

Oral History Interview: Candy Holmes 1

Interviewee: Candy Holmes

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

Date: October 29, 2017

Monique M. My name is Monique Moultrie and today is October 29, 2017, and I'm here with Reverend Candy Holmes. We're conducting an oral history to supplement the biographical statement that's already up on the Rolling the Stone Away website. And a lot of the questions that I would typically ask it does look like have already been done with Mark, so I'm going to ask some of those questions to get you to elaborate, but for our time I'm going to begin early in your life and then hit some major milestones along the way. So feel free to skip questions. Feel free to let me know if you want to say more or if you want to come back to a question or something comes to mind.

I read from the interview with Mark that you were born in D.C., so let's start there. Let's start with you telling me a bit about your early life and what type of neighborhood you grew up in, what type of class background, some just general.

Candy H. Okay. I consider myself a Washingtonian. I was born in Washington and I was born in Freeman's Hospital, which is now a part of Howard University, and it's the radio station. But it used to be the hospital. And Freeman's was named because free men, so it's directly connected to

slavery. And so I take particular delight in the place where I was born being named after freedom.

And so I grew up in several neighborhoods in D.C. My earliest recollection is growing up in Northeast Washington, and with a younger brother. And that neighborhood was, I think you would consider it a middle to lower class black neighborhood. And both my parents were hard-working and carrying more than one job to make ends meet. And my mom was a... She comes from a family where they were entrepreneurs, so they'd owned a cleaners, which, in Washington, D.C., it wasn't unusual for black people to own their own businesses. That was her parents, which were my grandparents. So that kind of set a foundation for the family.

However, when my mom came along and married my dad, this was her second marriage. And so her first marriage set her up in a way that—she was divorced, and back in those days getting divorced was not a simple matter, and it impacted you economically, especially a woman. And she already had two kids that she was supporting, but they were at least teenagers. And so then I came along, and it was a surprise for her that I came along because my father had indicated that he could not have children.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Candy H. Yes, and so she believed that, and then found out he could have children. And so I was a surprise baby. Not that she didn't want me. She wanted me. But it was more about I didn't know that—

Monique M. It was a possibility.

Candy H. It was even a possibility, right. And so here I come, and then my brother comes a year after that. And then there were a couple of other...my mom miscarried, I think, one other time, which was pretty hard on her physically. So I grew up in D.C. thinking that this was the world, that is, the world being all black people except for a few white people here and there, especially early on, because I was not exposed to white folks except for on television. So it was predominantly black neighborhoods, predominantly black church experiences, predominantly black schools, and that was my world. I knew white people existed because I saw them in the stores, I saw that they owned businesses and so forth, but on a day-to-day basis I did not interact with them. So purely enculturated into the black experience and black community.

My father was a cab driver. He was also a short-term cook. My mother was a bookkeeper and she was also very industrious in terms of what she could do, anywhere from being a seamstress because, you know, she came up in the cleaners business, to knowing how to run businesses. So later in life she was also a dynamic Avon lady, so she pursued Avon as a career as well.

In terms of my growing up, I would say that I was a quiet kid, but I was curious, so I noticed a lot of my environment. And so I noticed things, but I may not have always understood. And so my family, my mother and father, very early on, began to have challenges in their marriage. And so there was, I think it's safe to say that there was emotional and physical violence in the home, and so I was exposed to that. My brother was too young at the time for the early stages of that, but I wasn't. So I have imprints of violence in the home between my parents, and volatility, and extreme anger.

And some of this was around money. My father, as I said, he had more than one job, but one of his jobs was he was a banker. And the banker in the black community meant he was part of a numbers racket. And so sometimes his money would get funny, and it would mix in with his real money, his salary money, and then he didn't have all the money he needed for the household. And that was a problem for my mother. And he also had a drinking problem as well. He enjoyed drinking and he would come home late after working and after doing whatever he needed to do around his second job or third job, around the numbers, and then come home with not enough money to pay the bills. And so that caused a lot of tension in the home.

And I didn't know what it was at the time. I just knew that it was hard and it caused a lot of pain in the house. And so then I started becoming a fearful kid, which I was not always a fearful kid. So I was, I would say,

about three or four years old, starting to look at the world as a place to fear and not knowing where I could lay my trust. We moved around a lot. At least it seemed a lot to me. I don't know the reasons for why that was.

Monique M. In various places in D.C.?

Candy H. D.C., mm-hmm. And at one point my parents split up and the next thing I knew we were staying with our grandparents with my mother. And I don't have a clear sense of timeline. But to me as a kid it seemed like a long time. It could have been, it could not be the case, but it seemed like a long time. And it was during then I had chicken pox and some of the other kind of childhood conditions.

So being with my grandparents felt good to me. They had a house in Northwest Washington on Capitol Hill, what is now Capitol Hill, on Maryland Avenue, and so I had my own room, and I was going to school. It was very early, so it wasn't grade school, per se. I think it might have been kindergarten. So that seemed to be a reprieve from the tension and the pain of being in a home that had violence.

And then we moved again and my parents got back together. And this time it was a little different. They decided that they were going to start going to church. Which meant I was going to church with them, and my brother as well. And we were now going to the...it's called Salem Baptist Church. It was the home church for the family, family church, and my other relatives went there, too. And so started going to church beyond just the...we used

to be just the Easter and Christmas kind of family, and we grew out of that stage into more regularly attending church.

It took a little while to happen because my father, in particular, but my mom a little bit, but especially my father, he had had a lot of connections in the community that were not church, especially with being a numbers backer and that kind of thing. So it took a little while for the night life, I guess you could say, to transition from that into more of church. So during that process or that time, we continued to go to church and gradually started going to church more often.

And then my parents moved again, and then this time into a house, which is the first time we lived in a house, like it was our house, and so that was in Northeast Washington. And they were very proud of that. And I was happy for it as well. A neighborhood with lots of kids. And so I made friends and I started going to grade school, and life was good.

And then my uncle, who went to the same family church, he decided he was going to branch out and start his own church, and he asked my parents to go with him to be founding members. And so they decided to do that. And so I went with them. It was a Baptist church, New Image Community Baptist Church. And my father quickly became a deacon and my mother a deaconess. And so therefore then I became a deacon's kid. Which is a very interesting thing to be. It's like being a preacher's kid except you're the

deacon's kid. And it's not much different except I didn't have the same kind of pressure as a preacher's kid. But I had enough pressure.

And that pressure was that you had to be a certain way, had to look a certain way, had to behave a certain way. And I wasn't quite a churchy kind of kid. I was more of a fun-loving kind of kid. I wanted to play kickball and I wanted to run the streets with my friends, I wanted to go to the movies. Church wasn't fun for me. But I went because that was the rule.

And my parents were still struggling with their relationship, but at least it wasn't the same kind of physical violence. Well, violence is violence, but I didn't witness the physical violence anymore. And my father's drinking seemed to lessen, but it didn't go away completely for a while, so there was still alcohol, and he would come home smelling of alcohol from time to time. But over time he began to move away from excessive drinking.

So my childhood was speckled with upheaval, moving a lot, emotional trauma, uncertainty about the future, and still trying to figure out this church thing. I participated in church even though I didn't care for it much. I sang in the choir, the little kids' choir, and ushered, and Bible class and the like. And because I was a deacon's kid I got to see the problems that the deacons had to deal with, sort of the underbelly of the church.

And the more and more I saw of that, the more disenchanted I became with church. And not that I had a long ways to go. But it was easier to get to that edge after seeing all that I saw as it relates to how people treat each other, including my parents. So it's like okay, we'll do church on Sunday, and we'll just see how the rest of the week goes in terms of how we behave. At church we behaved well.

My response to that as a kid was I, and as far back as I can remember, I had this justice streak, so it was like I don't understand why it is that we can do right on Sunday, but we can't do right on Monday through Saturday. And so my response to that was resistance. And my resistance looked like I'm not going to be doing all this that they want me to do anymore because the church has a lot of hypocrites. And I didn't know that word when I was growing up, but I knew that feeling.

And so I decided I didn't want to participate if that is what church was about. And so I would go to church because I had to, but I wouldn't take my coat off. I'd sit in the back of the church like I was a stranger. That was my form of resistance as a child. And it would make my parents, and especially my mother, very angry, because she wanted me to participate. She wanted me to be in the front of the church with the other kids who were part of the deacons' families and the minister's families. And I just didn't want any part of it. And that was the reason. It wasn't that I had a problem with God. I had a problem with the church.

And even as a young person, even if I didn't understand what were the real issues at play, I could pick up that things were not kosher, people were not behaving well with each other. I just didn't know what it was called. I knew it felt bad, looked bad to me. And the occasions—well, because I was a quiet child, there was always a lot of talking going on around me, and so whether it was arguments or whether it was intense conversation, I could feel it that it was hard stuff.

Monique M. Let me ask there about values, because you've named a couple. But you said at the time you didn't have a language for them. So looking back, what type of values do you think were promoted or values you noticed?

Candy H. Well, I would say family values were promoted and family values being that family was important and that you stuck together. You didn't let anything happen to family. You protected family. You provided for family. And you didn't air your dirty laundry. So even if something was going on you had to act like nothing was going on. So there was the good side of family values and the not so good side of family values, the kind of family values where everything that happens in the house stays in the house. So that value around keeping things secret was a part of family values, as well as being willing to stand up for each other. So it was a mixed bag, family values.

I would say another value that was promoted, or that I picked up, or didn't have language for was faithfulness, that you showed up. So when I didn't

want to go to church, that wasn't an option because it was more important to be faithful. If you made a commitment to be a part of something that you showed up for that. So if I was a part of the choir, when I was a part of the singing, then I would have to show up for that. I didn't get to slack off. The same thing for chores and homework and any other obligation—faithfulness. So whether it was related to church or not, it's important to be a person who did what you said you would do, or you at least said you committed to.

And that took a little bit for me, in some ways, because, as I mentioned earlier about church, I wasn't committed to church. My parents were committed to church. But I had to be committed to family. That meant I had to go to church. And there was a work ethic, a serious value around work. Both parents had multiple jobs. And so it was important to work. It was important for me to work as a child. And so it wasn't like going out to work, but it was you will have chores and you will do your chores. If you don't do your chores, we will wake you up and you will do your chores. And so I had times where I was shaken awake—hello, you did not do the dishes. And they would get me up.

And I remember I was young enough that they had to bring out the little stepstool so that I could step up on it to wash the dishes. It didn't matter that it was 2:00 in the morning. I didn't do the dishes. And so I had to do them. Once they realized those dishes were not done, it didn't matter what

time of day or night it was, I had to go do the dishes. So I would say work was a high value.

And I think mostly from my mother—I don't think she would call it justice. I think the language she might use would be it's only right to do right. Which is part of some of the concerns in her relationship, that she sometimes felt like my father wasn't doing right by the family. But she had a, from my recollection and what she instilled in us, that it was right to do right. Which I now translate as justice. And so my justice button developed very early on.

Monique M. Can you speak about major influences you had growing up?

Candy H. My uncle was a major influence. He was the pastor of the church.

Monique M. Was the pastor of the church?

Candy H. Yes. He took time to talk with me. His daughter and son, we were all around the same ages, and so we were always with each other. And Uncle Robert was his name, and he was my mother's brother. And my mother was youngest, and he was next in line, I think maybe a couple years older. And he was a major influence in my life. He helped me to have some glimmer of hope around church. It was like he was trying to hold up a Christ-like standard or Christian-like standard, even if all hell was breaking loose. It seemed he was trying to hold onto that. And I would say that I noticed that in him. And it was not about him being the pastor, so he

was expected to do that. There was something more to that. It was his... I just felt he was a true person.

My godmother was another influence. She was my mother's best friend. And she too was that same kind of person, where the truth was most important. These individuals all seem to have the same thread, where the truth was what was most important. And I admired that. Where they were willing to say the hard things, even if it meant they were the only ones saying it. So I took note of that. Okay, that's possible. It wasn't just my mother saying it. Because I would say my mother was a strong influence, my godmother and my uncle in that regard, in terms of holding the truth out there and being willing to say...to be seen as perhaps one of a few who were willing to speak the truth.

My father, he was a strong influence, more around being a hard worker, and also he influenced me around you can do whatever you want to do and you don't have to be confined to roles. And how that looked, like my father, he did most of the cooking in the house, and he did the laundry, which back in the '50s and '60s would really be considered the woman's job. But he did it. And my mother could cook just fine. Could do laundry just fine. But he did it.

And primarily he did the laundry because we didn't have laundry facilities in the house, and my mother didn't drive, and so he would gather the laundry, and I would go with him, and we'd do the laundry at a

Laundromat. For years we did that. Until there was a washer and dryer in the house. And even still when there was, he still did the laundry. And he cooked, and he cooked a lot. My mom cooked some, but my father cooked a lot. And just those things helped me to see that I didn't have to be confined to just what was considered the woman's role. Which was very helpful, since I was a tomboy already, and had very little interest in household stuff.

Monique M. So church wasn't fun. You mention this now being a tomboy. What activities were you having fun at?

Candy H. I was having fun at any and every kind of sport I could get involved with. I enjoyed hanging out with my friends, and I loved having friends. And so from the time that I would wake up, especially on the weekends, till the time that the street lights went off, I was outside the house. I mean, my parents would have to make me come in to eat. And I would rush and eat and then run back outside to play. So I was all about play. And we didn't have Walkman's or iPods or electronic games, so it was all just imagination and fun with each other, and a lot of physical activity. A lot of sitting around on each other's porch and talking with each other. And a lot of social engagement as kids. And a lot of team sports, team activities. So I had a lot of fun just being a kid. And I loved having friends. That would be, I think, another value, that my mother in particular, she had friends, and they were very tight, like three or four particular friends. And

so I observed that and thinking how good that was, and so I think I mimicked that early on of developing friendships, and they being very important in stabilizing my life, especially when things were rocky. So yeah. And so I played with boys a lot, and girls, too, but I was not trying to sit on a porch with dolls. I was really more kickball, stickball, running up and down the streets, who can run the fastest, who can jump the highest. I was daring, and swinging from trees, and hurting myself, scraping myself.

Yeah, I was fun-loving and daring and being outside was everything, because I was with my friends. I didn't want to be in the house. Being in the house meant either I was having to do some chores or I was having to deal with the tension between my family members, my parents in particular, or I was by myself with my brother, but that was still the same as being by myself because he was a boy and, you know, we did some things together, but I preferred being outside with my friends.

Monique M. I'm going to leapfrog us to college, but are there any formative things that come to mind from childhood?

Candy H. Formative things from childhood that—

Monique M. That you'd want to share before we...

Candy H. I was always trying to have boyfriends. Even though I was having attraction to little girls as a little girl, I just didn't know that's what it was. And it didn't, it, you know. But I...yeah. So I was always having...trying

to figure out who was going to be my little boyfriend. But for the girls, I didn't call them girlfriends because it just seemed like that was natural, you know, to like...I don't even know how to put it except to say that we would... I don't recall me kissing a girl. I don't recall that. But I recall having warm fuzzy feelings for a girl and just wanted to be around her all the time. And that feeling never changed. It just grew bigger and bigger and bigger as I grew older. So I would put that probably back, as far I can remember, probably eight years old.

But I kept still trying to have boyfriends because that was what you were supposed to do as a girl. You're supposed to have boyfriends. You're supposed to respond to the boys that you really wanted to be with them, so I really tried to do that. So I would say that was something that was central in my formative years. And had crushes on teachers, female teachers. Never on a male teacher. Yeah.

And in high school I actually had a young woman try to hold my hand, and it freaked me out because I didn't know what that meant. It's like she's trying to hold my hand. It kind of brought the feelings of someone else out so that I could see it, but I didn't know what to do with that. And so I just yanked my hand back and looked at her like I don't do that, I don't know what you're doing. And I just walked off. I just walked off and tried to forget it. And she said oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

So I can't say that I didn't give off some vibe, because I don't know. I think in high school, by then I was certainly giving off some vibes. I just didn't do anything physical, touching or holding hands. But you don't have to do a whole lot of touching and holding hands for people to pick up that you have a warm and fuzzy feeling. But again, I didn't know what to call that because I had always had them, so I didn't call them anything other than, you know, a feeling for another person that I really wanted to be around.

Monique M. Okay. So you're in high school. What made you apply to Wheaton?

Candy H. What made me apply to Wheaton was there were other...there was a gospel choir in high school, and the gospel choir director was, I think, two years ahead of me. And so when she went away to school—she graduated. She went to Wheaton College. And I remained in high school, and by the time it was time for me to consider college, the boyfriend I had at the time, I thought we would go to school together, and he decided he wanted to go to Oberlin because he was pursuing music and Oberlin was good for music. Wheaton was good for academic scholarships. And that's what the choir director friend who was already at Wheaton was telling me. Said, well you know, Wheaton is a good place to go. I didn't know Wheaton. I had heard of Wheaton. So I decided that I would apply. I had very good grades. And they accepted me.

And I think the other reason I applied was I thought it would be important to go away from home, even though I'd never been away. The boyfriend I had, we had broken up, and I was heartbroken. I was devastated by it. And so I wanted to be able to prove that I could do something just like he did. He went away to school, I can go away to school. I think all those factors played into going to Wheaton.

I didn't really study Wheaton in terms of what kind of school is this and how can this be a school that could benefit me, and what can I do with this degree if I get this from Wheaton. I didn't think of any of that. I didn't think through this is an all white school. I didn't think through this is an all girls school. I didn't think through any of that. The only thing I could think through was they do financial scholarships. I could get a financial scholarship and my parents would not feel the weight of, and the burden of having to pay for school. So that's what factored in.

Monique M. So what was it like going from all black D.C. to very, very white Wheaton?

Candy H. It was a culture shock. Wheaton, back then, was like 1,100 white women, and it was about 40 black or people of color women, women of color, and it was a class shock because Wheaton then was considered where the upper crust would send their kids, their girls. So the likes of Harry Belafonte's daughter, she was there. And there were others. Now I didn't, you know, I never got to hang out with her. I think she might have been a

senior when I was there. But I knew she was there. And so there were so many layers of culture that just blew me away. I mean, it was the upper class culture. I just had no idea what was going on. Some girls stayed on campus. Some were driven to campus.

Back then it was all white, and I just had no idea about white culture, none. Not a clue. I had some idea about white culture from my music experience because we traveled, the choirs I was in, we traveled, and so I got to be around white people. And there were a few white people in the singing groups I was in. But by and large, I was not socialized with white people. So just experiencing how white people felt about black people in the '70s, like '75, '74, it was a very tense time.

And I would say that I didn't fare too well in that culture, that environment. I was already sort of a wallflower kind of person, quiet, shy. Heartbroken, because I was still nursing the heartbreak of breaking up with my boyfriend. I had no friends. And then they put me in a triad rooming situation with a Native American woman who smoked cigars, which was like...a woman that smokes—I didn't even know what to do with that.

Monique M. *[Laughs.]*

Candy H. And then it was, I think, another black woman, so they put all the people of color, at least in my triad, together. But we were all from different cultures. That person who was in there, the Native American woman was

from someplace I'm not familiar with. The other woman was from someplace out West, so we just came from all different cultures. So my roommate situation wasn't comfortable. And being at Wheaton was not comfortable for me.

And my counselor at the time, I just don't know what she was thinking. When I look back on it I have some thoughts. But she counseled me, advised me to take certain classes. I don't know if she was looking at my grades from high school thinking oh, I have a brainiac here, or if she was looking at me saying oh, black girl in white school, let's weed her out. I don't know which it was. Or I don't know if it was a combination of both. But I don't know how you give a freshman upper classman courses. I just don't know how that happens. But that's what happened. There was a mixture of upper classman and introductory courses.

So then I had the pressure of those kinds of academic rigors that I just really struggled with. And so I just felt really stupid. I was not accustomed to feeling stupid. I was accustomed to being the top of my class, and making excellent grades, and knowing what the hell I was thinking and doing, and doing it well. But I didn't feel that way there at all. So early on I just felt very embarrassed. And so I think it really set me up, in some ways. I was already feeling a certain kind of way in my heart. That hit my self-esteem. And so here I am a black girl, all white environment, feeling like I can't cut the mustard.

And so I think it set me up to want to seek out other settings where I could be with more black people to at least bolster myself. And that's sort of how I got involved in church. 'Cause there was a cluster of women there at school who would bus to college in Massachusetts, in Boston.

Monique M. So I noticed that in the bio that you've done that that was your introduction to the Apostolic faith.

Candy H. Yes.

Monique M. Give me some sense of how that was helpful.

Candy H. Okay.

Monique M. In a world where there's all whiteness, which is a foreign culture, and then you're sort of not...church isn't fun to go to, a culture that church is everything, it's the focus of your worldview.

Candy H. Well, I didn't know what it... To connect to high school, I started sampling different kinds of church in high school because of the music and because my boyfriend was Apostolic. And he was not just Apostolic, he was Seventh Day Apostolic, which meant they went to church on Saturday and Sunday, but Saturday was the Sabbath, they really celebrated that. And so every now and again I would go to church with him. And I was fascinated, because they lifted up truth. This thing about truth. And so I was fascinated by that.

And there seemed to be some connection to the divine that I had not experienced. It's like what do they have that I don't have? I'm interested in that. And if it gets me closer to the truth, I'm interested in that. And they were very sincere and loving. And so I had appreciation for that. So that connection I had with that church, even though it was very strict, I didn't go there as a member, so I didn't have to deal with all that strictness. But I did remember feeling that thing about truth, that value around truth. And so I thought, well, one Pentecostal church or Apostolic church, maybe that'll be the same as this one.

And it was a brand new church. They just started, the pastor and his wife just started the church, so it wasn't that old. And it was on campus. And it was a lot of young people. Predominantly black, but not exclusively. But it was black culture church, which I could connect to. And it was lively. And we hung out together. So it gave me a sense of community again, centered blackness again. What came of that, however, I did not realize, was all the rules were starting to set in around how to dress, how to socialize, what you can and cannot do. And then I started glazing over. It's like oh my god, I didn't know that was a part of the situation here.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Candy H. It was like, okay. I can't go roller skating, I can't play cards, I can't dance, I can't... I didn't have a—good news, I didn't have any interest in sex because I wasn't having sex with—I knew I just kind of didn't want to

have sex with a guy. You know, I just didn't... So I was cool with that, you know, so sex was not the issue. Even though I started to have boyfriends right away out of the Apostolic church, and they kept pressing me, let's get engaged. But I didn't know what the rush was. Well, the rush was because they wanted to be able to have sex. Well, sex, I wasn't rushing, so, you know, let's not get married. We can be engaged. And so I kept, you know, like putting someone off. That was more of what it was for me, you know, if I'm telling the truth about it.

So that experience, while it did give me the black culture again, and it gave me a community again, all the rigors and the doctrine and the dogma of the Apostolic church, at first I was okay, let me get in it and embrace it. And I did, you know, because I connected it with truth. If this is what is true, then therefore I want to be it. And so studied the Bible, faithful to service, to worship, do the best I could around clothes. I didn't have a lot of money, so I was a shabby looking college student trying to figure out where I was going to find dresses and skirts, in cold, cold Massachusetts. All of that was...I did my best to do that. But it felt like my effort to try to be true and to try to align with the truth.

And it got harder. It kept getting harder and harder as I kept having to... There were still yet more rules to learn and to abide by. So the pressure of that, internalized pressure of trying to adopt the Apostolic way of living, on top of what was going on at school, on top of I started having feelings

for somebody, and somebody was having feelings for me at the church, both male and female, I was a crazy hot mess.

Monique M. So what kept you interested in the Apostolic faith when you moved back to D.C.? Why did you go back to them and not back to your uncle's church?

Candy H. Well, still I felt like I had some part of truth, and it was recommended, if you're going to go to church, there's a sister church in D.C. that we fellowship with. You can see, oh, I'll see whether I like it. And so I said well, okay, since I was still in that mode of being Apostolic, I had not come to any terms around my sexual orientation. I didn't even know the term sexual orientation. So I was still pretty much dating men, with affinity for women, but not knowing that's what that was. And still this longing for truth. And so Apostolic still meant truth to me.

And so I went to that church. And they had some of the same rules and doctrine. But they were even more extreme than the church in Boston. So I just was like is there any...is this what this life is going to be about, just rules and then new rules? And I began...it started troubling me fairly early on the way in which women, even in the Apostolic church in Boston, the way women were relegated to a secondary position. You know, the whole thing of the man is the head of the household, you know, and head of the woman, and how that was taken literally. I understood it intellectually, but

in my heart I did not embrace it. It just felt like if I can do it, I should be able to do it.

And that comes directly from my mother. It comes directly from being around other strong women in my family, where we had to do it, they had to do it. And so it didn't come naturally for me to be with...to just go along with a man just because I'm supposed to go along. Well, if I have a question I think I should be able to ask it. And so that got me in a lot of trouble in church because I was always asking questions.

Monique M. You mentioned in Mark's bio you also got in trouble for their belief in your unnatural inclination.

Candy H. Yes.

Monique M. What was the evidence of that? Were you dating someone that they got wind of?

Candy H. I didn't know. I didn't know I was dating her. [*Laughs.*] I didn't know. 'Cause I was engaged. I was always engaged to somebody, some guy. And I was thinking I was trying, 'cause they were really trying to get me married off, and so I kept trying. But I was hanging out with one particular woman all the time. I didn't know that that was what that was, dating or, you know. But to me she was like chocolate ice cream, and chocolate ice cream is my favorite flavor. So I was like, yay. And dating a guy, or being engaged to a guy was like vanilla. I'll eat it if I have to, but eh, doesn't

have any flavor to me. But if vanilla was what you were supposed to eat, I was at least willing to put it on my plate. I didn't necessarily want to eat it.

So they saw that. They saw that I had unbridled glee and happiness when I was with this one particular woman, and that I looked kind of, you know, just so-so when I was hanging out with the guy. You know, it was like yeah, uh-huh. So I'm sure they saw that. But this is all hindsight now. I'm looking in the rearview mirror seeing this. But then I didn't see that. I didn't understand why they were preaching about women holding hands with women, and it's unnatural. I mean, I knew we were holding hands, but they couldn't be talking about me, because this is natural, so they couldn't be talking about me.

And it wasn't until I would say probably in the second year of our relationship with the woman that she made a physical advance to me to kiss me, and I'm like ooh, well! I mean, that's a long time. If somebody really likes you, that's a long time before they make an advance to do something. Because I would have never done that. I would have never. Because I thought oh, kissing is about being with a man, between a man and a woman, and sex was between a man and a woman, so I had no concept that I was engaged in a relationship of some sort that would even go in that direction.

So when she made a motion—no, first she made a motion to dance. She wanted to dance. So we were at her place, which happened to be the lower

level of her parents' home, and so first off, dancing? I thought we were not supposed to be dancing. And wait a minute. How come you have all this music? I gave all my music away. We're supposed to give it away. And you have all...? Well, you know. And so she was a deacon's daughter, and so she just said Candy, I'm not going to give all my music away. I said, oh, okay. So she would play music when I was over there visiting, and then, you know, she said, well come on, dance with me. And so I would dance with her.

And I'm talking about slow dancing. So was like okay, I don't know about slow dancing 'cause I think you're only supposed to slow dance with guys. And then at some point she made a motion to kiss me, and I stopped her. I said do you think God is really pleased with this? And I don't know where that came from, but I didn't know what else to say. And so she said yes. And then she said this is the love of God. And I went, oh, okay. And then I went on. I enjoyed the kiss. But it didn't make any sense to me. I mean, it made sense to me physically and emotionally, but I couldn't connect it in my head, I couldn't connect it spiritually.

And it surely could not be what people were talking about in the church about women liking women, because they never used the name. They never said lesbian. I don't know if they even knew the name. Back then the only thing I knew was gay, and that's the only term I'd ever heard. And I associated gay with men. And in particular men who expressed themselves in an effeminate way, so not all men, but those who expressed

themselves in an effeminate way. I thought that was the only kind of gay man.

So time went on and then the sermons got more and more around gay people and women. And then they started talking, you know, the woman who I guess I was dating, her mother approached me and asked me, you know, Sister Candy, what would you do if your child was having sex in your house? And I said wow. Well, if you don't think that your child should be having sex in your house, I guess you shouldn't allow it. Well, I didn't know she was talking about me because we were not having sex, from my mind. But I think she presumed that since we were sleeping in the same bed, I think she probably assumed we were having sex. Well, you know. I guess she thought so. And I think she was troubled by it.

And I think over time, and in the rearview mirror, I can see why she would think that, because what would it look like in a single bed for two grown women to be sleeping in it, unless there's no place else to sleep, which, there were other places in the house to sleep. But that's how we slept. Whenever I was there, I was always sleeping in her bed with her. So I could see how she could get there. But I'm sure it was no secret in the church because her father was a deacon, her mother was married to him and she was a deaconess, so I'm sure they were trying to figure out what to do with this situation.

So they eventually talked to her. Unbeknownst to me they talked to her and said we don't have this kind of thing in our family, so change the complexion of this relationship. And I didn't know that they had had that conversation. I just knew that she disappeared on me. She just stopped calling, she stopped inviting me out. I would try to get her to go places, she would say no. The church was always traveling and doing things together, and she chose to be separate from me when we used to do it all together. So it was drastic. It was like a breakup. I didn't know that anything had happened, but I knew it felt like a breakup.

And so I went and talked with the bishop and said, you know, I don't know what's happening, but she doesn't want to be with me anymore. And I remember his expression. It was like, oh, poor thing. He was like well, it's okay, Candy. She's probably just going through something right now, don't worry about. Who knew that—I mean, I found out years later that he knew all about it and he was a part of the change that happened. All this talk had been going on around me, but I was not involved in it. So yeah, so that's how they got to where they got to in terms of seeing me the way they did, and then eventually escalating it to ostracizing me openly, and calling me into meetings, and speaking about demons, and I'm needing to be saved or else I'm going to have a reprobate mind. I mean, I was already saved, quote, unquote, but clearly I needed more sanctification and I needed to be exorcised. And I wasn't having that.

Monique M. So during that period when you removed yourself from that church and from that mindset, did you continue to place yourself in opportunities to be with women so you could have that experience again that you'd had with the young woman?

Candy H. Absolutely, I did. But what happened was another woman who was in the Apostolic faith, I met her through my ex-boyfriend. And she felt like me to me. And I was just so happy about it that we just started corresponding. She lived in New Jersey. We just started corresponding and then I said, well, you know, I'll come up and visit you. And she came down and visited me. And that was also another problem before I left a church, because she would go to church with me. And because she was of the Apostolic faith that they could wear makeup and they could wear earrings, that was a problem because there was no makeup, no earrings in my church, so they thought she was not saved. And so they, oh here we go. Okay, so we've got Candy situated away from this other woman, but now here comes another woman, and this one is not even saved. And so that was problematic.

So I just, over time, there was a big blowup and then that blowup caused me to leave the church or be invited to leave the church. So that particular woman, who lived in New Jersey, over time she finally said, well you know, Candy, what they're saying is that you're a lesbian. And I said, well, what is that? And she said, well, women who like women. And I said oh. Well, that's not true. And she said, well, yeah, it is. I said no, it's not, I

don't like women. Yeah, you do. Yeah, you do. I met the person who you used to like, and that's what that... I said no, that wasn't that. I never had sex with her. I put it all around sex.

And she said oh, it doesn't matter whether you have sex with a person or not. It's about what's in your heart. It's where your affections are. And now you and I, she said I'm attracted to you, are you attracted to me? No. Well, why do you come up here and visit? And why is it okay to hold hands, and why is it okay to kiss? Is that not attraction? Hm. Well, I just thought that that's what you did with your good, good, good girlfriend who you really like. No, that's different, Candy. And so it took—I said well no, I'm not attracted to you. So it took months and months. And she finally said okay, I believe you. You're not attracted to me, okay.

And so we stopped seeing each other for a little bit. And then I started seeing another woman just right after that. And then this particular woman was truly not saved. I mean, she didn't go to church at all and was very clear about it. And then I said okay, well, if what is said about me is true, then I will experiment to see if this is true with this woman because she's not saved.

Monique M. *[Laughs.]*

Candy H. And if she's—

Monique M. I like that you spare someone else's—

Candy H. Yes.

Monique M. soul and salvation.

Candy H. Right. She didn't mind. She didn't mind at all. She was like...she knew. She says if there's a hell, I guess I'm going, and so Candy don't worry about that. And I said, well, I don't want to go to hell, but I do want to try to figure this out. So I had relationships with her, actual sexual relationships with her. And it was like oh, is this what this is? Oh, I understand. Then I thought okay, well, I guess this was the feeling. 'Cause it wasn't different. I just didn't follow it all the way through to having sex. And so that didn't last long. That was a long distance relationship. And that lasted about a year. But it gave me enough evidence that I needed to figure this out for myself. And so I started seeing the same woman again, going back to that same Apostolic woman who was in New Jersey, and I said yeah, I think this is true about me. And so she was like okay, well, I'm glad you've come to that.

But I still wasn't...I still didn't have it all in my head right. It was like, well, if I—maybe I can just not be all completely gay or be completely lesbian. Maybe if I don't do certain things sexually I can still be saved and still have this relationship. And so she was like no, Candy, it's not how it works. That's not how it works. And I said it's not? No, it's not. So I said well, I thought maybe if I didn't do cunnilingus, then I'll be good. And she just looked at me like I had five heads, like Candy, that's what women do,

along with other things. You can't just take something out. I mean, it would be one thing if you don't like it, but to say it's okay to receive but not give, is that what you're saying? And I said, well, if I'm active, then that means I'm participating. And she said no, Candy, that's crazy. That's just...that is so much of denial, you're going to have to deal with this.

And so anyway, she started seeing someone else. And I decided that I didn't like that, I didn't like her seeing somebody else. That made me feel bad. So I told her so, and I just said, you know, I've got to figure this out some kind of way and I don't like that, what you're doing with that other woman. I don't like that. And she said, well Candy, if you don't want a relationship with me, you know, I'll just go on with my life. I understand. But I want to be able to figure it out. And so she stopped seeing that person, and then said okay, well let's try to figure it out.

And so yes, to answer your question, I kept seeing women until I got to that particular woman. And that was my first relationship where I actually had a...where I committed to a relationship where I committed to the idea that I was on this journey to figure out my sexual orientation. I didn't need to not be in relationship in order to figure that out, I could be in relationship and figure it out. And I put myself in environments where there were other women like myself.

Monique M. Okay. Did that lead you to MCC?

Candy H. Yes. Yes, it did. I started going to a black lesbian support group in D.C. And it was like oh my god, there's women, there are other women like me from lots of church backgrounds, and people in different degrees of their coming out process. And it was like I cried almost every day, every time I went to those meetings. Someone talking about coming out, somebody talking about what it felt like with their family coming out, what it felt like coming out to their church. And it was just really truly support.

And then when I shared my story and I said something about coming out of church and doing music in church and so forth and so on, one of the women heard that and said you know we're starting a choir at our church, a gospel choir at our church, why don't you come on to our church and see, you might like it. And so I eventually did go, and I was very nervous because I had not been in church for seven years. I went to New Thought Church periodically, but not church as in conventional church.

And so I went and I enjoyed it thoroughly, even though it was a lot of white people. I mean, it was 90% white. But it was like I felt like I was at a place where I could be and nobody was going to question whether I was gay or not, and that everybody else in there seemed to be gay or lesbian. And so I thought, well, okay. And then I would go back, and so I kept going. It took me a while to get going, but eventually I did start going more regularly. And then I decided that I would participate in music and in the choir.

And so I will be forever grateful for my friend, who I'm still friends with to this day, who invited me to the church and to MCC. Yeah, because it was really the beginning of me looking at blending—not blending, but coming to terms with my sexuality, my sexual orientation and my spirituality and how they are all part of me, so that whole integration process. And it took a lot. I don't even remember how long it took for me to stop crying, because I would just cry all the time when I went to church. I would just cry and cry and cry. But that was just all the healing process that was taking place for me, just being able to go to church again.

Monique M. So how long did it take for you to move into ministry, to heed a call?

Candy H. I think it took, let's see, in 19...

Monique M. I'm going to turn the heat up.

Candy H. Oh, sure, sure. I think it took probably a good six years, six, seven years, because I felt really safe in music. But what started happening was that during choir rehearsals I would start preaching in choir rehearsal and it would just...I didn't even know it was. I was talking about a song, and what the song meant, and then this would just come up out of me, you know, that just felt like exhortation is what they call it in the Apostolic church. And so I would start exhorting in rehearsal. And I just thought, wow, that's really interesting that's happening. I didn't know what to make of that.

And because women couldn't be preachers, that's what I learned from the Apostolic church, couldn't be preachers or ministers, it never dawned on me that that might be a path for me. But it got stronger and stronger and stronger in me. And then eventually someone sent me, a spiritualist sent me a message that she had gotten to give to me. And that was that I was supposed to...I was being guided to pursue ministry. And I'm thinking I don't know about all that. And not only to pursue ministry, but to also pursue school as it relates to ministry. And I thought, oh, that cannot possibly happen. Said but okay, I know what I'll do. I'll go to Interfaith.

A friend of mine was looking at Interfaith Seminary. I said okay, that's what I'll do. Because I was concerned that if I went to school for ministry that it would put me back in a box. All I knew was the old Christian box, and I didn't want that. So I said, well, if I need more education I'm good with that. And also the healing gifts started to manifest also, and so I was doing more of that in church in terms of a healing ministry.

And so I decided that if I needed to seek more education as it relates to ministry to build my foundation, that I would be okay with that if it was Interfaith, because then I would have a broad spectrum. It could be Buddhist, it could be Muslim, it could be whatever, whatever. It wouldn't just be Christian. And I felt comfortable with that. And so I did that. And then I graduated. What I didn't realize was that at the end of graduation was ordination. It's like I don't want to be ordained.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Candy H. It's like... Because then I saw the box. The box is coming, the box is coming. And then it was explained that Candy, no, you can be an interfaith minister and it doesn't mean that you'll become a Christian minister. It just means that you are now authorized as an interfaith minister, and you can pursue ministry. So I got okay with it. And so I operated inside of MCC with those credentials for a while, and doing healing ministry. And I didn't preach, but I mostly just did healing ministry and choir.

But the choir thing was...you might as well have said I was preaching because whenever I would introduce a song or something like that the preaching just came out. So it was another form of denial, I guess, because I was scared. I just didn't want to be a Christian preacher. I just really didn't want to be a minister, because what I had in my mind was what I saw when I was growing up, and also what I saw in the Apostolic church. I had put that all in the box of things that either one, I couldn't do, or I didn't want to do because it had all these negative connotations associated with it.

Monique M. I read in a bio you described yourself as a spiritual seeker, which then made sense to see you ordained as an interfaith minister. That linked well for me. But I'm curious what that means for you and how your family dealt with those variety of changes—one, you joining a gay church and

two, you perhaps at that point claiming an affinity, if not actually being an outright lesbian.

Monique M. My family—well, my mom died before I joined MCC. But before, as she was moving towards the end of her life, she started prodding me, kind of gently pushing me, wanting me to talk about being lesbian, or being gay, whatever, you know, however she called it. But she never, she'd be like, Candy—whenever I would come over to the house she'd say oh, I have a program on, a show on, some gay people on. You want to sit and look at it with me? And I'd sit and look at it with her. And she would talk about what do you think? Well, I don't think much about it, Ma. And then I'd just go on. And so she did several attempts to try to get me to talk about it. I was very uncomfortable.

And then finally, before—I don't know how long it was before she died, but she just finally said to me, which, these are the words I hold onto still—she said, you know, Candy, I want you to live your life. Just live your life. And I remember feeling the weight of those words, that they kind of went in and they sat down inside of me. They were like...they were life-giving, they were affirming. Even if I was too scared to say yes, Mom, I will, and I know what you mean. I just expressed thank you. I've since told her in spirit how much I appreciate. And whenever I preach sometimes I bring her up and I talk about that, how helpful that was for me. But then she died.

And then my father, though in reasonably good health, I became, you know, the person who helped him manage his life. And so he was of the age that he didn't really understand women with women, but he only saw me with women. And so one particular woman, which is Darlene, he talked to her and said, you know, make sure to take care of Candy. And so I thought that was really interesting that he said that. On some level he knew, but we never talked about it.

And when I started going to MCC, I would invite him just in the same way that he used to take me around to my music engagements when I was in high school. He really appreciated that I was doing music again. And so I would invite him to come to some of my music engagements. And so he was very appreciative and very happy that I had found music again, and that he could appreciate that with me. He didn't know anything about MCC. He didn't know it was a gay church. He just knew it was church, and a church that accepted me. He didn't know that everybody in the church was just like me. *[Laughs.]* And so that was okay for, I think...because I didn't mention any of that to him. He was just glad I was going to church.

And I would periodically go to his church, which is my old church, for Father's Day, because they would always honor him as chairman deacon. And I would always show up and stand with him and so forth. But it was never brought up that I was a lesbian. It was never brought up that I was a

woman who liked women. None of that ever came up, even though it was always known. It was the unspoken truth, but it was unspoken.

And then his pastor was gay, but was married to a woman, and I think, you know, my father and I had a conversation about that. Because I said I used to be in choir with this guy. He's a gay man. And my father said, well, he's married and he has a child. I said oh, okay, so maybe he made a change. And so my father would say, well, he's married and he has a child. He wouldn't go any further than that. And so I didn't either.

And so over time my father and I, we didn't talk about it, but I think he was relieved that...because he never really wanted me to marry a man. He never did. And I don't know why. But he never did. And my mom told me that whenever I would get engaged—because I got engaged five times—whenever I would get engaged, it would just wreck him. And so I don't know if it was because his daughter, his only daughter was getting engaged and he would lose his daughter, or he knew there was something different about me and that that would be me going into living something that wasn't true for me. I don't know. Or a combination of the two. Maybe I'll never know.

But when he died, at the family meeting right before the day of the funeral, all the family gathered to go over the arrangements and who was going to ride with whom and so forth, and the pastor that was there and I spoke up. It was a room of my family, of about 30 people, I guess. And I

said, you know, I have something I'd like to say. I'd just like to say that I appreciate everyone being here, and I want you to know that I am gay, I'm a lesbian, and people are going to be inquiring when I walk in and walk down the aisle with two women, one on each arm, instead of a man, and I don't want you to protect me by saying something that's not true. So if you're asked am I gay, just say yes. You don't need to protect me. I don't want you to protect me. I want you to tell the truth, because I'm going to tell the truth.

And the women who I'll be walking down the aisle with, just so you know, they are not my girlfriends, but they're my deep friends, and they're also white, so anybody have a problem with them being white, just tell them chill. So don't be treating my white friends poorly. So I came out to my entire family at my father's, the family meeting around my father's funeral. And my eldest brother said, well Candy, did you think we didn't know? And I said, well, I didn't know what you knew. And so they all kind of broke out in laughter. And that's how it happened, it came out that way.

Now it didn't mean that everybody was hunky-dory, because I still had some family members who were not hunky-dory with it. But they didn't treat me poorly. They didn't ostracize me. They kept it to themselves. And over time they have evolved. And because I've been willing to talk about it, to answer questions, to be willing to bring my beloved around my family and to say it's important for you to see this and to understand that

we are together—and this was before we got married. So I was not going to hide anymore my life from them.

So we started going to holiday meetings, holiday dinners. I would bring my girlfriend, or my partner, whoever, however they wanted to refer to her. And I would just say partner, because girlfriend seemed like somebody when you're a teenager. And if that's what they called her I'd say you can call her my partner. And then when we decided to get married, when it was possible to get married in D.C., I made sure they all knew so that they would not be surprised, because it was a big, big deal. And I didn't know it was going to be as big a deal as it got to be. I had no idea of that. And neither did they. So I'm at least glad that I mentioned it to them. And some of them, I asked them if they would come and be with me. And my brother did, and two of my best girlfriends did, because we could only bring a certain number of people, so they were aware of that.

Monique M. So you brought Reverend Garner into the space. So let's talk. This is an interesting interview because I interviewed her first, so I heard your story through her. So now I want to hear your story through you of y'all's love and partnering in both life and ministry.

Candy H. Right. Well, we met through MCC. We met before we met, and that meaning we were at the funeral of the then pastor of the D.C. church, MCC-DC church, and she was reading scripture and I was leading the choir, and she was the pastor of a church in Northern Virginia. She

remembers seeing me and making note of me. I did not remember her. Though she was standing right in front of me, because I was in the back. The choir was in the back and the speakers were out here on the front part of the stage.

I don't remember her. And that should be significant to me because there weren't a whole lot of black people in MCC in those days, especially black ministers, and black female ministers. But I didn't remember her. But that was not unusual for me because when I'm in church and I'm focused on something, I was probably thinking of the next song and what I needed to remember to do.

And I'm also very focused in church. I try to be...at least back then. Back then I was still very much in the way of when you're in church you need to be in church. You need to keep focused and be about what you're supposed to be about. So I wouldn't be winking and blinking and nodding at anybody in church. I really would be focused. So anyway—and I think I was with somebody at the time. I'm sure I was with somebody. So I wouldn't have been winking and blinking and nodding and noticing people either because I was with someone.

But I was out of relationship and my good girlfriends, my buddies, were trying to hook me up with somebody. They said, you know, Candy, you want to start dating. And I was thinking. I said, well, you know, I'll put in an ad and see what happens there. And I didn't like that process at all,

because it was before the fancy online computer dating systems that you have now. So it was like putting something in the paper and trying to figure out what to say, and it was like ugh. I didn't like it at all.

So they said, well, you know, there is this woman who's pastoring at the Virginia church, a black woman. I didn't mind white women. I would have dated a white woman. But I really wanted to date a black woman. I just felt like I wanted to be in relationship with a black woman. After being in MCC for as long as I had been at that point, there were a lot of interracial relationships, but I didn't want to...I don't think I wanted to be in one. I'm not exactly sure all the reasons why. It felt like the cultural commute in interracial relationships was always longer for the black person than for the white person. And it was enough to just do that in church. I didn't want to have to do that in relationship, too.

So anyway, my friends said we have this—the choir was having a CD release party at Bertucci's restaurant, and we are enjoying our meals, and Darlene is at the bar, and so one of my friends said, well, you know, she's here, you want to go talk to her? I said oh no, I could never go up to her and talk to her. And so well, do you want me to go up to see if she might have interest in talking to you? I said yeah. And so she did. So my good girlfriend went up there and told her, she said, you know—she phrased it, she said, would you be...do you think you could be interested in dating Candy Holmes? And she came back and said that Darlene said yes, she thought she could. And so that happened.

I guess she called me, and so I guess my girlfriend gave her my telephone number, so she called and asked me out. And so we went out and we had a lovely time. And then the evening came to an end, and she wanted to go out again. And so I think I asked her a question about her previous relationship. Oh, well, that wasn't quite previous. She was still in this relationship with this woman. I said oh, well I can't be going out with you.

Monique M. What are we doing here?

Candy H. What are we doing here? I can't—no, hm-mmm. I said you have to do something with that before. And that's just what I said, hm-mmm. What I didn't realize was that she had broken up—they had broken up, but it wasn't long before we went out that they had kind of, before she had asked me out they had kind of gotten back together kind of quasi-like, but it was weak, you know, it was like are we going to do this, are we not going to do this, are we in, are we not? So I said, well, you know what, how about this? You go take care of that and then whatever happens, happens, and if you do wind up that you're not together, then you can call me. And so about three weeks later she contacted me to say that she and the woman were not going to be with each other and that she would like to date. And so we started dating from that point.

Monique M. Now in her interview with me she talked about sort of the evolution of the relationship and the many moves as she moved up the MCC hierarchy, both geographic moves as well as ecclesial moves and what that did to the

relationship. So I'm curious from the other perspective, because you're also active in MCC, but also were employed outside of MCC, was that an easier balance because you had this outside life that wasn't the life of the church, and thus that was where all of your attention had to be?

Candy H. Hm. I would say that, well, the truth of the matter is, is that we broke up and she began making her moves. So the first...we were together for two years and we had gotten engaged, even though you couldn't get married, but we got engaged, so I guess we were going to do something. Back then it was called holy unionize, I call it. And so we were going to have that. And we were looking for a house.

And then she made a decision to take this job in L.A., and then that required a move. In her mind, as she relayed it to me, she thought we could just have this bicoastal relationship or that I could move. And I got stuck on you didn't ask me anything about this job. You didn't include me in the conversation. And that just triggered me in a way that I still reflect on it as being wow, what was that about. But it felt like this person who I deeply loved did not care enough about me to include me in such a major decision, and I couldn't get past it. And even though we went to therapy to try to work through it, I couldn't get past it.

And so I told her I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do it. Not only could I not move, not only did I not want a bicoastal relationship, I just did not want the relationship. It was not so much about what we could do, it was that

she did not include me, and that I was concerned that if MCC was going to become that important that she would be making these kinds of decisions without me, that I could see in the future that that would just be a pattern, and I didn't want to have a life like that. So that's one particular piece.

A year went by and I started feeling—and my heart didn't change. My heart still was where it had always been and in love with her. So I decided that when I saw her at our conference that I would talk with her about it and ask her if she would...if we could just make a cleaner break so that we wouldn't be so tied together emotionally. And her response to that was no, but that she was going to stay like that, in that kind of emotional connectedness, that that was her preference. And I just thought that was madness. It's like how are you going to be in a relationship with other people when your heart is with somebody else? And she just didn't respond to that.

And so I left her suite and went, and the next thing I knew I was...I had arranged to... I was directing the mass choir at that conference, and I wore the outfit that I was supposed to wear when we got married, or when we got holy unionized, this white kind of flowy kind of thingy. And so I wore that. And she said it just really tore her up to see me in it. I later found that out. But also what was going on is that she was already starting to date somebody else, and I couldn't believe that, so I was pissed. It was like wait a minute. You want to be in this kind of emotional twisty kind of

connectedness, but you're dating? I couldn't make sense of that. It's like oh, no, no, no, no, no.

So anyway, that conference was over, I was heartbroken still. I went back home. And it took many moons and a lot of Reiki, and healing, and therapy, and talking to friends, and it just took a lot to just come to some kind of peace within myself around the relationship.

So being at work, for me, was not a distraction or it wasn't a separate path, necessarily, because we were not together. So I started exceling in my own career path at work. She was doing her thing in terms of MCC. And upon occasion we would be in the same space because MCC would bring us together for whatever the thing was, whether it was a conference, or women's conference, or people of African descent conference, or some other kind of meeting, we would be in the same space. And when I saw her coming, I'd turn and go another direction. And we were like frenemies. And it was horrible, a horrible experience. And it went on like that for years. I want to say probably about eight years it was like that.

And then I remember being on a cruise—it was a leadership cruise—a cruise where we had a leadership meeting on the cruise. And I remember sitting with some black folk who were talking about her, and not in a good way. And they were thinking that I would enjoy it and join in. And I told them no, that if you have a problem with her I think you should talk with her, that I don't think it's right to do this and to talk about her that way.

And so on the ship I went to her and I said, you know, I need to tell you that some black folks on the ship were talking about you in a not good way, and I know we're not together, but I'm not going to have anybody talk about you. So here again my thing around truth and faithfulness. And she said, well, who are those people? And I gave her the names. I said this one, this one, this one, this one. And she approached them to find out if they had any issues with her. But she appreciated that I did that for her.

But on that ship it was like torture because I would see her, nowhere to go. We're not together, but I would see her, and I was with somebody. But I would see her, and she would kind of cast a look my way, and this longing look. I felt like I was in some kind of 1950s movie with these longing looks, and, you know, and wishing you could talk, but you can't talk.

And so the last scene I remember of this movie is that we're disembarking, and I am still up on the ship, and I can see that she's getting off in the throng of people, and I see her turn around kind of spying to see if she could see me. And I knew that's what she was doing, trying to see if she could see me in the midst of the crowd. And when she finally saw me, she just smiled and just waved her hand, and then she turned around and went off. So it was... Then I decided to go back to school.

Monique M. That was EDS?

Candy H. EDS, uh-huh. And so while there, the person I was seeing, that relationship became more and more challenging and eventually abusive,

and I was feeling like I really needed to do something, but I didn't quite know what to do. And the truth of the matter is that Darlene and I had unfinished business in terms of in our hearts, but I didn't know what to do with that, either, because she was in a relationship with somebody else, I was in a relationship with somebody else.

And so one meeting—she had a meeting she came to in D.C. and she asked if I would be willing to go out, if she could take me out for my birthday. And that was significant because during the time that we were together, she never took me out for my birthday because she was always at an MCC meeting that was away, so we had to always do something around my birthday at a different time. This was actually my birthday and she asked me out on my birthday. And so I went out.

And we actually talked about why did we break up. And I told her what was the case for me. And she didn't realize that was the reason. And so we actually got to talk through the reasons for the breakup. And she said, well, Candy, it was never—she said it was never her intention to break up. That was never on her radar. So I didn't realize that, either. So anyway, that's what happened.

And we ended that day, and another one of those movie scenes. I take her back to her hotel, I walk her to her room, and I say good-bye and I hug her, and I say good-bye to her, and then I go to the elevator, and I'm getting on the—she walks me to the elevator. I get on the elevator and the

elevator doors are closing, and next thing I know there's a hand coming in between the doors to open them back up and she said I just want to tell you, I want you to know that you were the love of my life. And then the doors close. And I'm thinking what am I supposed to do with that? I'm going down the elevator. Oh, my god. And so I go back home.

But I have an answer to my question. Because I thought that she had discarded me for MCC. And so I realized that that was not the case. So we didn't really compete—MCC did not become a competing piece in our lives until we were back together. When we got back together in 2008, we had to talk about MCC and the place of MCC in our lives, because by then I was ordained in MCC. I was doing more healing ministry and music and was thinking about what I was going to be doing in ministry beyond that. She was an elder and doing things in MCC that were pretty significant. You know, back from South Africa, back from Mexico. And so we really had to talk through how we were going to navigate how significant MCC was in our lives for both of us.

And I still had a full-time job, and I was in management at that time, so it took a lot of my time. But for me, my management career was not my heart. I did it, I enjoyed it, but it wasn't my heart. My heart work was MCC. So in some ways, while I really appreciated the work that I did and the impact I had for my federal job, it was not my calling, it was not my life work. And I just longed for to be able to do my life work. But I was

too far along in my federal career to consider stopping that, and so decided that I would just work until I retired, and I would just be bivocational.

And that was no simple matter because having a full-time management job as well as, in many ways, a full-time ministry job, and then a relationship, it was a lot. But she also had a lot, too, because her job was like having four jobs. So it took a lot of talking, a lot of navigating how we were going to spend time together, when we were going to spend time together, would we travel together, can we travel together, all of that, because it was two kind of really, I don't know what the word is for it, when you're two women who have very high power jobs, and how we were going to navigate that.

And then the more and more I got involved in some of the things that touched her work, like diversity and inclusion, and dealing with matters around race, which is a slice of her portfolio, then we had to talk about the dynamics of that, and how we were going to work through that. And then my activism just blew up, and not in a bad way, but in a good way, so I became more and more of, you know, involved in being an active advocate, which took me in different spaces and places. And that was sort of separate and apart from the advocacy work that Darlene was doing.

But because she was sort of like one of the faces of MCC, and then here I come doing all of this advocacy work, and it's outside of the space of MCC, but I'm an MCC person, so I'm working with the advocacy

organizations and I say I'm an MCC clergy person, and so I'm becoming more and more of a prominent voice as a faith leader. So all that's happening at the same time, and so we're having to talk about that.

And then they find out oh, you are Reverend Darlene Garner's wife? Or partner at the time, and then wife. And they said oh. Because they know her, but they didn't know me, because I was always doing music or I was always doing healing ministry. And I had the full-time federal job. And so it was through that federal job that my activism was seeded, because of the stuff around federal benefits for LGBT folks and marriage. So that just kind of happened just like that.

[Break in recording.]

Monique M. So this is Interview 2 with Reverend Candy Holmes, and we are following up so that I ask some concluding questions about activism, particularly activist orientation and how that has been tied to her religiosity and her spirituality. So I'm going to bring us back to the record to talk about the activism she took in her workforce first, and then she can talk a bit more about how she lives that out in the rest of the arenas of her life. But can you talk about the photo, and sharing the photo, and how it had, that, as you say, such a small step had such ripples effects?

Candy H. Before I can talk about the photo I have to provide a little bit of a context around why that photo was so important. Primarily because I was not out at work in the federal workplace, I did not feel like I could be out and also

feel that my being gay or lesbian or same gender loving woman would somehow hinder my upper mobility in the organization. So I really felt like as a black woman I had that already going as something of a barrier, and so then adding to that being a lesbian, and then being out, I just didn't feel comfortable for many years.

Even though I was going to a church that was open and accepting, that didn't matter, and even though some people in my family knew, that didn't matter. I just didn't feel safe at work. And I didn't feel safe around other black people at work. My organization was predominantly white, but there were some black people at work, and most of them were religious. And so my experience with some of my colleagues, some of them were my staff, you know, I would get comments like, you know, I'm okay with you, Candy, because you know we are all sinners, but by the grace of God.

And so for my staff I would have to help them understand that those kind of statements were not appropriate for the workplace. So that was as far as I was willing to go in terms of helping them to understand that what they were saying to me, not only was it not appropriate, but they were going across a boundary as it relates to religion in the workplace, as it relates to biases.

And then eventually my being suspected of being a lesbian started to cause some ripple effects in the workplace that were not positive, especially among black women in particular. So that looked like putting a distance

between me and them, not being willing for my staff, you know, just not wanting to work with me. And so the idea of putting a picture up that really proclaimed who I was and who I loved was, while it seemed like a small step, it was a huge step. Because it would take away all the questions about whether or not I was or wasn't. Because I wasn't waving a flag, a rainbow flag in the office, and I didn't have pictures in the office of my family and my spouse, my partner. But the picture would erase all doubt.

But what happened—so that's a little bit of background. What happened was Proposition 8 happened. And I grew up in a setting where church and politics never...they didn't run in the same circles. They never intersected. So I didn't know anything about politics. And what I was taught and what I had bought into was that that was of the world, and you let the world handle the politics, because you're not going to be here much longer anyway, because you're going to heaven. And so, you know, we're not here to deal with politics. And so I didn't learn the ways of politics in my home, nor in the churches I attended. So I was disassociated from the world of politics and the implications of politics on my life, myself as a person.

And those things that I was aware of, like Martin Luther King and March on Washington, those kind of civil rights, I had a place for those things or those events in my black history part of myself, but that didn't have anything to do with being gay. I had not connected that that was also a

civil right, that was something that was a human right. I had not connected that. And that had everything to do with me connecting myself with being a full human being that deserved the same rights as anyone else in the U.S. And so it took a minute for me to connect those dots, that in the same way that black people fought for rights, I needed to also fight for all of who I was, not just my blackness. So I actually was pretty much compartmentalized in terms of my blackness was in one part, my gayness was in another part, my being a woman was in another part.

And Proposition 8 changed that all for me because I could not understand, even with my limited awareness and knowledge about politics, how a group of people, their rights could be voted away, that they could get married, because they could get married, and then because a group of people said no, we don't like that, for their reasons, their right to love and to participate in marriage was taken away. That so incensed me, it pushed a button in me that I didn't know was even there. But it had been nurtured all along. I just didn't pay any attention to it, that justice button. It showed itself in different times in my life. But this time Proposition 8 pushed that button so that it unraveled me, it rattled me. It gut punched me. It woke me up in a way that I realized I had to do something.

And I didn't know what I was going to do because I had no skills, I had no tools. I was not out. But it pushed me to the edge of what I now understand as being in denial. The closet has many parts, and so while I was out in certain parts, in certain aspects of my life, this was the last part,

this part of the closet. My work space was the last part of it. Because if nothing else, I wanted to always be able to say that my life was secure, I knew I had a job. And so my work ethic was really driving me, that you do not do anything to interrupt money coming in that will help you to be able to live. And so that was all about my job, all about my career.

But that changed with Proposition 8. It was like, well, you know, I had to do something. And I didn't know if it would jeopardize my work or not, but I knew I had to do something. And so at the desk, at my desk, I said a prayer. I said God, I don't know what to do, but if I could just do one small thing. And so when I just said that prayer, I remember it like it was yesterday, and I glanced up at my computer, and on the screen was this email about a gay and lesbian employee association. They were doing a project for diversity month. And this particular year they decided they wanted to put our families on display because of all the stuff that was starting to brew around gay people, and gay people having families, and wanting to get married, so they thought this would be one way to show that we do have families and it's important to acknowledge that we have families.

And I saw that and I thought, well, I wonder could Darlene and I do that. And so I called her up and I said would you be willing to have a photo of ours put on a photo display. And I explained everything to her. She said oh, absolutely, that would be great. She probably was surprised that I even wanted to do that. And so I nervously picked one of our, what I thought

was one of our best pictures—and that's one of the ones that's on the web page—of us together and sent it in. I was all kind of nervous about it, but I figured, well, what's a picture? What's a picture? It's just a picture. So that happened.

And I went away for two weeks because I was in school. And when I came back, I decided to check out the display. And when I did that, I walked down the hall corridor and I noticed people noticing me, kind of looking at me like in a most unusual way, more than just saying good morning. And these are people that didn't necessarily know me. And so as I walked down this long, wide hallway, I stopped in front of the display and the display was, I guess, perhaps 30 feet by 18 feet. It was a pretty big display. Maybe not that big. I might be exaggerating. But it was full of photos, filled to the brim, and they had placed mine and Darlene's picture right smack dab in the middle and blew it up.

So I sent in what was a four by five. I thought I was going to see a four by five of us among—no, they blew it up to the size of paper in the midst of all these other photos that were predominantly, if not exclusively, white. And we were the only black gay couple, period. And there were no men, nothing. And there were no interracial couples. So it was all white and then there was Darlene and I in the middle.

So I took a deep breath. Said well, there is no hiding in plain sight now. But I had a relief. I felt relief. And I felt something welling up in me that

felt like a very different kind of feeling. And what I realized when I walked away from the photo, it kept bubbling up, and what I felt like, it was pride and courage. And I felt good about it. And it was like, well, even though I was a little afraid, a little nervous, but I felt good about it. It was like yeah, I did something. Oh, yes, okay. [*Sighs.*] I could do something.

So I went back to my desk and I was just kind of being with that. And then the phone rang. And when the phone rang, I picked it up, said hello as I always do, my usual greeting—this is Candy Holmes, and the name of my agency, and how can I help you. And they said, well, this is the White House calling on behalf of President Obama, and we'd like to talk with Reverend Holmes. And no one calls my office asking for Reverend Holmes, so I thought this was someone playing a gag on me or something. And so I said beg your pardon? And they repeated the same thing. And I said, well, this is she. And then I sat down and I thought...then I got nervous all over again. It was like oh my god, did I do something wrong? That's immediately where I went.

And they said, well, Miss Holmes, Reverend Holmes, we're calling you on behalf of the President because the President would like for you to stand with him as a part of the ceremony when he signs some legislation around benefits for federal employees who have gay or lesbian spouses, partners, and we'd like to know if you'd be willing to join him in that. And I said yes. It didn't pop out yes because I was still kind of stunned,

but then I said yes, sure, I will be delighted to join the President. And they said, well, we'll be in touch with some more information around security clearance and all like that.

And I also had to check with my agency, because since my agency was an arm of Congress and part of the legislative arm of Congress, of government, we did work for Congress, so I had to go to the ethics office to make sure that going to the White House was okay. And it was okay with them. And so I just...then I checked it out with Darlene, and she was good with it. And unfortunately, because it was limited in numbers of people who could go, they thought initially that Darlene could go with me, but then they decided that that wouldn't be possible, considering the constraints around numbers, but what they would do is that they would commit to bringing us back to the White House and to meet President Obama on another occasion soon after that event. And so I said okay, because I didn't want it to be that it was just me alone, because we were in this together, Darlene and I. And so that's how it happened that I got to the White House.

But backtracking, I asked the person on the call who asked me to go to the White House, who invited me, how did they find me. Of all the gay and lesbian people in the federal government, of which you know there are quite a few, at least I knew that there were quite a few, even if I didn't know them, I just knew that we were always around. And they said, well, we heard about your photo, and your agency's photo display. I said my

photo? And they said yeah, absolutely we did. We heard you had this beautiful photo, and that's how we heard about you, and so we wanted to ask you if you would be willing to stand with the President. And so that was my—so I hung the phone up and I just could not believe it. I thought I was in a dream. Said wow, okay, this is really happening. I called Darlene and I was crying. I said guess what just happened, and I told her.

Hung up from her and then the phone rang again. And then it was the *Washington Post*, who asked to speak to Reverend Holmes. And I thought okay, *Washington Post* asking for Reverend Holmes, this must be connected. And so I said this is she. Said Reverend Holmes, we'd like to know if you'd be open to an interview about what the President is getting ready to do around signing a Presidential memorandum on benefits for employees, for their spouses and partners. I said yeah, sure. Now I had never done an interview before, so I didn't know what I was saying yes to. I just knew that if they were calling and asking, that I should be open at least to talking with them. And so I just said yes. And they said oh, and by the way, we heard about your photo and we'd like to know if we can run that photo with the article. I said sure, absolutely. And I didn't even ask them how they found out about the photo. It was like okay, clearly something is going on about this photo. I had no idea how it was connecting me and Darlene with these other efforts.

So that's how that happened in terms of the photo. And then the photo just kept getting places. It just kept popping up places, unbeknownst to me and

Darlene. And shortly after that, before I actually got to the White House, which was three weeks away, then Congress called, probably a week or two after the White House, to say that they were having committee meetings, and they asked if I would be willing to provide testimony for a different law, but that was connected to providing full benefits to federal employees who had partners who were same gender loving.

And all of that happened within a month's time. And so it was quite the experience because I had not before had any activism or advocacy leanings. And, matter of fact, I would say that I probably ran the other direction because one, I wasn't completely out of the closet; two, I didn't know anything about it, so I had no prior experience, whether in church or growing up in church. It was just the opposite. You render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, so basically go to work and come home, but don't get involved in anything political because that is not your bailiwick if you're Christian. If you're a follower of Jesus, you just...

And so I didn't interrogate the scriptures around all the political stuff Jesus did. I knew he knocked over tables because he was angry about what was going on in the temple, but I didn't connect that with politics. I didn't connect Jesus being hung on the cross to politics, none of that, because that wasn't the narrative that we received, so I didn't really grow my awareness around the politics of Jesus until much further on in my activism life.

Monique M. So how do you go from there to in your bio now identifying as a spiritual activist?

Candy H. Well, yes. Well, once I crossed over that bridge of putting myself out there and realizing that my voice counted, and it did matter, and it could make a difference, I thought, well why not keep doing this? I may not have all the skill, but I can learn skill. I might not know how to talk in front of the camera, but I can find out if there's some media training. And I've never written a blog before, but I know how to write, so I will find out, I'll study what other people have done. And so one thing just sort of led to the other around in the federal workplace, the more President Obama pushed for these rights.

And then when I finally did go to the White House, I had an opportunity to speak with him directly, and I thought, well, I can speak to him and I can tell him what I really think. I believed that. And so I did. I said to him, you know, we need your help. Our community needs your help. And while this is a good step and appreciated, there's more ground to cover. And what he said to me was okay, then what I want you to do is I want you to go back to your community and tell them make me do it. And I told him I will do that. I will do that exactly.

And so I think that was the turn for me. It was more than just the picture. It was more of a commitment, him inviting me to step up to speak in the community, and my willingness to do that, even though I didn't know

what all that might take. But I thought, well, the President asked me to do this, I have already made some steps to even get myself here, I can do this, and I'll just see what it takes, and I'll just put one foot in front of the other.

And then the next thing happened around the testimony for Congress. And I didn't know how to write a testimony. I've testified in church. That was it. But in terms of actual testimony, I had no idea. I know what I've seen on television, in the movies. And so what I did is I looked at who I knew in my friendship circles and who might have connections to others. And so I just started telling people that this is what happened, do you know anyone who's ever testified before Congress? And sure enough, in my set of friends, I had one person who was a media specialist who trained people to do testimonies, and then another person who actually knew someone who provided testimony.

And so I contacted both those individuals and they helped me to get prepared. And I also contacted an advocacy organization who were accustomed to that kind of thing, and they sent me some drafts that I could begin to tell in my testimony, because you have to submit your testimony ahead of time, because it becomes a part of the public record, so it's not just you speaking. And so I did all of that, and within a matter of a couple weeks, and then I was ready to go testify.

And some of my family went with me, which I was really happy with. My grand-niece, who is also a lesbian, she wanted to go. My sister went. Of

course, Darlene was with me. And so they sat behind me when I sat at the mike with the panel of people who were testifying. And I thought to myself, this all stemmed from being willing to step out and put our picture up in this display. How much more could I do if I were willing to be open?

And so sure enough, during that congressional meeting session, the chairman, before everything got going, because they had like three different panels. I think we were the third panel. And he stopped everything before our panel got going and he looked at me and he said, Reverend Holmes, or Miss Holmes, I don't remember which, he said can I speak with you? I said sure. So he wanted me to get up from my seat and go to where he was standing. They were all in their whatever you call it. It wasn't quite like seats, like we're all on the same level. They were lifted up kind of on a podium. And I said sure.

And he put his hand over the mike so this was clearly off record. He said I read your story, your testimony, and I really was touched by it, and I want to know how this legislation will really help you, and how it will help your family, because you say it will. And I said yeah, it absolutely will. And he said, well, do you have children? I said our children are grown, but had we had children that were a younger age, this would absolutely help us, because right now if we had kids—and others of us do—they would have nothing to do if one of the parents died because the other parent wouldn't have any rights. Okay.

And I said so right now I'm a grandmother, I'm a minister, and I work for the federal government, and the federal government is not offering me any rights. And I've worked for the federal government for 30 some years. And that's just not right. And he just said, you know, you're absolutely right. I just wanted to hear from you personally before we started this whole panel because your story so intrigued me. And I said, well, thank you, I appreciate your asking. And then I went back to my seat, and then the panel started, and then I eventually testified.

So those kind of things kept happening as sort of a witness or an indicator to me that my voice was important. And so that helped me continue to walk forward. So it wasn't one thing that helped me to go from being someone who was not active to someone who was very active, but it was like I progressed, evolved as I was invited into these spaces.

And I have to say I think because of my presentation—and what I mean by that, when people don't know who you are, they look at you, and so I present like a black woman, clearly somewhere in...not a young black woman, so perhaps a senior, someone who identifies as a grandmother and someone who identifies as religious. And so I was kind of an anomaly, I think, for many to see an older person come out and speak out and talk as forcefully as I did. I think people could relate to me. It was like I was somebody in their family, like their mother speaking out, or their auntie, not just somebody young who was trying to push forward because we need to do the right thing, but more about—I could feel that it was as

though when people looked at me and listened to me that they were looking at me as though I was their window into deeper awareness and deeper knowledge, and deeper insights.

And since I could feel that, and though I didn't have all of the background as a seasoned advocate, I had my life, and so I just kept sharing my life and what it was like growing up in the church, and what it was like not knowing that I was gay. I just thought it was who I was, and I didn't know there was a name for it. And I just kept sharing those different—and it kept opening doors. I mean, it was like a snowball effect.

Monique M. So can we talk a bit about how your religion played a part? Because I really love the term spiritual activist, and so I want to get to what you mean when you say that.

Candy H. Well, what I mean is I no longer separate myself. I no longer segregate or compartmentalize my spirituality and my sexual orientation, my sexual identity, my being a same gender loving woman. All of that is one for me now. And so if I'm whole, a whole person, I believe that we are spiritual beings having a physical reality, so I think that our spirituality is really...I lead with my spirituality as who I am in this world. And how I express myself is an expression of my spirituality. And so as a spiritual activist, I express myself now as an activist, in other words, someone who is active and actively pursuing justice, and that that is an outgrowth of my spirituality.

It is not that I have some political agenda that's inspiring me. I'm inspired by my spirituality to be an activist, to be a change agent, to see that the world we are living in is about other spiritual people as well, no matter where they fall on the spectrum in terms of the politics, but that I can bring my spirit and my spirituality and my humanity, all that's combined and integrated, and I bring that to the table, and that is the alchemy that I think helps activism, for me, to be impactful, because I don't leave that at the door, I bring that in the room with me, or I take that to the mike, or I put that in the articles that I write, or whatever the expression of activism it is.

My spirituality is not so much me being a minister and wearing a collar, but it is that spirituality, the gift of my spirituality and the gift of my sexual orientation are just that, they're gifts, and they're part of who I am. And being an activist is to say that I lift all that up for the cause of justice in the same way that Jesus did. And so I see Jesus as a spiritual activist. And I see myself in that same way.

Monique M. Excellent. Can you talk about—I read on your LinkedIn page that you have a publication, “I Made It Out,” that is interesting. Can you talk a bit about...is that something you are doing in retirement? Is it something that's coming from the new life as an activist?

Candy H. Well, you know, I...that's a great question. The book was really...I kept feeling that I wanted to talk about and share about the trauma of growing up in the church, but I didn't think that that was a story. I just felt like...I

kept...I realized I was talking to people about it all the time and people were seeking me out. I mean, to the point of finding me through social media, you know, people recommending folks to me through different back channels, through their churches, you know, people who were not out but trying to find a way to find hope beyond their church, find hope that they could come out. And because it kept happening, I just thought, well, you know.

And I happened to mention it in a group of friends, a gathering, that these things keep happening, and it sort of makes me feel like maybe I should write a book. And in this group of friends was someone who owns a publishing company, and she overheard me say that, and she knew me. And she said, well, you know, Candy, I absolutely think you should write a book because your story is something that will benefit a lot of people, but not only that, it would benefit you to get that stuff up and out because it's just running around inside of you, for you to express it. And so I thought about it and I said, well, I have never written a book before, I don't know anything about it. Well, you don't have to worry about that. That's what the publishing company does, help authors, help writers to write their books. If you're willing, we can figure something out. And so I thought about it and I said yeah, I'd be willing to do that.

So we're in the midst of that process now. And because it's a very emotional process for me, because it means going back to talk about a lot of the aspects of my life that were traumatic, where I was impacted in

ways that I didn't understand because I was lesbian, but I didn't know that I was being treated in a certain way because I was lesbian, I just thought it was because of who I was. And so going back and talking about sexual abuse in the church, talking about being ostracized in the church, talking about being openly ridiculed, talking about feeling like I couldn't come out to my family, so all those pieces, while they are something I'm willing to talk about, when you're having to, when you go through the process of writing a book, it's a different process.

And so I said, well, okay, I think I'm going to have to put myself in therapy to even go into this process because it was like reliving it. And so I've been on this journey writing this book, and I would say that I've written it twice because I've gone through the process of going through all the components of my life and all the way through the activism part. And then I started over again. I went through the same process again because I felt like that first time around I wasn't sure what was missing. And so I decided that I'd go through it again.

And the reason I did it, it was all oral, talking into a tape recorder, because I found that actually typing it out or writing it out, I just got nowhere. I kept getting stuck in my feelings, stuck in those vignettes of my life. And so I thought, well, if I could talk through it, then maybe I could get through it, and so that's what I wound up doing, twice. And so now I am in the process of sort of working through the recordings. And so we'll see where it goes.

I've had one...I released one chapter online just to give people a snippet of what will be in the book. And I have not, to be truthful about it, I have not been as focused on it in the last four or five months because our lives, Darlene and mine, our lives have gotten really topsy-turvy with moving, and with a lot of life changes. And so I'm hoping that by the new year I'll be able to refocus.

Monique M. That brings me to some of my final thoughts. So I want you to talk about retiring in Florida. Why leave D.C., where you've been all your life?

Candy H. That is a good question. I love D.C., and I love everything about D.C. And my family's there. My roots are there. When Darlene and I married, she was fine with living in the area. But we started getting such that the cold weather was getting on our nerves, the snow was getting on our nerves. You know, we were getting up in age. We didn't always feel like shoveling snow, dealing with ice, walking on it. And I just became less and less interested in dealing with the cold and the inclement weather, at least that aspect of it in the winter.

And so we had friends in Florida that we would visit at least once or twice a year, and Darlene often had meetings in Florida, and so we would travel to Florida at least three times a year. I enjoyed the weather. And then when we made good friends there, I realized that I could have friends other places. The thought occurred to me, I wonder if we could live in Florida. And St. Petersburg is one particular city that just seemed very

warm, and it felt like D.C. except it was warmer than D.C. And our friends were, you know, we didn't have a lot of friends, but the few that we had there were always warm and engaging, and I just thought wow, I wonder if we could do this.

And I had just told Darlene I was just not going to ever move, and she was fine with that. But as I started approaching retirement, I said well maybe what we could do is we could have—I know what some folks do is they find a little something, you know, where it's warmer and that's where they go like snowbirds. I said maybe we could do that, just go in the wintertime, and then we could maintain a home in Maryland. And so she said oh, okay. And so we tried that, and we found a place, and so we were going to maintain both these places.

Then the financial realities started setting in, that as I was approaching retirement, of course that would impact my salary. Darlene still was working. But what would happen when Darlene was no longer working? And being a minister, for her whole career, or at least the latter part of her career, it doesn't afford a pension of any sort. I mean, \$150 or less a month was the pension. And I said Darlene, you know, that means that we would then have one salary. And so she said yeah, that's what it would mean. And not salary, but one pension. And I said, well, you know, I think maybe we could live more comfortably if we were just in one place.

And Maryland is not the most tax friendly state. And so we were in a suburb of D.C., and so D.C. and Maryland were not tax friendly to those who have pensions. And there were some states that were tax friendly, and Florida was one. So the combination of it being warm, having some friends there, and also being tax friendly, the practicality part of me kicked in and went, you know what? I need to get over not ever wanting to move from D.C. I can always fly home. I can see my family. We can do FaceTime. We can talk on the phone. It wasn't like we were always over at each other's house anyway. It was just the convenience of knowing that we're not too far away from each other.

And so that's what happened. I decided, you know, I can do this. And Darlene, because she's been a world traveler and lived in many places, she was fine with moving, and she liked Florida in particular, too. And so that's what really went into our decision to move to Florida.

Monique M. So what started the coaching and counseling post retirement? Thought you were going there to retire.

Candy H. I know, right? Well, I retired from the federal government. I didn't retire from ministry, and I didn't retire from doing things I enjoy. And so I started realizing that I did a lot of coaching and counseling in diversity and inclusion work the latter part of my career in the federal government, and I thought, well, if I did that for the federal government, why can't I do that for myself? There's nothing stopping me from doing it for myself. And I

can have my own schedule the way I want it. And so that's what I decided to do.

I thought, well, I will have to go back to school because the federal government, they have their own system, and so I'm certified within the federal government, but not in the secular world. And so I sent myself back to school so that I could be a certified coach outside of the federal government, and decided that this was something I would want to pursue because I love doing it. Absolutely love doing it. And as soon as I announced that I was doing it, oh my goodness, it was like I couldn't handle the many clients that came, and so I had a waiting list of people who wanted to get coaching from me.

And so I have been doing it for now a couple of years. I'm not surprised of the response because I had a good response when I was coaching and counseling within the federal government. I mean, I was used a lot. But I didn't know what the response was going to be, because it takes a while for people to get to hear about you. So my immediate circles knew about me, and so they were really engaging me and passing my name on. And so now I am doing some more intentional marketing for myself so that people beyond my immediate circles can be aware, and that's starting to happen, where I'm getting contracts and being retained by organizations and seminars, so not just individuals.

So that's really exciting to me because it dovetails into my activism work as well, because when I'm out there doing activism and I get asked, well, what do you do, and I say, well, I'm a coach, and they say what kind of coach are you? I say I'm an umbrella coach. What is an umbrella coach? An umbrella coach is anything under the realm of coaching. So whether that's leadership coaching, spiritual coaching, whether that's coaching around employment, whether that's coaching around blocks in your life, whether that's coaching as it relates to church, it's a broad spectrum of coaching that I provide. And it's more about development. It's not life coaching. It's more about developing the person. So that's how I got into it. And I would say that I've been doing it all along anyway. I'm just now doing it for myself as a business. And more as a practice, slash, ministry.

Monique M. One question I realize I didn't ask that I normally ask in the beginning. How do you currently identify? Do you identify as a lesbian? Do you identify as same gender loving? Do you identify as queer? What category?

Candy H. It depends on where I am because I'm all those things. If I'm at a black church setting that's very traditional, I might say that I'm gay, because that's just the broad statement. If I'm in a setting that is a little bit more aware, I will say lesbian. If I'm in a setting that is very aware and/or very LGBT, I'll say same gender loving because I think same gender loving is really where I am. But I think it kind of depends on the level of awareness. So I try to discern that. And if I'm speaking at a school or something like that I'll say I'm queer and I'm same gender loving. If I'm speaking at a

seminary or someplace that people use that language. Because queer doesn't always translate in black settings, so I don't always—I try not to use queer because they don't know what I'm talking about, and I want people to know what I'm talking about. And that's what drives what I say wherever I am.

Monique M. The final question I ask everyone. What brings you joy? And what are you most proud of?

Candy H. Those are good questions. I think what brings me joy is the sense of being a part of, not only for myself, but for others, freedom—freedom from oppression, freedom from things that would bind us, freedom from things that will terrorize us, freedom from things that would take away our hope. So what brings me joy is moving in ways in the world that help to inspire freedom and hope, and not only for myself, but especially for others. The light comes on for people. That gives me a lot of joy, when I see the light comes on. Just like the light went on for me one day, and it still does. It brings me joy when the light goes on or comes on for others.

And what I'm most proud of... I think I am most proud of standing up and stepping forward, even when I was afraid and didn't know what was going to come, but stepping away from the church, the doctrine of the church that was, the dogma that was oppressing me. I'm most proud of stepping away from that and rebuilding my life. That did not exclude the church,

but that it put spirituality and religion in a perspective that allowed me to bring all of me to life, and not just parts of me.

Monique M. I would normally say thank you and that would be my last question, but Dr. Lightsey did ask me to ask about self-care, and I realize that's a good question, too. So specifically in your role in activism and sort of being a public advocate, what do you do to lighten the load? What resources do you utilize to not become overwhelmed in dealing with oppressive structures all the time, death-dealing structures?

Candy H. I think for me that's a learning process. Because I am an extremely kinesthetic person, and because I walk in the world sort of as a livewire—and what I mean by that is I have lots of different gifts and talents, and so when I go into these settings that are oppressive, that are death-dealing, I can probably feel it even more deeply than probably your average person. And so what I've had to learn to do is to first off, recognize where I am and to locate myself in terms of who I am in this space so that I'm grounded, and then that I don't take on other people's energy, I don't take on other people's opinions of me, I don't take on that just because somebody's angry that I might be protesting, that I don't take on their anger as an attack. It could be that they feel they're attacking me. I don't have to receive it into my body or into my psyche. And it's taken years to learn that because I didn't grow up with ever protesting or being an activist in any way. So those are some steps.

Some other steps are I've created for myself circles of trust of people who are like me, and we talk to each other about what we're doing and how we're navigating these spaces. So those are support groups. I also—and especially around trauma I have certain individuals who I talk with about church trauma. And it doesn't matter how much we talk. It's like an AA group. We're all part of this group, you know, we've been traumatized by church, and so we talk about it. Not in terms of reliving the trauma, but to understand that trauma has layers to it, and so these, I want to call them empowering friendships, you know, that we are sort of retrieving our souls, and retrieving our spirits piece by piece, and through these conversations, and through these relationships. So those are what I've done on the personal level.

On the larger level, I really do participate and look for organizations and settings that focus on trauma for activists, and I participate in those, not only as someone to bring what I have, but to also receive what others might have done. So for instance I went to Auburn Seminary, and they had all these activists together. I took away some great tools like around breathing, to breathe through some of the oppressive nature. And some of these things, because you don't always win against some of these things that are oppressing, how do you keep going when you don't win? So how do you keep going when it seems that there's such a backlash? Like dealing with marriage equality. Now we're dealing with the backlash. How do you deal with it? So just gathering these tools.

And I think also going to the basics of my spirituality, and not really complex, but that God made me just as I am, and God has my back, and God, through others, will have my back. And I so strongly believe that, that that's what I look for when I'm in places and dealing with different kinds of... I'll give you an example.

When we were doing the marriage equality work in D.C. and Maryland, and it failed in Maryland because the organizers had not done the legwork around gathering, communicating and mobilizing in the black neighborhoods, black people, black church, black clergy, black LGBT clergy, they didn't do that work. I think they thought, well, if we just put it out there, you know, the black people will come along. Well, the black people didn't. Many of our folks were in their churches and the church was saying hell, no, we won't go, hm-mmm, vote no. And that's what they did.

So even though we were on the periphery, I was on the periphery of some of that work, they didn't use me, they didn't access me. They mostly used me as window dressing. So then they turned around and said, well, you know, what are we going to for next year because it's going to come back around? We've got to figure out a different strategy. And so I was one of the chief voices that said if you want to address a particular community, you want to find people who are in that community who can talk to that community. And part of the flaw with your strategy is that you didn't use black and brown voices well and you didn't use faith voices, black and

brown faith voices well, if at all, and then when you did use some of our voices, you did not allow us to have our authentic voice. And people of faith know when others are not speaking from an authentic place or when you're being politic, and they don't cotton to that. They feel like you've been pimped. And so you have to change that. And so they began changing that.

And so all that happened, and we were moving towards the next vote. It was getting heated, and all the big churches were coming out against it, and some other big churches were coming out for it, and some of their ministers. And so what they decided to do was have a press conference with all these big name, mainstream, black clergy like Sharpton and Otis Moss III and others. And then they asked the LGBT black clergy to come, but not to speak. Now that was traumatic because inside of the community that we've been working for, fighting for this all along, and then you're going to relegate us to the audience while the mainstream black clergy have the mike and have the photo ops, so that they're the face. And so we knew what that was and why that was, but did not appreciate how that was happening and didn't think it had to be that way.

So one of the ways in which I took care of myself, because that was very traumatizing for me to feel as though we were being used inside of an active campaign for marriage equality, which was a good thing, but these other ways in which our voices were being silenced was not a good thing. And so it was traumatizing because it felt like our blackness was a

problem. It felt like being LGBT was a problem, it felt like our faith was a problem. All of that was a problem to the organizers, because they only wanted to have black straight people for America to see to legitimize why marriage equality was important, and that having us together, all together, would somehow take away from that.

So what happened was they went through the press conference and all the clergy spoke. We were sitting there. I decided to show up. And several of us, we did decide to show up and we sat in the audience with our collars on and everything so we could clearly be identified as clergy. And then what I did, and encouraged others to do, was to—they took a break before the photo ops, took a break, and they were just eating little snacks and so forth. We all just walked around and talked to the clergy, introduced ourselves and said who we were and thanked them for being here, and how much it meant to us that they were here, that we were a gay or lesbian or trans minister, told them where we were from, and how we've been pushing for marriage equality, and that their being here and their voice mattered. So didn't attack them for being there and us not being there, but thanking them.

And so it's like turning that model around. And the organizers really didn't want us to talk with them, right? It was the most bizarre thing. And so the celebrities couldn't talk with the ground folks. And so we just went and talked. And there were some I just walked up to, and I was crying with some of them. Said you remind me of my father. This is what my

father would be doing if he were here. My father was a deacon in the Baptist church. And so these ministers started realizing that not only were we there, but that we were connected to the black church because we helped them to know that we were connected. We came up out of these churches, and some of these churches would no longer have us, so we had to do something else. We had to form other churches or join other affirming churches. And just sort of explained it to them.

What that did for my heart was healing, and what that did for others was healing, because we would not allow the silencing. And so we spoke to those individuals. And then what happened, which was a witness to what happens when healing happens, is that in spite of what the organizers wanted, when it came time for the photo op, the first photo was just the straight clergy. Then they wanted to shift some of the clergy around, and they said, well, wait a minute, wait a minute—the clergy, the black straight clergy said what about these other clergy that's still around, the ones—those, they should be up here, too. So the straight black clergy went beyond the organizers and said we want them with us. And so then we joined into the picture. And so now there's this whole picture of all the black clergy, including LGBT clergy as well.

And for me that was probably one of the ways in which I could see how, when not allowing trauma to win, even if it's inside the community, the oppression to win, even if it's inside the community. So I take that with me as a lesson because it's not, I don't always deal with that kind of thing

inside the community, but it also works outside of the community as well.
So those are some of the ways in which I...

Monique M. Thank you. Thank you so much for again having time for me to ask my questions. We've gone into an hour, so I don't want to take any more of your time, but I do want to say thank you for sharing, and I'm really enthused and excited about what's going to come next from others hearing your story.

Candy H. Thank you so much.

[End of recording.]