

[OH2148.Johnson_access_clip3.mp3]

[01:32:34]

Halaska: Hm-mm. And then, also, why was it important for you to do an oral history interview that not only talked about your military service but also acknowledged your sexual orientation in the history as well?

Johnson: 'Cause I think it's important—I've read an awful lot of books about gays in the military, starting back in World War II and even before that and everything they've gone through. Stonewall [Stonewall Riots sparked by the June 28, 1969 anti-gay police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York City] which wasn't necessarily attached to military, but it was gay history and it was just something that needs to be continued; young people need to know where they came from; they need to know what happened first. I don't care what venue you're in. If you're in the world of sports—women's sports especially—they need to know it was never, not always this easy. And they need to recognize that because if they *don't*, it's going to go back to the way it was. They start getting lackadaisical and, yeah, it's going to go back to the way it was. So they need to recognize their history. They don't necessarily need to recognize *me*, but they need to recognize their history, and if I'm part of that that's fine.

I think the other part if it is I never realized how proud my *family* was of *me* as a person—I came out to them when I was thirty-five. I was sittin' in Norfolk in my house one day and thinkin, You know, this is ridiculous. I'm thirty-five years old. Why am I still hidin' this? And I picked up—I was thinking I was hiding it I should say [Halaska laughs]. I picked up the phone and I called my cousin, who I know, one cousin who I know is the biggest blabbermouth in the family [both laugh] and I told her and I said "Ann, by the way you can tell anybody you want to. Yeah." And she's like surprised didn't drop the phone but she said, "Oh, we were wondering what took you so long." [both laugh] And it was funny because we went for my fiftieth class reunion here last summer and she went with me and even there it came up and it was like my classmates, the people that were my good friends in high school then just looked at me and said, "This is supposed to be some kind of surprise? You think we didn't know? What?" [Johnson laughs] Like, okay, whatever. But now I think it's serious. It's important that kids remember where they came from. That it wasn't always this easy. I mean I read a lot of that stuff—I never realized; I guess I never thought about it. And that's the biggest downfall. You just don't think about it, much less realize how bad it was for some of those folks.

So Robbie, my colonel, came from the Air Force, she gave my speech. My God, she fought getting mustered out for, two years? They had like thirty charges against her, all of which were bogus, and she fought it. Fought it, fought it, fought it. This was early in her Air Force career. So she didn't have a pleasant time of it either. She'd be one to talk to but I'm not sure she'd talk about it [laughs]. So, no, I just think kids need to know where they come from. And that it's not impossible. I mean, I went through *before* "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" [US military policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians; effective February 28, 1994–September 20, 2011] and then "Don't Ask/Don't Tell/Don't Pursue"—I mean I thought it was very liberating when I was in San Diego and I watched at a gay pride parade right after "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" passed and one of my guys drove by in an open-top car and yelled, "Hey, Chief Johnson," and I didn't have to duck and look around to see who was listening, you know, because it didn't matter. Yeah, it was very liberating.