you my life was complicated and I wanted to give you a little bit of context. I'm having some relationship issues, but the relationship issues that I'm having aren't with my wife.”

And I told him that I was in a mixed orientation marriage, I've have been married 35 years and he didn't know what that meant. I said, “That means my wife is straight, and I'm not. Okay? And, I have a significant friend who's—that's the person I'm having the relationship challenge with, and I kind of feel like I'd really like to go home this afternoon. I just don't feel like I'm capable of really dealing with, you know, people at this point.”

And he said—he was very like—not surprised, necessarily. I think he took it very well. And he was like, very supportive. Supportive personally, but also supported from a company standpoint—that said anything that I needed, he was, he was there to help me.

So, it was just another—it was another situation that I kind of took one more layer, you know off, if you will have kind of this mask that I've worn for a long, long time.

Now, he's not going around telling everybody that around work. It was between—he, basically, held it in confidence and he isn't even going to tell his boss. Unless there's a situation that it would require, you know, based on time away from work or anything like that. But, things have gotten better with my friend and we work things out and it was one of those things.

He had—he and I, we had a really good conversation. This was—this is the day of the shelter in place order going into effect for both Monterey and San Benito County, and he lives in San Benito County. So, I actually went over and worked at his house that Tuesday before the order went into place, and we had a good talk.

But, um, I do realize that even though I've had—this is the first man that I've ever had feelings for, I do believe that he is not the man that I want —certainly is not the man that I would leave my wife for, nor would I really want to live with him full time. And I told him that. And part of that—it wasn't like I was trying to be cruel or anything, but I wanted to be upfront and honest with him.

And part of that is I've traveled this journey to get in touch with who I am and the feelings and being able to express myself. And he's much younger, or he doesn't have this ex—he doesn't have the experienced that I do. I would say, I don't have a lot of

experience with men in a relationship because I don't, and I have limited—limited numbers of females that I've been in relationships with, although I've been in one—one relationship for 35 years plus—so 36, 37 years. So that's a long time. So I do have that experience. But, I think that it's partly just because I don't think that he and I could probably sustain a relationship long-term, um, and I know he wants a long-term relationship.

00:40:12

Randy Buffon: I do realize he's probably not ready for it, and hopefully through our relationship maybe he will pick up some things that will help him and in his next, in the next... Hopefully, that long-term relationship that he seeks down the road. So anyway, and for me, part of that is coming to that conclusion, I guess, and being able to accept it. And some days it's not easy. I do have feelings. So it's tough sometimes to know that, you know, we won't be together, and that we really can't be committed to one another. And maybe that's probably the best thing anyway. So, it's complicated.

So, I told my boss, “in many ways.”

And, after I told him that he goes, “It really is complicated.”

He goes, “I can't even imagine how you deal with all that.

And I said, “Some days it's better than others, and today,”—the day that I was seeing him in his office was one of those that I wasn't dealing with it as well as I might have.

So, but...

00:41:18

Q: How did you expect him to react?

Randy Buffon: I wasn't sure. He's pretty progressive, so I felt like he would be able to accept it intellectually. Um, I didn't expect the amount of support that he gave me. That was surprising in a good way. So yeah, I was, I was pleasantly surprised that he was so positively supportive. And it didn't make a difference. It's like, “okay, fine, you know, can we just move on?”

And the next day is the next day, so, um, and I don't think that my situation is going to get—it will not interfere with my work performance necessarily other than, you know, personal relationship sometimes do—do have an impact. But, you know, it's no different than the relationship with my wife, and we continue to see a couple's counselor, because we feel that that's the right thing to do. It's not like we have a crisis situation on our hands, but we feel like we want to work on our communication skills, being able to be honest and open with each other. And deal with kind of the stresses of having at least a third person kind of involved in terms of, you know, my relationship with another man.

Q: Um, what was your, what was your worst reaction? Do you remember it, or do you have any bad reactions? To coming out?

00:42:54

Randy Buffon: As far as—no, I don't, which is good because I've from my HOW group I've heard some horror stories. And that, you know, whether it was a wife who basically kicked the husband out of the house or kids who, you know, never speak to their, their dad again or other relatives that are just basically, you know, they can't, they can't process what they're hearing it or they or where there's something fundamentally that they just can't accept, you know.

And in today's world, I think you kind of have to be at least somewhat accepting and I say that—and I know that there's a lot of people that feel have very strong feelings about homosexuality—and I get that but, this isn't a choice. It's not something you just wake up one morning and go, “Oh, I'm going to be gay.”

No different than I'd say I'm going to get out of bed and go, “I'm going to be heterosexual. I'm going to be straight,” right?

Or you know the color of my hair. The color of my eyes. These are things that—things that you're born with. So, you know, and so, I guess that that realization—some people just can't accept that, you know, it's a it's a choice, and I hope that that over time, you know, that should change.

But there are still a lot of people that have that same—same belief. Many times, that's, you know, kind of somehow connected to a religious, you know, doctrine or something but, then hopefully that changes as well. Cause, you know, you can have faith in you know not be straight.

Q: Do you have any religious background?

00:44:58

Randy Buffon: I grew up raised Catholic, practiced until I was probably 15, and then when my wife and I did not really practice any religion for about, I'd say about five, six years, and my wife and I got married.

We did belong to a church in various areas. A couple areas we have not belong to a church for many, many years, and I—in some ways, like I missed that connection. But I also felt like when I was married, and I was—we belong to a church—I was petrified that someone else, someone would find out, you know, about me, who has the same kind of,

if you will, fear of getting close to a man—other men—that they would somehow know. Some—somehow I would let something slip or they would have some idea based on mannerism or characteristics that I was not necessarily straight.

I feel like I'm a fairly masculine person. So that's not overtly, you know, feminine traits or anything. But so I feel like that—that was probably one of the reasons we probably didn't find a church and all the areas we've lived and probably one of the reasons we haven't really gotten back even today.

I think here there's opportunity to do that, and there are some accepting you know denominations and churches in the area that I think there would be some—some benefit to that, you know, both spiritually, as well as just from a social perspective.

00:46:33

Laurel Guerrero: Um, how do you feel yourself in the LGBT community now?

Randy Buffon: So, I'm not exactly out in the sense that I'm out publicly. So my neighbors here don't know that, you know, I'm not straight. And in the community, I guess—we moved to California last year, so it was about a year ago that I moved to California. That gave me the opportunity to be a little bit more expanding in terms of who I was.

And so some of the things that I've started to, kind of, if you will, move into is trying to get involved, like in the Monterey Peninsula Pride. I'm on their planning committee. Of course, we probably won't have a Pride this year [due to the Shelter in Place], as most places won't. Maybe it'll be a virtual pride. Right?

Q: [Chuckles] Yeah that'd be cool.

Randy Buffon: We can try—we can try that and see what happens. But, um, so I'm involved in that and just being able to get involved with other, you know, people that are—have strong feelings and conviction around helping kind of the LGBT community move ahead.

I'm also—I've gotten involved in some of the social things that, um, there's a Monterey—Monterey LGBT group on Facebook and they do social mixers, and I've been to a number of those, and met some really nice people as well.

So just trying to step out kind of one step at a time. And allowing people to know—and I have this feeling, like at work—again, I told my boss—that doesn't mean I need to tell everybody that works for me or the other people that I work with. But if someone were to ask me the question, I would just give them the honest answer because I think that's—that's what I should do. Given—given my past, given kind of what I believe in today is it's just better to be honest.

Q: And you're a counselor—or not a counselor, but you're an advocate on HOW.

00:48:32

Randy Buffon: I am. So I am on the board of directors, and I would say recently I was the gathering guy, which I was the guy who, if you will, organize the national gathering. Um, I passed that baton off after two successful gatherings. I didn't really like that job and I'm now the admin, which is the person who accepts new members onto the, onto the website. We're getting ready to actually move to a new a new platform we're using [inaudible], which is a—think was a offshoot of Yahoo and so they basically—it's a an online forum, but, so we're moving to that platform soon. I'm involved in the technical

side of that. Not that I'm a technical person like programmer, but I'm there to help support kind of that move in the migration that I-I read before we got on this call.

I had another new HOW member apply and so I have to go through and vet, kind of, if you will. I hear—I see their story. I see where—you know, they tell me who they are, kind of, you know, on their board—but just a bunch of information that I can see that nobody else does. And then I decide whether it's, you know, they are who they say they are and allow them to enter our, if you will, organization, and then if people want to leave, same thing. I, basically, get their membership, you know, deleted and, and moved one. So, that's been good.

Um, what was it? Monday night? Monday night we had a zoom HOW gathering, so that was fun. We had 20 men on and spent—uh spent—we were on there for about an hour and a half, I think, and basically each guy got to tell kind of their story, which was good. And that's very similar to our gathering thing. When we do our gathering thing we spent the better part of the day of the gathering Saturday basically telling story telling our story. So, very powerful.

Q: How—are there, um—are there outlets for your wife as well? In—within HOW?

00:50:48

Randy Buffon: There is a—she has a group that she belongs to on Facebook. It's a private Facebook group called “The New Normal,” and those are primarily women who are married to men. So it's kind of the equivalent of HOW. She likes that because it's Facebook and she's used to it and we didn't go Facebook because we just didn't feel like we wanted any of the privacy issues necessarily that might go along with Facebook, even though the private group is pretty—pretty safe. There's still opportunity there.

And there's a lot of women who end up in HOW—they've been closeted for you know 20, 30, 40 years. So they're very fearful of letting their identity be known and they would be very fearful of being “outed,” if you will, in a public sense. That's probably where the out-- where the Facebook thing, uh, it's probably scary because what happens if it got out there and all the—all their friends knew and all that kind of stuff?

So that's why we're doing the group's IO thing [an online platform for groups to communicate] but, uh, so she has that, and we do belong to the couple's group called HUGS. And that is a group that is couples in the situation. It could be a straight—straight husband and a not straight wife. So there are number—there's a couple of those.

Predominantly, it is the straight wife and the not-straight husband, though, so those are really the groups that she has that she interacts with then there's another, there's another group that's called “Making Mixed Orientation Marriages Work,” and it's on the group, group IO as well. So, so there's some outlets there as well. We'd like to find some local, you know, folks that we could get together that are in this situation.

Funny story: I met a guy on an app. Okay, so like I said you—I'm very selective about the guys I'd been on apps today. When you look at my profile on this app it tells the whole story. I'm married to a woman. I don't do hookups. I'm interested in friendship first. If you want to talk to me, I'm here to talk and we will have a beer, have a coffee. I'm not interested in jumping in bed. It's just not who I am. And so, that puts off a bunch of people that aren't interested in that kind of situation, and the ones that get through are probably people that are like have a—you know conversation.

So I met a guy who is married, and he is out to his wife. And so we have not met yet physically because of the COVID thing, but just the other day I dropped him a note

that said, “Well, let's have like a virtual beer together. Right? I mean, we can't do it—you know a coffee or whatever. I don't care what it is. Let's just at least meet face to face. We can do a video chat. And at least get to know each other a little bit.”

He's like, “Yeah, sure, that sounds good.” So there's other ways to do this, even with the situation we have today, and so that I think is important for me and I've, I have a number of people that are here, local that I communicate with pretty regularly. In addition to my boyfriend and I feel that's very healthy as well just to have a group of friends that I know know me and you know they accept me and they're not my HOW group, which is another whole group of friends, and I have extensions of some of those from offshoots of friends of some of the HOW guys as well. So I'm just really trying to, you know, find people that are interesting to talk to. And that I, you know, care about.

Q: How, how would you describe your wife's opinion about everything?

Randy Buffon: Today, or in the past?

Q: Take me through the process of it.

00:54:40

Randy Buffon: Okay, so, um, I think that initially—I think she has always kind of known, even though I told her that, yes, I was interested in you know men and thinking about bisexuality and those kinds of things, and maybe even bringing a man with us, the three of us. So that was not a surprise, necessarily. She's like, “Yeah, I kind of knew that. I just wasn't accepting of it.”

And then once I kind of accepted it. She was like, “Okay, I can accept that.”

The thing that she couldn't accept was the sneaking around and, you know, all those decades of being not honest, and again, not being who I was, necessarily, the

personal that she thought I was and how did I do it, you know, talking about the compartmentalizing thing. Really, how did I sneak around for all those years and never get caught, you know, until that one situation which, frankly, I probably wanted her to ask me that question because it gave me the opportunity to tell her something that I didn't have the courage to tell her myself and I do feel bad about that, but I also feel like we weren't in a good place, from a relationship standpoint, at that time, and so she's gotten to a very—today I think—accepting, healthy attitude about—we talk—I tell her pretty much everything. She knows like most—I mean like any of the guys that I'm talking to, whether I'd met them on an app or something—I tell her about them and who they are and kind of not, you know, every detail, but just so she has an idea.

And eventually, if I do see them for some, you know, whether it's socially or have a relationship with them, whether it's physical or otherwise, she would meet them so that you would have an idea of who they are and that I was safe and you know they're good people, and it's not that she's necessarily having veto power over it, but just so that she's in the know, and she knows something about this part of my life that, you know, is something that she can't necessarily provide in the sense of, you know, this connectedness with other men. That's just beyond her, you know, beyond her gender I guess is the way to describe it. So, I think it's good.

Q: Yeah. You sound like you do have a very good relationship.

Randy Buffon: Yeah.

Q: What year did you come out?

Randy Buffon: 2016

Q: 2016 that right. So it's fairly new.

Randy Buffon: It is new.

Q: Yeah.

Randy Buffon: Yeah.

Q: Um, would you like to—

Randy Buffon: I've changed a lot in those—cause I—I, kind of, I think of my life—there's this like—there's three phases of my life. So there's this kind of, if you will pre-adolescence and adolescent phase of my life probably up to the point where I got married. And then there's the married part of my life, which probably extends—there's, there's this first part of the marriage, which is probably about 10 years and then there's the next 20 something years and then there's the point where I came out and then everything thereafter.

So I'm in this, you know, I'm 57 today. So for, you—it was like I was 50, 54? Yeah, 53? 53. Do the math. And so 53 at the time. And so I have this like next phase of my life for who knows, I mean there might be another phase after this. I just don't know it yet, but this adolescent phase was this like curious and not knowing what was going on phase and I didn't—I knew I had feelings about some of this, but I just didn't ever recognize or even know what that meant.

Then there was this first part of marriage phase, which I really wasn't that interested in a whole lot of data just it was more interested in family and marriage and those kinds of things, and then there was this other phase in the marriage that kind of created this kind of dark time, if you will, and I wish that in some ways I could relive some of those years like I am today.

Q: Um, what, what advice would you give to your past self?

00:59:06

Randy Buffon: “Be honest to yourself.” I think that's number one. And I think, too, I think it is important that you recognize when you need help, so um, feeling kind of like, you can always just do everything yourself. The first time I ever saw a therapist or counselor was when I had this, you know, crisis of, “Okay, what is my sexuality?”

And so, I felt as if I could have used that 10 years before. 15 years. 20 years maybe, I don't know, but I think being honest with yourself and also knowing that you can't solve all of your own problem sometimes you need help, and that can be helped, from a friend. It could be helped, from a partner, it can be help from a professional therapist. Certainly, that is, is, I think—and then you know the honest, the honest part is one thing to recognize, but I also think that once you recognize that, then just be true to yourself. So those are kind of similar related, but “be true” is, kind of, the action part of that—being true to yourself and—and making sure that you're authentic and you're not, you know, doing this, like compartmentalizing thing and—and whatnot and, yeah, so definitely.

Q: So do you wish you came out sooner? Any regrets?

Randy Buffon: I'm not sure it's regrets, necessarily. I only wish that I would have found like a group like HOW many years before that. And, I think that would have precipitated even because we have members who come on and have not come out to their wives, yet, but they intend to.

And so, that could have precipitated a better way to come out to my wife, and sooner and have more time in my life that is like now, versus this kind of dark time that I had that wasn't very satisfying and our relationship wasn't good, because even though the

situation with the infidelity, not so much the sexuality almost broke our marriage. It actually made us much stronger so—and to this day—and typically if you make it somewhere between three and four years two to four years after you've come out, there's probably a chance that you can make it. Many, many mixed orientation marriages fail within that timeframe from the point of coming out because one partner or the other or both decide this isn't workable for me. The man wants to have full time relationships with another man, um, or the woman doesn't want to have any type of—there's, it's, it's a monogamous or, you know, that's—that's the rule. And I think that for me—my wife, and

I've come to a good place where we understand, kind of—she understands what I need, and she's accepting of that and I'm more accepting of her as well. So, you know, things that used to bother me about her necessarily don't bother me anymore because I've accepted her more because she's accepted me and I can accept her more fully.

But I think that if you know, she said, “Well, we would have to be monogamous,” then that would be the end. That would be the end of the story or end of the conversation. I would have a hard time with that. And I told her that up front. I said—not so much that it would be monogamous from a standpoint of, I guess, the sexual monogamy, meaning that you wouldn't the emotional part of that I think is a little different and, you know, originally, our agreement was that I was looking for a friend with benefits, so someone not necessarily emotionally tied, but more physical, you know, kind of outlet—that changed with the person I'm seeing now, um, wasn't intentional from a standpoint that it was like I was looking for that.

01:03:19

Randy Buffon: It just happened. And those things do just happen. Um, it's been difficult. And he said to me the other day. He says to me, he's—we're messaging back and forth, and he says, "Sometimes it's hard."

[Chuckles] I said, "Well, yeah, relationships, I could just tell you, I've been in one for, you know, over three decades. Sometimes it is hard and you do have to work at it."

And so, he's learning about that but it, it has been hard sometimes. But it's also been very good. So, and it's expanded me and I know that, you know, the relationship I have today with him may not last. You know, I don't know how long it will last. I don't really have a preconceived idea, but if the next relationship—I'm not necessarily going to go look and look for an emotional relationship with a man, but if it happens I know that I can do that now, and I value that. And so, will it happen again? There's probably a good chance it will happen again.

01:04:22

Q: What else do you see for the future?

Randy Buffon: I see myself I think kind of slowly continuing this journey about becoming "out" to others, and so when this was posted—this opportunity—I was like, "Well, this is another opportunity for me to tell my story. And so I can tell my story."

Um, and I was a little bit fearful at first, like, "Well, should I reveal my identity or not?"

And I came to, kind of, peace with that that I'm okay with revealing my identity and letting people know I'm not—nor would I really want to be out and proud across all of my Facebook friends. That's not what I'm looking for. But, I do use Facebook in a different way now. I have a special group that I have a custom group that are my friends

in the know. And sometimes, I will post things to my friends in the know that I wouldn't post to my other friends and so they only see things for me that maybe—and then, I post to all the friends so that other stuff, but I'm using live in a different way and having comfort with that as well. So it's not like, “Oh, I can't have another friend on there that is gay or knows you know about me” kind of thing.

And, even to the extent that I have some friends there that I've connected with. One friend in particular who I knew when I lived in Florida, and he was—he was the first man that I had a—there was not an anonymous kind of thing. We didn't have a relationship. We didn't have an emotional tie. We did see each other in a number of times. We spent a lot of time messaging and and phone and some other stuff, but he's on my face—he is a Facebook friend and my wife—I think she might have even asked—and I had told her about this friend, but I reminded her that, oh, this is that friend from Florida and so she's like, okay.

So she knows more about me and some of my friends that are on there that are friends from—from the past. Many of them are HOW friends, but some of my friends that I have here some of our friends that I've had in the past and other areas.

Q: Um, what would you say to other people in your situation, maybe more closeted hoping to come out?

01:06:45

Randy Buffon: Well, I can only say that you're ready to do that when you're ready to do it, so don't do it for the wrong reason. Be ready for it, I guess, and come to terms within yourself before you can, you know, get out. And one, of one of my friends at HOW told me, he said, “this coming out pain. It's a journey it's it's really, it's a like long journey.

And that doesn't mean you have to be out to everybody, because it doesn't matter to many people, but it does matter people to you care about or that are important—care or important in your life.”

So my boss—as an example—I do feel like, you know, for me, being a being, and as an executive that at some point I will be out at work, and it would be good for me to be a representation of the LGBT, if you will, community as an executive of the company that I'm in. And for the employees that are there. So, yeah, I think that's—so I have some goals in terms of kind of not just being out saying I'm going to be out but, continuing this and then encouraging others.

So sometimes I will be a guy like on one of these apps. And he's like, he's he's on the down low. His wife doesn't know. And, you know, and it's like he's, like trying to get me to like jump into bed or something. And I'm like, “No, I don't do that.”

And so, what I will tell them is, I'd be like, (and this is before all the COVID-19 stuff) be like, “I'll go for a beer with you and just chat, you know, or I'll tell you about this HOW group,” and, you know, that kind of thing, and some guys are interested in doing that many of them aren't, but I certainly am looking for friends.

Friends are great to have, so doesn't mean that I'm going to go and have a sexual relationship with you because, for me, that's—that crosses a barrier. I did that, and I'm not going to do that to somebody else. You know, so to another wife, if you will, or another partner because sometimes it's not a wife, it's a, you know, a partner and they're two—two gay men.

But, um so, I think that it's just, you're ready. When you're ready, but make sure that, you know, kind of, I guess, deep down that you've accepted yourself before you step

through because you don't want to go back in the closet. That would be terrible. I think. I wouldn't. I wouldn't want to do that to myself. I couldn't do that. And if that were the—if that were the ultimatum. Whether it's in my marriage, today I would have to say that I would have to, you know, that would be something that would be workable. Fortunately, my wife is very supportive of that.

01:09:27

Randy Buffon: I do get her input about, you know, certain things like she's been to one of the gay socials that that I have gone to hear and Marina, and you know, it's just like she didn't want to go. She didn't need to go. But she actually enjoyed it so we'll probably go to a couple more once they strike those back up again. It's just, it's fun to meet people that are, you know, kind of like us and some some point will probably find somebody who's in a mixed orientation marriage and to be like, "Great, let's get together and have dinner or whatever," you know, so...

Q: How do you see your marriage continuing in the future?

Randy Buffon: I think it'll be a strong marriage, and I think that if we continue to work at it. We're much stronger today than we were before I came out, um, and even going back, back, and I guess the—the good days—the good old days when we were first married in the first 10 years maybe. We had some issues that we didn't really deal with. And we're dealing with those issues from a communication standpoint and being honest with one another and, and whatnot. So I feel like we have a really solid marriage. And there's no reason why we shouldn't be married till—the marriage 50 years or whatever it is. Right?

So I, I feel like that's just going to continue on and I recognize that my marriage to my wife is my primary relationship. And so anything else is secondary to that. And there's really nothing that would take over that, and I'm not interested in having something take over that because I've known her for 40 plus years and, um yeah she's—she's my soul partner. So...

Q: Well, um, you answered a lot of my questions without—without me even having to ask them.

Randy Buffon: Okay, good. Good.

Q: You're very—you're a very good person to interview. Is there anything else you want to add?

01:11:24

Randy Buffon: I don't think so—it's just—this is a great opportunity.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And I'm glad you chose to remove the veil of anon [stutters] anonymity [chuckles].

Randy Buffon: Well, and I think it's again it's just it's it's another example of just taking one more layer off. Right. So, and I think that's—since I've been here in California and I think my wife has been—that would be one thing I would say is: if you're in this situation, you can only go as kind of as fast as the slowest, partner or the slowest person in that kind of race, if you will. And so sometimes I've had to kind of, like, go, kind of, say, “Whoa, whoa. Okay, this might be going too fast. Let's just slow down a little bit.”

But she's amazed me how she's been resilient and coming along the journey with me. And this last year in California has been a lot of change, which a change for the

better. So, I look forward to the finished product and and really see kind of how things go. Are they still doing the presentation? Is that still happening?

Q: We don't have anymore class or gatherings for this semester, yeah, so we've—

Randy Buffon: They could—they could do it virtually.

Q: I think we might be—we're working on something I think.

Randy Buffon: Ok.

Q: Yeah.

Randy Buffon: That would be interesting. That would be really interesting.

Q: [Inadible]. Yes, and I'll, um—I can send you the—you probably have the video as well, right? I'm not sure how Zoom.

Randy Buffon: Uh, no I don't think so. I think because you're the host, you probably—probably recorded to the cloud or wherever [inaudible]

Q: Yeah I recorded it to the cloud. I don't know what that means but—[laughs]

Randy Buffon: Yes. Think it'll probably give you a link when you sign off, and there might—there might be two. I don't know because of the, you know, the piece where it stopped so...

Q: Oh yeah.

Randy Buffon: So there might be two actually. The first part and the second part.

Q: Yeah, I'll send it to you. Definitely.

Randy Buffon: I will—that will be enjoyable.

Q: Yeah.

Randy Buffon: Yeah.

Q: Well thank you so much Randy, um...

Randy Buffon: Thanks Laurel.

Q: Is there anything else I could do for you? Any—Any other questions?

Randy Buffon: Yep. Just tell me—

Q: I really appreciate you telling your story.

Randy Buffon: Sure. Well, I enjoyed telling it. Ok, great. Well best of luck.

Q: Yep. Stay safe.

Randy Buffon: Take care. Yep. Will do. Bye bye.

Q: Bye.