

[OH2135.Swokowski_file2_access_clip1.mp3]

[00:55:07]

Swokowski: I was lead instructor for the Army National Guard Force Management Course, which I had four or five courses per year. They ran two weeks, and the other times, I worked other courses for them. And as it turns out, the move to Washington DC area, the national capital region, became my personal tipping point when it came to my authenticity, because for the very first time—well, let me back up a little bit. For the very first time, I could live pretty much as myself. For the entire time, weekends, days—the only time I didn't, of course, was when I was on the podium at the school. So my hair was a little long, and coming into the schoolhouse the first day, I remember the good-natured jokes that were going around about, you know, hey, tell the Deputy, Sheri's down here with her bun—not Sheri, it was my former name—with the bun in the hair and the long hair, and it was god-natured ribbing, but it was really a sign of thing to come.

So, my wife had—I'd come out to my wife—and this was not my first wife. I had been married multiple times, because living inauthentically does little for your personal relationships, and it was probably 1999 before I shared my secret with anyone. And to her credit, she was—she understood. Not sure she approved of it, but she understood, and that was important to me.

Halaska: Could you tell me a little bit more about when you came out to your wife, what prompted it and what that experience was like for you?

Swokowski: I think what prompted my coming out in 1999, that I was—I could see the end of my military career down the road in just a short number of years, and when you're on active duty, once you get to your eighteenth year, you're pretty much locked in for retirement unless something extremely drastic occurs. And so I just felt to be in a little safer place from the job perspective, and frankly, the job has been the thing that was most consistent throughout my lifetime. I had multiple marriages, you know, they came and they went, they came and they went, but the job was always there. There was a special something about the profession of being a member of the armed forces.