

Delwin Vriend

Oct. 9, '13

Interviewers: Murray Billett, Don Bouzek, Jo-Ann Kolmes

Q (MB): What brought you to King's College? You started there in December of '87. What did you do there, what were you hired to do? Kind of walk us through growing up in your family and the religion and what took you there.

DV: It starts a little bit before I started working at the The King's College. I was actually a student at The King's College four years prior. Like you said, I grew up in a Christian Reformed community, a very conservative Christian community. I went to, graduating from high school, my first year of university level education was at The King's College. After The King's College for one year at that point they did not offer degrees, so it was a transfer program. I went to a Christian college in Michigan and graduated from there in 1987. On coming back from college with a Physics and Math degree in 1987, December of '87 the professor of chemistry at The King's College, who was also the head of the Science Department at The King's College, asked me to fill in for the remainder of the semester for the chemistry lab instructor who had quit on them suddenly and left them a little bit in the lurch. In that December it was basically grading papers and getting a few things ready to get together in the lab, making sure the equipment was in place and so on. He asked me to continue then... he asked me to continue that in January. I started working at The King's College basically as a laboratory instructor, chemistry laboratory instructor, and a general laboratory coordinator. I was responsible for making sure that all the labs, biology and chemistry labs as well as physics labs, had the equipment that they needed, the resources that they needed, and then I was doing instruction for the first year chemistry labs.

Q: So we move through your career and then suddenly they find something out about you. How did that happen?

DV: When they first asked me, when Peter Mahaffy was his name, the head of the department, asked me to fill in and to continue for the first semester, initially that was going to be the end of it. It was just a temporary thing, a four month stint. That four month stint went very well. They were extremely pleased with my work, with what I was doing in the lab in terms of my instruction and in terms of being able to keep the laboratories running well and so on. Despite the fact that I did not have a Masters Degree, which people in this position normally did, they asked me to continue on, on a fulltime permanent basis. It was when he asked me to do that that I actually told Peter Mahaffy that I would be glad to do this, that I enjoyed doing it and would be quite happy to continue, but that I had one slight concern, and that was that, being gay – and this is the first that I'd told him of this – being gay, I thought the college might have a problem with me at some point in the future. He said, well Delwin, I hope the college does not have a problem with you. I definitely don't have a problem with this. I think we should just proceed on the basis that this is not a problem, and leave it at that. So I accepted the position and we went forward from there. The church that I was attending at the time, the congregation, had decided to move into The King's College facilities as well. I was attending services, church services at the time at The King's College, and I had a boyfriend. I had met someone about a year after I'd started working at The King's College, and he was also from this church, a different congregation, but we would occasionally go to one or the other together as a couple to these worship services. But the fact that The King's College housed the congregation that I was a member of meant that a lot of King's College students came to this congregation as well. We don't know exactly what happened but the assumption is that, and we're pretty sure it's what happened, one of the most conservative students at the college at the time did attend the services one of the days that I was with my partner, and he figured things out. He went to the president of The King's College and said, Delwin's gay, he's gotta go.

Q: This is a student?

DV: This is a student, ya. The president of The King's College at the time, he was just as bad. So he actually asked me into his office with the head of the Department of Chemistry.

Q: When was this?

DV: This was a year before I was actually fired, so '89 or end of '88, something like that. No a year before, sorry. Dates are difficult. But it was a year before I was fired. The president of the college asked me to confirm whether or not I was gay. He said, I don't really wanna know anything else, I just wanna know, are you or are you not gay? I don't wanna know if you have a boyfriend, don't wanna know... It's like, I understand. Then I said, yes I'm gay. It's like, well I understand that you're more comfortable with men than you are with women. I said, wait, I am not more comfortable with men than I am with women; I'm definitely not more comfortable with you right now than I am with most women, so don't make that assumption that I'm more comfortable with men than I am with women. But he said, okay we're not going to do anything right now. We're going to create a committee on the Board of Governors to investigate this. So they struck a committee on the Board of Governors and they took their time. I really never knew what was going on, but they were supposedly supposed to come up with some sort of policy and figure out what to do with me. It was maybe six months before, there was a, I don't know what to call it. There was a human rights conference of some sort that had been put together where I was, GALA, Gay and Lesbian Alliance [Awareness Society] of Edmonton, was wanting some publicity for. We all knew I was a member of GALA, in fact I was the president of GALA at the time. We all knew that there was definitely a possibility of a story here at some point; maybe we should get this out as a story in the Edmonton Journal as publicity for this conference. The agreement was that we weren't going to use names, so that it wouldn't be forcing the issue. So Paula Simons of the Edmonton Journal interviewed my father and myself and The King's College, the

president of The King's College. They first interviewed my father, and that went quite well. My father agreed to doing this article with the caveat that if anyone did not want their name used that no one's name would be used, but that he was fine with his name being used if everyone else was fine with their names being used. So Paula Simons then interviewed the rest of us. She asked me, am I okay with my name being used? Ya, if everyone else is going to be using their name, I'm fine with that. Apparently she didn't really ask The King's College, she just went in and interviewed. Because they didn't say, don't use my name, she just took that as meaning go ahead and use The King's College name. So suddenly she had permission then from all parties to use our names, which was a little bit of a shock, because both my dad and I didn't realize that this was the case; we were sure that The King's College wouldn't want this used. So it comes out on the Monday of the conference, this little article. I'm actually gone, I've taken the day off at King's College just to attend this conference. I see this article and I'm thinking, oh boy, tomorrow I've gotta go to work, here we go. Sure enough, I walk in to work and right at the front door the receptionist already she is pissed off at me. It's like, Delwin, come here. It's like, did you leave yesterday because you knew that this was coming up in the Edmonton Journal? It's like, no, it had long been planned and I didn't know that my name was going to be used or anything. It's like, okay, because I was sitting on the phone all day with furious people phoning in and I had to deal with them. It's like, if you had disappeared just because you didn't want to deal with that, then she was not happy. But that was basically the start of the end. It was a few months later that I was actually fired. That had pushed the issue far enough. On my birthday on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, so a week before I was fired, I was actually told that I was going to be asked to resign. In fact, I was asked to resign. I was not given a letter asking to it, but it's like, this is going to come out and we'd like you to resign. It was on the 28<sup>th</sup> that I was given a letter. I was called into the president's office on that Monday morning first thing and given a letter, and it was basically a letter for me to sign giving my resignation. I was told that if I did not resign then my employment was terminated as of noon that day. So the head of the department at the time, which was a different head of department, because Peter Mahaffy was on

sabbatical, he and I on a Monday morning go out for a beer and at noon we come back and I pack up my stuff in my office. I've got students coming by and they've got questions about their lab assignments and whatever. I'm like, I'm sorry, I can't help you anymore, I'm no longer working here. What? Ya, I've just been fired, so sorry. So that was news to the students as well. It was just a very sudden thing. Ya, just went home, not to my home but to my parents' home. Basically drove out there and said, well Mom, Dad, I've been fired.

Q: What impact did that have on your family and their place in the community and your place in the community?

DV: That was quite difficult for a lot of my family. My family all dealt with it very, very well. One of my brothers, he had a lot of people at his church that were suddenly asking him questions about this, and he had to come up with answers. I was quite surprised with how he handled it. It's like, look, if you've got questions you can ask him; I don't necessarily have the answers. My family handled it quite maturely. They all had to, I mean it was a huge thing. Well for my mom and dad it was a huge thing. In their congregation, the congregation that I had been a member of up until that point, they had to deal with a lot of fallout there. They lost friends, they lost a lot of friends from that, similar to gay people coming out, especially at that time, losing friends, my parents lost friends. So there were definitely family repercussions. Even neighbours of my parents on the farm, there were neighbours just shaking their heads, I don't know Ruth, my mom and dad. But ya, eventually they turn around as well.

Q: In terms of next steps, how did you come to decide to go to the council, go to the Human Rights Commission? How did that piece fall into place?

DV: Well already when the president of The King's College called me into the office the first time just to verify whether or not I was gay, I thought, okay. I was a member of

GALA, Gay and Lesbian Awareness of Edmonton at the time, so I got some advice from them and we found together a lawyer, my first lawyer, and I met with him.

Q: That's Victor?

DV: Yes, Victor. He advised that I keep a journal of everything that went on related to this. So by the time that this happened I had been in touch with him quite a few times and we knew what the next step would be. The next step was going to be going to the Human Rights Commission and filing, or attempting to file a complaint.

Q: Tell us about that.

DV: Ya well... I was received very well. The people at the Human Rights Commission were very kind. They were supportive all along. But I did go in and said I wanted to file a complaint. Well actually I had made an appointment to do this and they said, ya come in with the details. I met with the lawyer of the Human Rights Commission, I believe she was a lawyer, at least one of the employees. She basically told me, well there's nothing here that we can do. We've been instructed by the government that we cannot proceed on sexual orientation cases, and it's clear that that's what this is. It's not a gender identity issue; there's no other issue here. Which was true. The King's College made it very clear in their letter, they were very clear that this was because I was gay. They were not at all timid in saying why I was being fired.

Q: How did that make you feel, when you go to the Commission that you thought was going to go to bat for you?

DV: Ya, it didn't feel that great. I wanted them to go to bat for me and I kept trying to convince them that maybe there was another way that we could do this. On the other hand, I knew that, well ya. I knew that that would bring forward a court case, that our

next step would be a court case, and that that could be a good thing because a court case is much more decisive in a lot of ways and can be much broader, whereas this one complaint could be just me, and what sort of precedent does it set? Well it sets a little bit but not necessarily as much as a court case could. And the fact was that ya, now the Alberta Human Rights Commission is not going to be, if we go to court, they're not going to be leading that court case; they're on the other side of it instead of my side. So that didn't feel that great. It was a little bit disappointing, it was very disappointing. But I also knew that that's not the end of things. I knew that there was, well the next step was to go forward and file a suit against the government and the Human Rights Commission for non protection.

Q: How did that play out? Did Victor move to Toronto?

DV: So Victor was still involved through the whole court case.

Q: He was involved?

DV: Ya, he was the lawyer on the first court case. The very first level of court, the Court of Queen's Bench I believe, that was Victor, and he made all the arguments there. Like with most of the court cases, I really was not involved with any of the creation of the arguments or anything. Basically it was a black box behind me. Victor's doing his work here and I don't know what he's coming up with. I went to court to watch but I was not involved. In none of the court cases did I give evidence. Really to me it was a black box. I was quite happy for that. My role in a lot of this was media, and that was the difficult part. That was the really difficult part. Especially when I was first fired, even before we got to court, all of the calls that I'd be getting from the Journal and all of the media – radio stations, CBC – they were almost nonstop. I know my boyfriend at the time, Nick, he had mentioned that he would do a lot of the screening of those calls. The phone would ring and I was just, oh I can't deal with this, can you please answer it and make it go

away. So having to deal with that end of stuff was enough; it was good that I didn't have to do a lot of the other stuff. Although maybe if it had been reversed it would have been more interesting, if I didn't have to put the public face on. I'm not a very public person. Initially I thought, oh this could be my 15 minutes of fame. It ended up being a lot more than 15 minutes. I kind of realized that, no I don't really want that 15 minutes of fame, that's not for me. So perhaps it would've been more interesting to have been working more on the legal end of stuff.

Q: Was that one of the biggest challenges for you during all of this?

DV: Ya, the media. Dealing with the media, dealing with any large gathering that took place, like at the Legislature or whatever, and needing to speak and whatever – that was very difficult for me. I would not sleep the night before, I would just like... Even though I would always do fine and people would say, ya you look great, you come off well, it just was a lot of pressure. I'm sure I got a fair share of migraines just from having to do all of that. I'm very much of an introvert too, and these are not introvert moments. So ya, that took a lot of energy, a lot of energy.

Q: So it went to Queen's Bench?

DV: Yes and we won that actually. We won the first court case, and that was great. The feeling was wow.

Q: Do you remember the day. Do you remember before the decision came out?

DV: You know, I don't remember the decision coming out. All of the day that I remember of that court case is being in the courtrooms. I just remember it was the first time I'd ever walked into the court buildings, the Alberta court buildings here whatsoever. I'd never done that before – trying to navigate my way through and then just sitting in the court



room. I hear my name being said and you're sitting in this courtroom thinking, this is sort of about me, isn't it? Also the media being outside; they're not allowed into the courtroom so they're sitting outside the glass doors and I can see them and it's like, oh no, I have to leave through these doors and the media is there. They always want your little walk up to the doors and so on – they want to stage everything. I remember they wanted me to stage walking into the courtroom even though I was actually walking out. So walking in I tried to push the doors, oh it doesn't work. I've seen it again on video and it's like Delwin is trying to push the doors – no it doesn't, you have to pull. But that's okay.

Q: So after the decision came out, can you recall how that came about and what decisions were made as a result of that?

DV: Well you know, I don't remember a whole lot around that. I know that it took a while before the government actually decided to appeal that case. But between the positive decision and the appeal, I don't remember very much.

Q: Victor left subsequent to the ruling on QB. Do you recall how you and I met and how Sheila became involved, then the government announces that they're going to appeal that? Do you recall any of that?

DV: I don't really.

Q: We end up getting the government appeals. Do you remember what you and your family felt?

DV: When they appealed?

Q: When they made that decision that they're going to try to overturn the decision?

DV: In some ways it wasn't too surprising and in some ways I know that we had discussed at some point the fact that going to a higher level court brings a higher level of precedence as well. So that's not necessarily bad. I think we expected the government to appeal; that was fairly clear. The Klein government, we didn't expect anything less. So we had a good result from the first one and I think for me I felt even if they appeal we've already won one, we're going to win this appeal; don't worry about this. I don't know if I had talked to Sheila Greckol at the time yet or not.

Q: Do you remember attending the appeal court with the three judges?

DV: Yes, yes, I do remember that.

Q: What memories do you have of that one?

DV: I don't have very many memories. Again, I just remember taking the elevator up to the courtroom and sitting in the courtroom with the three judges and of course what's his name...

Q: McClung?

DV: Ya McClung, just thinking, oh boy. You could just tell that it was not going to go over for him. I think that was probably the most frustrating point of that part, is realizing that he's on this panel of judges.

Q: You could see his reaction?

DV: Ya, ya.

Q: That takes us to 1996 when McClung ruled and they overturned the Russell decision. So then, do you recall any of the meetings we had after that?

DV: I do remember you asking, Delwin, do you want to keep going? I think in a lot of ways the court cases were going to go ahead whether I was going to be part of this or not. There was a momentum behind them that was apart from me. I think even if I had said, no I don't really want to go on to the Supreme Court, I think the court case probably would've gone on to the Supreme Court.

Q: Couldn't have done it without you, just so you know.

DV: Well couldn't have done it without the initial, without me having been fired. I think by that point it could've been done without me. I think a lot of what I was involved with was the public face of things, sort of trying to win the public over as opposed to the courts over, which probably was an important part of it. You need a favourable public to have a favourable court, in many ways.

Q: Do you remember the fallout across the province? Do you remember the reaction in the media, the reaction on the radio to the court decision being overturned and the Alberta government putting us back in our place?

DV: You know, I know that in the papers there were a lot of letters to the editors on both sides. It's like, this is absolutely ridiculous, why has this been overturned? Others were, yes, finally some logic, some reality back in the mix. But I don't remember much more than that. I would have to read through all these articles again.

Q: It's a long time ago and there was so much going on for so long. I know the impact it had on you and your family, and that was profound. What about when we decided, the royal we, we're going to go to the Supreme Court now – some of the rallies we did and

some of the fundraising that we did and some of the media stuff we did. Can you talk about how the community reacted and the different allies that came together and how the momentum was built?

DV: Honesty Murray, I don't remember any of those aspects. I think honestly I blocked a lot of that out. I might have participated a little bit but my spirit probably wasn't in it. I would just block it out afterwards, just as a coping mechanism. It's like no, put it aside.

Q: I kind of described you as my little brother – you're not going to go near him; I'll talk to you. That's what I saw. That's the impact that a lot of people didn't understand and a lot of people didn't see.

DV: I think that's very true. You were definitely the protector.

Q: How about the trip to Ottawa?

DV: I don't remember the flight to Ottawa but I remember going to Ottawa and getting to the Supreme Court and going, wow, I'm going to be sitting in the Supreme Court. There's not that many places in the Supreme Court, so getting there early but realizing how packed this was and sitting there with Andrew, or Fernander at the time, and all the rest of us who were not the lawyers up at the benches. Then realizing, ya if we're getting all seven, or is it nine – nine judges? Nine judges. Seven is the U.S.

Q: Some cases have seven.

DV: Oh some cases do have seven? Okay. But ya, realizing that we got all the judges it's like, wow.

Q: Anything stand out in terms of what any of the lawyers said?

DV: Oh there were a few.

Q: Or what we talked about sitting beside each other?

DV: I don't remember what we talked about. But there was, especially one of the judges, I don't know which judge, but he got the audience cracking up a couple of times because he would just, the questions that he would address to the people opposed to us, especially the Christian groups, he was just, it was obvious he was incredulous at how they were even trying to argue this. He would just say, so blah, and it would just be the funniest statement and obvious that he was just like, you are insane if you think that's going to fly, and all of us cracking up. Those were good feelings, like yes, good, at least they see that these are ridiculous arguments.

Q: Any points you recall that drove something home for you?

DV: There was, who was the lawyer for the Jewish council? That was a difficult morning. We knew that the judgment was going to be coming down on that morning; I don't remember which morning it was. The night before I'm thinking, okay we've got to go there. I'm already thinking, no matter what happens there's going to be tons of media stuff going on tomorrow, whether we lose or win. It was fairly early here that it came down, because it came back at what, 11 o'clock eastern time or 10 o'clock eastern time? 9:30, so here 7:30. So I think I managed to get to Sheila's office at 7:15, although they didn't know that. In fact, actually I think I managed to get to your office at 7 o'clock and sat out in my car for 15 minutes until 7:15 and then walked up to your door. I just couldn't go in, I just couldn't go in. It's like, Andrew, I just can't do this, I don't want to do this. I sat outside the door and sat outside the door and sat outside the door. I think it was probably 7:35 or something when the decision finally got to you guys. There was a cheer that rose up from inside, and I just collapsed and I cried on the ground. I did not cry out

of happiness. It's just like, I can't do this. I don't want this day to go on; please go away. If I'd heard an ohh, I would've done the same thing. It's just the fact that it had finally come down it's like, no that's it, just hit the wall and hit the floor and crying. I think it took me another 10 minutes before I managed to open your door and sort of go in. It's like, hi. You're all, you're late, we've got the decision. It's like, I know you have the decision.

Q: I didn't know that part.

DV: Alberta is one of very few provinces that has ever considered using and continues to use or consider using the notwithstanding clause. The fact that they had considered or that this had been brought up that we might use the notwithstanding clause in some ways obviously is legitimate, it's constitutional; that is part of the constitution in Alberta that the province can. But that threat is a pretty overwhelming threat as well. It's like, you mean after doing all of this and winning at the Supreme Court level, winning constitutionally, now you're going to use another constitutional out to get by this? I think that was a pretty devastating possibility to the community, to us. I think we tried to put a lot of pressure on. I know that we met with cabinet ministers, Gary Mar at the time, I believe. Boy it's funny how I remember some names but not others.

Q: Does the name Klein ring a bell?

DV: Ya, that one definitely does, but I don't think we met with him. Oh wait.

Q: Ya, we did.

DV: Ya.

Q: Just to step back a bit, we did a big press conference at McKay School over here. Do you remember that day?

DV: The press conference where I said ha ha?

Q: Yes. Let's talk about the press conference and then explain the ha ha. There's an important story there that they don't get.

DV: There is, and they don't get it; they never did. We did have a press conference after having won the Supreme Court case. You know, it was basically me talking for ten minutes or something and then we turned it over to the press. But the funny thing is I talked for ten minutes and I'm raising a number of points. I don't remember what points I was raising, but I thought these were important points to be raising and figured that the press should be listening to this. But then at the end it's like, you know, this government has been such a childish government in terms of the way it has been approaching this all along. You take a look at the cabinet ministers, you take a look at all the back benchers, everyone in this government, they're just being babies – big, big babies. So at the end of what I was saying I just said, and oh by the way, ha ha, I win. It's like, as a response to these babies, you have to speak baby to babies. So ha ha, I win. Well that was headline news the next day. That was splashed up big in the Edmonton Sun and the Edmonton Journal. It's like “Ha ha I win,” and that's all they got from that press conference, which is rather funny. But they didn't even get the why of the ha ha I win. In fact, there was a columnist who had written something and said that this was a ridiculous response of Delwin – Delwin is just being childish, if that's what he is. So many people's response to that ha ha I win is, oh well now I don't support him, now he's being childish. But that's my point exactly – I'm being childish because I'm responding to a child or children. But ya, people just never got it, never did.

Q: We kind of tried to turn that around. I actually explained it this morning when I was doing my piece, because I knew exactly what you were saying.

DV: Ya.

Q: So now the government finally makes up their mind.

DV: They decide not to use the notwithstanding clause, ya.

e

Q: What happened to your life after that?

DV: The University of Alberta was great. I needed time off. I was basically given paid time off, sick leave, just to leave for two months, three months, just to recover from everything. I actually went to Europe and did a little bit of traveling for a couple of months and did eventually get back to the University of Alberta, but that was the big thing. First of all I just needed to get away from everything. Initially that was for a short period. Then I started working again at the University of Alberta, and that was in 1998 that I had taken that time off. But it became clear to me that in some ways I needed to get away from here, to get away from Edmonton. A lot of people, and this was sort of the case throughout the whole process, in some ways I said initially there was this 15 minutes of fame, people know me now. Very early on I thought, oh that could be cool. But I found out very quickly that's not what I want, that's not me. Part of what it was the whole time along is people think they know who you are, but they know what they see in the media. They know that media image, that face that is put on for the media. They don't know me. Everyone thought they knew me, and no one knew me. I could not get to know people really well, because they already knew me, supposedly. I could not start a relationship with a person, a friendship – I'm not talking about necessarily a couple relationship – but any relationship with any other person on an equal ground. They knew something about me and they figured they actually knew a lot about me, and I just needed to get away from that. So I did decide to start looking into moving away from Edmonton. I had looked into moving to Seattle at one point. I couldn't move to Vancouver because too many of the people I already knew were out there, although that wouldn't have been a bad



thing in retrospect. But it's also very rainy, and that's one of the reasons I didn't move to Seattle – it's too rainy. I finally did move to San Francisco. There there was one person that did know me, did know of the whole situation. He had moved down there before me, but from Edmonton. But we never really hung out or anything, so I was basically anonymous in San Francisco, which was kind of nice. I am now in France as well. It comes up when I want it to come up. If I feel it's important or feel that they might find it interesting and it's not threatening to me, then I can bring up a part of my history. But otherwise, it's anonymous.

Q: What impact did that move have on your family and on you? You're moving away from everybody you knew, and that took some courage.

DV: I don't know if it took courage or just stupidity. In some ways it was something I needed to do. In many ways they've been good experiences. But it is definitely something where it's not like when I moved away I was 18 or 22 or even 25 years old anymore and you're still making friends because you've got university community or these other communities. So making friends becomes much harder as you get older. So moving to San Francisco when I was 34 and then to France when I'm 39, ya it's not so easy. I've got my family here and I've got friends here and Calgary. Not so much anymore in Vancouver, they've all moved back to Edmonton or Calgary. But ya, that's something that is unfortunate. I do think of moving back. I probably could now. I think enough time has passed that I could be, there's a lot of people out there that don't know me and those that did probably don't remember that they knew me.

Q: What's the best thing for you out of all of that stuff? What's the best thing that happened as a result of that long battle?

DV: You can't spring a question like that on me. The best thing of all these millions of things?

Q: There's so many cool things that happened within that – the friendships that were formed and the wedges that were put and the power of our community. You left so many cool things. What's a badge of honour?

DV: First I'll go with one of the best things. What I often tell people is that this was a period of my life that was one of the most difficult. But not only most difficult, it was something that I did not want to be going through. Yet I have to say it was also the best thing that has ever happened to me. It allowed me to get out of a community that I didn't know, a fairly cultish community, didn't know that I could get out of, didn't know how to get out of. This would give me a way out. It allowed me, I mean socially, whatever, it allowed for a lot of development, personal development. Like I say, and I'm very serious when I say it, the worst things that have happened to me in my life have also been the best things that have happened to me in my life. The best things always come from the worst things, for some reason. It sounds trite, but it's so true. Badge of honour? I think ultimately it is neat to have been such a central part, especially my name. I was not involved in the court cases so much, legally I was not involved. I think there was an initial deposition that I did with Victor or something, but I think that was only one thing that I did. But my name is on everything, and I'm associated with it. That's a huge badge of honour.

Q: You I'm sure have been told or are aware that this case is in the top ten of human rights law. In universities around the world, your case is one of the top ten.

DV: Like you say, around the world. In the U.S. it is – it's not just in Alberta, it's not just in Canada, it's not even just in North America. It's around the world.

Q: Your family has got to be proud.

DV: Oh yes, of course they are, oh yes, oh yes. My sister, she's a little bit of a shit kicker herself. She's so proud of that, that's the first thing she tells anyone.

Q: A younger sister?

DV: Ya, it's my only sister. She's younger.

Q: She must have been beside you as this was all moving through.

DV: Ya. My parents too are very proud, very proud. There's no doubt there.

Q: Your parents played a pretty big role in all of this. They weren't shy to step up to the media.

DV: Ya, they were definitely in the media. They were present at a lot of these things, at the rallies and at the Legislature after we won the Supreme Court. They were up on stage with me, ya.

Q: What about the legal team that came together?

DV: What an incredible team, what an incredible team. With Julie and Jo-Ann and ...

Q: Doug Stollery.

DV: Doug, ya. Sheila... Lyle, ya. It was like you couldn't think of a better team to put together.

Q (JK): Just a couple of questions. How did the experience change you?

DV: I think it has, I think it has made me less shy, less timid, because I had to be in the media. Oh one big way is I'm completely out. I had basically come out one year before I was fired, well two years before I was fired, to my parents and to a few other people, a couple of friends, one that decided he wasn't going to be friends with me anymore, a few people. I was barely out, then I'm fired and I'm out all over the country. It's like there was no doubt that Delwin was gay now. I think that was powerful. There are very few people that have had an experience like that. I know so many people who have, are still, after 20 years of having come out to their parents and to a few friends, some of their family doesn't know, their extended family doesn't know or whatever. To me that is just foreign. It's something I've never had to hide since I was fired, it's something I've never wanted to hide. It's something I usually am very upfront with, even in job interviews. It's like, if you're going to discriminate against me you'd better do it now, because I'm gay so now's your time, you don't have to hire me; it's pretty hard to prove that you didn't hire me because I'm gay. I think that was a huge change, just being so far out.

Q (MB): It launched a few of us out in bigger ways, no question about that. Jo-Ann, do you have anything else?

Q (JK): In the difficult times, what kept you going?

DV: The fact that I had to. That's the way my mind works. It's just like, okay you have to do this. Because I had committed to doing it, and in my mind a commitment... I've always said I have a problem with commitment. People say, you don't have a problem with commitment, you're always committed to everything. It's like, well that's probably what my problem is. It's like I don't like the commitment of marriage because I know that that's forever. The fact that I had said, yes I'm going to do this, that was a yes. Okay you've said it, so whether you like it or not, you're doing this. That was basically it.

Q (DB): These are less questions than things that you said that really struck me and I'm hoping you can talk some more about. One of them was, and this came up in another interview about a legal process, about this sense of dislocation from the process. It's like, what am I, a piece of meat? There's people in this room talking about me, but where do I fit into this process? Talk about how it feels to be in the centre of this legal storm.

DV: Sitting there and having your name mentioned and not really being up there and involved in this and not being involved in the legal wranglings of how we're going to approach this and whatever, it does, I think in many ways it felt, well it felt odd, obviously. But like you said, disembodied. And yet I think I was able to say, well that name could be any name, there's a person here that has been fired. I am accustomed, I've been known to talk about myself in the third person, so I think that made it a little bit easier for me. I can relate to other people talking about me as if I'm talking in the third person about me. But uh, ya, I don't know if that answers the question.

Q: It does. As I say, these are less questions than reflections. Another one, you were saying for you a lot of what you thought your role was, was in the public eye of this process. It strikes me that that child quote is a classic example of what happens when you're dealing with really stupid people who aren't able to fill in any context to the story. What that does to you when you know, I'm trying to explain something complicated here, and they're going to reduce it to ten seconds. Talk about how you dealt with that frustration.

DV: You know, it was definitely a frustration. I think a lot of journalists came to know me as the sound bite master, because for some reason I was able to give them sound bites. This wasn't something that I had practiced or tried to do, but I gave sound bites. I think I tried, the sound bites that I tried to give were in many ways sound bites that tried to boil down the essence of this complex argument that I was trying to make into a smaller quantity for them to use. But ya, definitely frustrating when there's so much more even

behind that sound bite. It's like, you're not going to get it all if that's all you're using. Not only that, there's a problem of taking things out of context. Suddenly they're using that out of the context of whatever else you've said, and that can change the meaning completely. So ya, very frustrating. Sometimes you just wanted to strangle someone.

Q: One of the things we were talking about before involves the fact that this case was so important for the way in which it broke a kind of silence in this province, where people would suddenly go quiet and say, oh I can't possibly talk about that. The fact that somebody took it all the way and said, okay you're not going to be able to silence us, we're just going to keep going. If you're going to deny us at the appeal, well fine, we'll appeal back. That was really important. Were you aware of how important that was?

DV: I'm not sure I was aware of how important that was. It's part of the nature of me and my family, it's my dad where that comes from as well. All of us were in that. We were all saying, no we're going to continue here and we're not giving up, we're going all the way. But in terms of myself personally, that sort of comes from the family, from my dad. My sister has it too – no, this is not going to happen, no, no, no, no. Because of that, I don't think I was that aware of the importance of that. That's just the way it was going to be.

Q: Then people were talking.

DV: Absolutely, then people were talking. In fact, when you were raising this question earlier I was thinking in my mind also before this happened in the Edmonton Journal you would often see pictures of a gay couple holding hands, but you would see them from shoulder down or from behind, so you wouldn't see faces. I think that changed with this court case as well. You suddenly started to see in the Edmonton Journal and the Edmonton Sun, on the news at night, on TV, you'd see faces of gay and lesbian people, of couples. I think that was a big change.

Q (MB): Let me share with you what I brought up this morning. I was sitting at Second Cup this past summer and a couple of young gay guys walked by holding hands and I went, wow. Then I wanted to run up and touch them on the shoulder and go, excuse me, you're welcome. Talk about the impact that this case has had on families, on young queer people, and the difference that it's made not just to Alberta but to our country.

DV: Not only to our country but to, well definitely to the U.S. I had people on Facebook look me up on Facebook and they've never been to Canada and they want to be my friend because they've studied me. They are a gay student and they just think, you are my hero. It's like still today 22-year-olds in university or whatever, it's like wow, in the U.S., that that has had a huge impact. I think you're right, I think you do see a lot more people being able to be open today than you did back then. It's strange you say that, because I was just, it was about five years ago, no probably more than that, it was before I moved to France, so nine years ago I was walking past Second Cup as well, and that was with my boyfriend Justin. We were walking hand in hand and someone said, you go girls, as if this was something that was odd on Jasper Avenue yet. They were gay as well; this was not an insult. But it was something that was obviously not often seen. That surprised me. That could be because I'd lived so long in San Francisco by that point, but I was sure that by the time I'd left Edmonton that I was seeing more of that. So I thought there was perhaps a retrograde of some sort that had taken place in Edmonton for a while.

Q: So let me ask you the question. You're a hero.

DV: No I'm not. There's no way I'm a hero. I was the person that got fired.

Q: If it wasn't you it would be somebody else?

DV: Ya, I hope so. That is one thing that I hope, you know there are still so many issues that come up today and I know that people are so afraid of bringing them to the Human

Rights Commission or going further than the Human Rights Commission. I can understand that in some ways. They don't want to be in the public eye, they don't want to be the one making a big fuss, whatever. Yet you know, in many ways I didn't want to either, except I didn't have to. I could've said, no I'm not doing this media stuff. I said, yes I am – I thought it was important. But people have to understand that you can do these things without being that public. So why did I be so public? I don't know.

Q: You opened the door.

DV: Ya, but why did I stay in the media view?

Q: Because I pushed you into it.

DV: It's your fault. Well I think I felt it was an important thing to do as well. But I hope that there are people today that would consider doing similar things. Even if you don't do the whole media thing, just go and file a complaint.

Q: That was one of their big concerns – well now everybody's going to complain. Do you remember that?

DV: Ya. And no one does.

Q: That they'd be lined up out the doors of the Commission. That certainly didn't play out.

DV: No.

Q (DB): Just one more. This is to do with the whole system of charter schools and faith based education. Here you are coming from what is clearly a science background. What



are your perceptions around that now? What is the relationship with schools that are coming from a philosophy, not necessarily Christian, but how does that all play out in your mind now that you've had to struggle with it?

DV: I think that as soon as you get to an institution, whether it be a school or university, whatever, any institution, if it's publicly supported, if it's publicly financed to whatever degree, I think there has to be a public accountability. I think they give up the right to be completely self determined. They have the right, they have the responsibility, sorry, of the charter of rights. They cannot opt out of that. If they're going to be a privately funded educational institution I would say they still have that right but it's definitely less clear. I think it's very clear that if there's any public funding, if they're going to accept public funding they have to accept all public law. That public law includes the Charter of Rights. In my mind, there's no doubt.

[ END ]