

OUT AT WORK
A Film by Kelly Anderson & Tami Gold

TRANSCRIPT

Hugh Downs:

Should your employer be able to fire you because of who you sleep with?

Cheryl Summerville:

When you give a company, or you give anybody, your very best, and I couldn't have given them any more, then you really feel betrayed.

Ron Woods:

I'm an electrician. I work with 440 (volts), 220 (volts) -- 110 can do you in. You're dealing with high voltages, sharp edges. The area manager, he shoved me to where I almost fell sideways, onto a machine. Onto a machine.

Nat Keitt:

On my job? Well, yes, they perceive me as a woman sometimes. Because after all, let's face it, what average man is walking around the street looking like me? I'm not a closeted person. Never have been, and never will be.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

In 41 American states, it is legal to fire employees for being homosexual...

OUT AT WORK
A FILM BY KELLY ANDERSON AND TAMI GOLD

CHERYL'S STORY

CHERYL:

I don't know how to explain the people around here. They're laid back more than city people are. They sit out on their front porches and rock in rocking chairs, and when you pass them they wave to you.

SANDY RILEY:

The cars that go by you. When we first came up here, people would drive by and they'd wave, and we'd say "Who's that?"

CHERYL:

We finally figured out they just do it.

SANDY:

We don't go around announcing to the world that we're lesbians, but I'm sure people don't have any problem figuring out once they've talked to us for more than five minutes. And the ones that we have met have all been fine with it. They haven't had a problem.

We were very naive, but we had never experienced discrimination. We'd had a little bit of difficulty with our families when we first came out, but then it all settled down, and it was a shock to find out that there were people in the world who hated us just for what we were, and to find out that you have a stigma on you because you're a lesbian.

CHERYL:

I worked at a chain restaurant called Cracker Barrel. I worked for that company for three and a half years, and actually had no intentions of leaving it. I thought that I'd be there forever. There were two of the managers that knew that I was a lesbian, but nobody else in the entire store knew.

CHERYL:

Sandy and I have been together for 13 years. And I'd been denying our whole relationship ...

SANDY:

We had been together ten years then ... in fact it was four days before our tenth anniversary.

CHERYL:

I was off on a Friday, and my sister worked there, and my sister-in-law worked there. They both came home from work, and they called me and they said, "Cheryl, you're not going to believe this. They have a new policy and they're reading it to people." I said, "What is it?" They said, "They're firing people for being gay." The policy actually read that they would no longer employ anybody who did not demonstrate normal heterosexual values. I stayed up all night long trying to figure out what to do. Chris is my son, and he was 15 years old at the time. We had just bought a new house. Sandy had owned her own business, and she had sold it so that we could move out to the country and so that she could try and have a baby, so I was the sole income except for what we had in savings.

And at the same time, though, if I went in there and denied being a lesbian or if I didn't stand up for it, I'd be denying everything I'd worked for for so many years. So I spent most of the night sitting up and crying, too.

So I went on in the office, and I asked for Mary Lee, was her name. And she came in and I said, "I hear you have a new policy. If you do, I want you to read it to me." And she said, "No, you just go back to work. We're really targeting effeminate men on the floor, they're wanting to get rid of them."

SANDY:

They held a big meeting, every employee in the store, and they read the policy and then they said, "You, you and you are fired."

CHERYL:

"We're all one," I said, "And if it applies to them, it applies to me. Now are you going to fire me? You know I'm a lesbian." I thought, "I can't believe this is happening after all this time."

They fired me that afternoon, and on my termination paper it read that I violated company policy, that I was gay.

SANDY:

She came in with a carton of cigarettes and a gallon of wine. And sat and cried all night long, and got drunk. Roaring drunk, as I recall.

I guess we were aware of the name "lesbians," but a small awareness of it. We never really thought about it. We really didn't. We just lived our lives and got along just fine with everybody else, and went off with our friends who were couples, and all our kids played together. We took vacations together with them and everything was great. We never thought about us being different from them. We thought we were the same. Until Cracker Barrel made us feel different.

CHERYL:

They tried to make us different.

When they fired me, I thought I was going to sue them. Monday morning, I picked up the phone and the first people I called were the ACLU. And they told us that it didn't stand a chance, that there was absolutely nothing that they could do about it. What they had done was perfectly legal. I was shocked. I really and truly thought I had protection, and I didn't.

TEXT:

RON'S STORY

RON:

We're coming into downtown Royal Oak, which is considered one of the most gay-friendly cities in Southeastern Michigan, if not all of Michigan. It's a nice little place, it's part of the reason I moved here. I've been with Chrysler nine years and four months, almost. I enjoy being an electrician. I have always enjoyed working with circuits and everything that an electrician does, and I like that combination of knowledge, skill, mental and physical prowess and ability.

I just read about Cracker Barrel coming to Michigan, and they had fired 12 people at the time for being gay and lesbian. I thought, "This is Michigan, home of the UAW, in some ways home of civil rights, I feel, especially in the work environment."

DON LINGAR:

Ron came to me the first time, I was driving down the main driveway, and I saw this guy waving frantically at me, and I rolled down my window and he said, "I'm Ron Woods, I'm an electrician in the plant, what's the UAW's position on Cracker Barrel?"

RON:

It was the first store ever in the entire state of Michigan. I felt, we must take a stand.

DON:

He said, "They're trying to keep the union out of Cracker Barrel." I said, "Hey, that's a cause."

That rally that night was dual. I wasn't ever aware of the homosexual issue. It was a union issue. And then, when it came out the next day in the Free Press, on the front page of the Free Press, here's one of the members from my local union on the front page.

RON:

It was Monday, September 31 of 1992. I was walking into work and walking down the aisle way that I always walked down. And everywhere I looked, I saw on the front page of the local section of the Free Press, my picture, on top of the fold. It was right there, everywhere I looked it was.

DON:

Because he came out of the closet on that issue right there, everything went downhill from that point on.

RON:

No one talked to me, but one person ... he looked over at me, and he looked back at the picture and the name and the homosexual part, and he looked back at me, and he said, "Ron, did you know that you're in the paper?" I said, "Yes, Jim, I'm aware of that." I said it very matter of factly, and he never said another word about it, and I never said another word. The very next day, it began.

Almost every bathroom wall had my name of it, describing all these sex acts, and there was a bullseye at work that was posted saying, "Such and such amount of money, reward for the assassination of Ron Woods,." with a bullseye on it.

It got to the point where just walking into work was a major trauma. Just walking down the aisles and people staring and whispering to each other, and this person who obviously liked me said, "Ron, I want you to know that I cannot be seen talking to you any longer. I cannot have anything to do with you. I don't want anyone to think that I'm like you."

One day, when I was sitting in my usual chair, someone comes along and they threw a bucket of water all over the floor and splashed my feet. And he said, "Get out of here, I gotta clean, get out of here." And I left, and I became very angry. So I went up to him, and I believe my words were, "Can you ask me to leave instead of yelling at me?" He just immediately grabbed me by the neck, and he's a very strong, muscular man, and he shook and he threatened me and said something like, "I could kill you." People told me, "Ron, stay away from him. He's a Klansman, he does not like you."

I told myself, "You go in there every day. I don't care if you have a cold, or a flu, it doesn't matter what. You're going to be the best employee they ever had, and they're going to live with me, just like I have to live with them. And I went in there all the time and did the best I could. And I realized it was never going to work. That to the day I retired or the day I died, I would always be that faggot that people hated.

TEXT:
NAT'S STORY

TAMI GOLD:
Are you out on the job?

NAT KEITT:
Of course! I was never in. New York Public Libraries, they are very understanding in that way. As a matter of fact, it's written in our policy that there's no discrimination against us for our sexual gen -- sexual orientation.

TAMI:
What were you going to say?

Nat:
Sexual gender! Cancel that word!

I have what it considered a very ideal work situation. I've been here these 14 years and I've been really enjoying myself.

I've had people come up to me on the job and say, "Yes, ma-am" in their response to certain things, or they refer to me as "Miss," and they're not being facetious. It's the fact that they don't know. My voice is very high to it's very feminine. I just basically go on as business as usual. They usually find out, one way or the other. But I've found that it never made a difference. They love me either way. They love me the way they met me and they still love me after they find out. So it doesn't matter.

I've never really had a problem talking about anything. I talk about David. As a matter of fact, they all know who he is. It's the same as if someone on my staff would want to talk about their spouse. I sit and I listen, so we do the same.

NAT (at party):
What is it in Spanish? What does your mother use?

DAVID SANABRIA:
Coquetta. I call her a coquetta.

NAT:
So that means I'm fresh.

DAVID:

Yes, that's what it means. I tell you, it's going to be ten years in January. January 26th is our tenth anniversary. And I tell you ... I don't what to expect from the next ten, but if it's as good as the past ten, I'm going to stick around and find out.

NAT:

He's not complaining. Oh, I thought he was complaining.

DAVID:

Why should I complain?

NAT:

Thank you, sugar.

DAVID:

Listen, I love you.

NAT:

When David came disabled with AIDS, he was home, and him being the type of person that believes in work -- cause that's something he always said his mother always told him, always make sure you keep a job so you can keep a roof over your head, and stuff like that, and you can take care of yourself, so that's something that was instilled in him. And so being home was kind of like a punishment.

DAVID:

I had to go out on disability, because I wound up getting sick and so I had to go out on disability and I've been on disability now for two years. It's been changes in my life, the past four years.

NAT:

The library has a policy that there is no discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace. But some people were experiencing a lot of problems because their partners had to go to doctors and had to go to hospitals, and this was out-of-the-pocket expense that they had to pay. Straight people did not have to worry about getting health benefits for their spouses. However, a person like myself had to fight for this because I do not have the sanction of that marital status.

The nature of David's illness actually predicated a lot of expenses. I began to get a feel for what it was like to pick up the cost of David's medical expenses, and it was actually taking me in the hole. I mean, I woke up one day and I was \$50,000 in debt, just from David's medical. Just from that.

CHERYL:

The most political thing I'd ever done was go to a voting booth. I saw protests and stuff on television but I'd never been a part of one. I actually couldn't imagine it. After we found out we couldn't do anything legally, my brother called me and he had read Southern Voice, a gay and lesbian newspaper in town, and he said, "I read a small article." So I picked up the telephone and I called

Southern Voice. They said, "Well, there's two organizations in town you need to go see: ACT UP and Queer Nation." Well, Queer Nation was real scary-sounding to me. We happened to be driving through town one night, and Sandy said, "You know, that Queer Nation meeting is right down the street, and it's about five minutes to the time that it's to start. How do you feel about it?" It was very scary. I thought I was going to walk into maybe a ton of radical people, or crazies. I walked in, and it was all boys, real normal-looking, and actually Lynn Cothren was the chair. He's Coretta Scott King's assistant here in Atlanta.

LYNN COTHREN:

Ms. King calls me her hillbilly sometimes. She says I'm her little hillbilly. How did this little hillbilly boy who came from Tennessee work at the King Center? I was supposed to go work at Sears, but I didn't go down that path. I went and did this, and you know I got a Masters in the King Center and a doctorate in Coretta Scott King, is my big joke with them.

MARCHERS:

We're here, we're queer, we're not eating breakfast.

SANDY:

Lynn was the chair, and he insisted that if he was going to be in charge of it, then it was going to be done his way, and his way was non-violence.

LARRY PELLEGRINI:

What we developed was a model based on Martin Luther King, Jr's six steps for non-violence protest.

CHERYL:

We went to our first protest, and it was so pitiful. There was about 15 people. It was pouring down rain, and people slipped and fell in the mud. It was a pretty big mess that day, and it was kind of discouraging, but the next one got better.

CHANTING:

We're your family, not your enemy, someone you love is queer.

CHERYL:

We'd make the protests different each time, so that people didn't lose their interest. We had Mother's Day, where everybody brought their mothers.

SINGING:

Happy Mother's Day to you ...

MAN:

If you don't like America, get out and go someplace else. Why don't you go to Russia? Go to Cuba.

GUY WITH MEGAPHONE:

Queer Nation Atlanta subscribes to the particular type of non-violence endorsed by Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. We ultimately would like to see

reconciliation with the Cracker Barrel management, but until then we will protest their policy.

CHERYL:

We set up a Western Union campaign, where they sent letters in to Cracker Barrel, and then there was a boycott called on them.

We're going to win, y'all.

LARRY KING:

Can an employer dictate the sexual preferences of its workers? That's the question being asked by several former employees of the Cracker Barrel restaurants.

OPRAH:

One day, they arrive at work and are told, "You're fired." The reason? Because they're gay.

BARBARA WALTERS:

If you go out to dinner, would it bother you if your waiter was homosexual?

ANGRY MAN:

Get out of my goddamn way!

SINGING:

Deep in my heart, I do believe, that we shall overcome someday.

CHERYL:

Now the first time they went inside a restaurant, it happened to be at the one I worked at. They would kidnap the restaurant, they would hold the tables hostage for several hours.

LYNN:

Gang -- unfortunately the manager is having to turn away people. And he's not giving them any free meal tickets or anything today. Because Queer Nation Atlanta is protesting at Cracker Barrel.

NEWS ANCHOR:

More than a dozen gay rights activists are free on bond tonight after they were arrested inside a Union City restaurant.

LYNN:

We were arrested for criminal trespassing at Cracker Barrel, and that was for demonstrating inside, for the sit-ins. We wanted to go through the trial procedure with a jury so that the ugliness, the real truth, could come out, once and for all. Bigotry and discrimination is ugly, and you have to bare that ugliness in the open like a sore, so you can begin the healing process.

RON:

This is Trenton Engine Plant Motor Pulse, March/April 1990. I had just graduated as an apprentice, and they highlighted me. Apparently they felt they would spotlight what I had accomplished, earning a journeyman's card and a second degree while working full time. So I was proud of that.

For eight, nine, ten months, ever since Cracker Barrel started, it was really bad. The person I was dating ran away, friends ran away. I'm not blaming them, I used to be very bitter, I'm trying to work on that. I was unpleasant. It took more of a personal toll than I ever thought it would. I never complained to my union because I felt it was my burden to bear ostracism, it was my burden to bear a lot of this. But the physical attack was too much. I called my union representative.

DON LINGAR & MIKE HARRALD:

We built engines. The best engines in the world, right there.

MIKE HARRALD:

We have people that have put over 170,000 miles on some of them cars over there. Including yours' truly, with 110,000 miles. I feel kind of good. Best engines in the world, right there. Best workers in the world.

My job is to represent people. I don't have a problem with who I represent, especially if it's somebody being persecuted. People in general can be very vicious, and people don't realize they can be vicious. There's only so much that an individual can take. And I think Ron was right on the borderline of a breakdown. We went by the toolboxes, away from everybody, and he told me everything that was going on. He was more in fear that because of him being homosexual, that I wouldn't represent him. And then I told him about some of my experiences, and told him that him being discriminated against was just the tip of the iceberg, and I told him some things really that happened to me. I was the first black at Hamtramk Foundry, in skilled trades, and sure, from a lot of people I went through a heck of a lot of abuse. I used to have to go down in the basement and just hit something or cry, away from everybody, wash my face and go back to work, like nothing happened.

RON:

He said, "Ron, one day I came very close, but I woke up and got out of bed, and if I had been single, it would be a very sad situation." Because believe me, people can be hurt in these situations, these are my words, my words. He said, "Ron, I looked at a picture of my wife and my children, and I put up with it." I respect that man deeply, but it makes me sad for me, because I had no one. I would get off work and go for walks, and I felt like the loneliest man on earth. I think the worst time of my life was that one day, I remember. I called my mother and she asked me to change, and started crying, and I started crying, and that was rough. That was really hard.

DON:

Ron called me at home a couple of times, and my wife thought maybe that I might have been a little gay, because I sat and talked to him for an hour and a

half on the kitchen floor by the heater one night. But he was troubled, he was troubled so bad that if I'd given him one of those short answers, "Stick it up your rear" and hang it up type of thing, I thought the guy might go off the deep end.

MIKE:

I told the guys to cut the bullcrap out. I told them, "I know who's doing it, I've already been told who did at least some of the incidents, and I want it to stop. If you don't cease what you're doing, you will be brought up front and you will be discharged."

DON:

Mike had to go out there and tell some of the hourly brothers and sisters that if you don't back off from persecuting Ron Woods, your ass is going to be out on the street.

MIKE:

They didn't pick me up on their shoulders or nothing, they weren't happy about it, but they knew that I was telling them the straight of it. Even on management's side, some of the management that gave him a hard time out there on the floor, was brought up in front of my president and the plant manager, and they were read the riot act, under no terms, Don don't bite his tongue at all, and when they left out of there, he didn't have no more problems. But he still wanted to get away from the total situation.

DON:

We went down the path of bringing management in and making Ron's wishes known to them, and eventually that ended up being a transfer out of Trenton Engine.

RON:

Eleven months after the harassment started, I was transferred to Chrysler Technology Center, and it saved my life.

NAT:

David and I have been together for like 12 years. He's been just everything to me. It's been what I would consider a very good marriage.

This is the time of year that you don't know how to shop. You have to let me come shopping with you, there's so many goodies in here.

Basically, I took care of all the responsibilities of the home, and David did nothing but go to work. There was a change in David's life, and the next thing I know, David's in the house and I'm outside all the time.

DAVID:

I've gotten used to it, I guess. It has its good points and its bad points.

I used to work for a company, RSR corporation. I started as a laborer, worked my way up to a helper, and after that I worked my way up into a refinery

operator. I basically, when they asked me I told them I had my wife, which was half a truth and half a lie.

TAMI:
Why?

DAVID:
Because they wouldn't consider it like a marriage, a lot of them. But I consider it like he's my wife, so that's it.

NAT:
David is able to slip in and out of places, and people will never know. When I walk into a room I obviously hit you like a 50 Megaton bomb, and the only thing is, you either love me or you hate me.

DAVID:
Nat's very feminine, and when he comes into a room you can't help but notice that he's gay.

NAT:
I have to be one person, I have to be true to that person, I cannot be a phony. Bottom line, what you see is what you get.

DAVID:
But you are very fortunate ...

NAT:
I don't know what you mean by fortunate, David.

DAVID:
In a way, you've been fortunate to have found a job in which you can be yourself. There's a lot of industrial jobs, there's a lot of different types of other jobs, and they would like to approach the person, but they have a fear.

NAT:
I can understand, his union would not back him up because it would just be an unfortunate circumstance.

DAVID:
It's company bought, first of all ...

NAT:
You can't say that ...

DAVID:
I don't care. It's a company-bought union. A boys' club, is basically what it is. These are all good guys, big macho egotistical types of guys ...

NAT:
You can be macho, too.

DAVID:
Why'd you put orange juice in mine?

NAT:
Because you can't drink wine.

DAVID:
I was waiting for that little glass. When I put out four glasses I was hoping he'd be nice to me ...

CHERYL:
I was depressed, and I hid it from people that I saw. Everybody thought that I was dealing with it just great, but they didn't see me when I was at home. I kept trying to figure out what was wrong with me. I had never had to think about being a lesbian before, and when I was fired, I kept trying to figure out, "What's wrong with me being a lesbian, why did you fire me because of this, what's so bad about it?"

LARRY KING:
Welcome back to Larry King Live with Cheryl Summerville. New York City, Hello.

CALLER:
Look at this woman, it's obvious to see she's a homosexual.

LARRY KING:
Let's say that's obvious, caller. Why should she not be a cook?

CALLER:
She can be a cook as long as she does her job and does not come out of the kitchen. But this is very offensive to a family restaurant. Why a person should have to go into a restaurant with their family, and then their children start to have a weird idea of what men and women should be.

CHERYL:
When people would tell me that I was bad and that I was sick, and I was perverted, I think I would take that so deep that I would have to question my own self.

My son, he had some problems in school. They wrote slogans on the gym wall that said "Chris' mother's a fag and so it he." I had to take him out of school, had to change schools because of it, because they told me they could not insure his safety. He even came to me one time and he asked me why. He had become upset. He had had some of the problems, was starting to feel the impact of it. He came to me, we were actually driving down the road and he asked me, "Why?"

Why you?" And I told him that it had happened to me, nobody else could do it for me."

RON:

Here we are. This is Doug's Body Shop, this is pretty much the only place I go. I come here after work with my uniform on, what the heck. Most people would not go to a gay bar in a work uniform but I don't care, if they have that kind of hangup then I'm not worried about it.

I love these cars. Like right here, you've got all the buttons and things that still work. Here we have these big, knobby heat controls.

My mind's going in a lot of ways, a lot of directions.

SANDY:

Well, we learned one thing. That you can never believe anything you read. Because of all that was written about Cheryl and about us, every article was wrong in some regard.

CHERYL:

People stereotyped us. Not only were we gays and lesbians, we were stupid country hicks, too.

SANDY:

The guy who wrote that Mother Jones article. He said that when I was arrested I had on white shoes and a white purse. And I have never even owned a white purse.

CHERYL:

Summerville was not a political person. She wasn't tortured by ideals or abstractions. She just wanted to live an uncomplicated life. I didn't remember this part, either. Sandra Riley favors ruffles.

SANDY:

It makes me look ignorant and unstylish like I have to idea how to dress or how to behave myself. To go to a protest in heels with a white pocket book. Come on how, who would do that?

CHERYL:

I manage to make a living now by delivering papers. I deliver Southern Voice, it's a gay and lesbian newspaper, and I sling hamburgers at Hardees.

TAMI:

Where are we going now?

CHERYL:

To my favorite mechanic. She's a big old butch dyke.

SANDY:

Cheryl was almost like chosen to do this job, because she was the only person I know of that's ever gotten it in writing. She's the only one who had it on her termination paper, who could go lobbying in the Congress and in the Senate, in Washington, and say, "Look, this happened to me. This is real. We need laws to protect us."

RON:

This is what I do every day before I go to work. Put on the battle gear, so to speak.

I thought that things would be much better at Chrysler Technology Center. I felt this was a chance for a new start. And I was treated well. There was even a group of your large, boisterous types who were good to me. Approximately four months later, things became really bad. The word started to get around, and some people started to turn cold. One in particular is Bill. We call him Big Bill, for good reason, he's 6'9" and 350 pounds. He's a big man. A very big man. I don't believe that until that point he knew anyone who was gay.

BIG BILL WHITMER:

I've never worked with a homosexual, a gay. And it did somewhat make me uneasy.

RON:

He was saying things like "Gosh, you know, I hear people do all these certain things, sexually. I just can't see how people can do that, I just don't understand it." Just obviously making himself apart from me.

BILL:

I was told by some fellow employees and by management to avoid him, that he was nothing but trouble.

RON:

The few weeks after that were starting to be a living hell for me, and they brought back a lot of painful memories. There was literature that was absolutely disgusting, that gays are running around with needles and injecting people with AIDS, and their sole purpose in life is to infect as many people as they can.

BILL:

We had one who blamed him for looking over the divider in the urinals.

TERRY KREMKOW:

Nobody wanted to talk, as far as I could see, to Ron. Then nobody wanted to talk to me when I was with Ron.

BILL:

Then when he got partnered up with Terry, Terry's very outgoing, very friendly, and he kind of put Ron in the limelight and said, "This is a good guy."

TERRY:

I've been ridiculed since I was a little kid. Either I was fat, or I was this, or I was that, or I was poor, I was short, I'm not tall enough, or my nose is big ... I mean, you can go on and on with people.

RON:

Terry was a person of the sort of macho type of persona that is respected in a shop environment, and so because of Terry then things did change.

BILL:

I kind of got personal with him a few times, and said, "When did you know that you were ..." Curiosity was more like it. "When did you know that you were homosexual?" And talking with Terry, and saying, he's attracted to his own sex, just like we're attracted to a female. So I'm trying to understand him.

TERRY:

There was one co-worker who would say, "Yeah, you and your fag buddy. Are you getting your daily blow jobs from your fag buddy?"

BILL:

One of the individuals who gave Ron some of the hardest time attacked me out in the parking lot.

RON:

Bill had just come back from Disneyland with his family.

BILL:

I got out of my car, set my lunch box on top of the roof. All of a sudden I hear, "You motherfucker, you cocksucker." And being as big as I am, I'm looking around like, "Who are they talking to?" This individual says, "You motherfucker, I'm going to kick your ass," and he jumped out of the truck and came charging at me swinging and kicking. I took some good hits, but if that had been somebody Ron's size, he would have really gotten beaten up bad.

I've talked to my family, I've talked to other workers, and I've told them, "Things are different at Chrysler, and one of the things that makes a difference at Chrysler is the guy that I work with is a homosexual." And some people, it really floors them. They're like, "How do you know he's a homosexual?" He comes right and tells you. He's not ashamed of it. That's what he is.

NAT:

Are you ready for it, honey?

DAVID:

Give me a pillow. I need a pillow. Thank goodness.

NAT:

Do you need another one?

DAVID:
I'm okay.

NAT:
What about your back?

DAVID:
I got the pillow for my back.

NAT:
That's a small one.

DAVID:
Nat, don't insist. If I'm comfortable, I'm comfortable. So don't be insisting.

NAT:
David had started to get sick. He was worried because he didn't know exactly what was going to happen next. I was worried because I wanted to make sure that he had the best possible health care that could be given to him. If I did not fight to try and get him on my benefits, all his medical expenses would have come out of my pocket.

I always look at the union as being my legal defense in the labor world. Because no matter what happens, I've got someone I can go to. We have an executive board which governs the union local itself. I was chosen to run for this position. They took a vote, and there I was, I was sitting on the executive board. They knew that I was openly gay, there's no problem with that. I'm quite popular with them, as a matter of fact. They love me.

RAY MARKEY:
Here's a toast to Nat, who just made 50, who looks like he's 30. A good friend of all of us, many of us have worked with him for many years, a leader of our union, and many other things ... here's to Nat.

NAT:
After I was elected to the executive board, the president of my local appointed me to be co-chair of our gay and lesbian issues committee. At the same time, city workers all over the city were organizing their committees within their worksites, and hell broke loose.

GUY:
The Coalition of Lesbian and Gay City Employees represents and issues and concerns of lesbian and gay city employees from across city government.

JULIE SCHWARTZBERG:
We pay dues, we want to feel comfortable in the union, and there are a lot of labor issues that are our issues.

REGINA SHAVERS:

DC37 covers 130,000 municipal employees. If you go by the adage that one person in ten is gay, that's a lot of lesbian, gay and bisexual municipal employees. We all belonged to the union, and the union fought for everyone else's rights, and we felt we should give them the opportunity to fight for ours as well. We wrote a letter to the Executive Director of District Council 37 saying that we had a group formed, and that we wished to have that group recognized be an official part of the union. We received notice that the Executive Board would recognize a Lesbian and Gay Committee of District Council 37.

JULIE:

This is the first party ever in this union that's by and for our people, in this union hall.

WOMAN:

When everybody was calling me names, I was telling them, "One of these days, we're going to be organized." And here we are, 25 years later.

WOMAN:

I've been with the union for 20 years, Sweetcakes. Working in the closet and out. However, here I am. In drag. The whole whoopdeedo, and loving it.

LYNN:

After we had the first protests, and we started organizing the sit-ins, we started calling in other groups. We brought in a lot of the civil rights people, because they saw how the issue related to them as well.

Then when I got in the struggle, I noticed that it just didn't affect gays and lesbians. It affected women, it affected African Americans. On one of my shopping sprees to Cracker Barrel, I purchased one of many items that are negative and degrading to the African American community: a mammy doll. We say stop selling your mammy dolls, stop selling confederate flags and Sambo memorabilia, hire gays and lesbians back now. Change your policy!

LARRY:

Over a hundred different groups allied with Queer Nation is opposing Cracker Barrel's discrimination.

CHERYL:

There were many churches and unions. There was actually a straight organization that formed out of ours, called "Straight Not Narrow."

I'm not used to this, so y'all bear with me because I'm probably going to make a lot of mistakes. I want to tell you that it's great to look out and see so many people. To note how much support has come behind this whole thing over the last year, it's grown and grown and to look at it today, it's just amazing.

LARRY:

We got so many allies that we felt we were feeling like we were surrounding Cracker Barrel.

RON:

I was between a rock and a hard place. I was minority of one for being gay, and I was also a minority for being very pro-union. A lot of people in this work environment were not supportive of the union, and I was very upset about this, and I told Terry the situation about anti-union remarks and how management was violating the contract. When I saw that supervisor doing union work in a union shop with union tools from union workers, I confronted the supervisor, "Stop that work, now!" And people say, "Well, this guy might be skinny, and he may not be popular because he's gay, but he's the only one who had a shouting match with management.:"

TERRY:

About a year ago, they had the skilled trades rep job come up, and I told him to run for it. He had nothing to lose.

RON:

People started asking me to run for steward, and believe me, it's not because I'm gay. You want a steward who's going to defend you.

BILL:

He went throughout our whole building, and he campaigned very strongly, told people what he thought. I think a lot of people changed their mind once they sat down and talked to him and saw where the guy was coming from.

RON:

I won an election as delegate to the 31st constitutional convention of the United Auto Workers in Anaheim, California. And that still is the happiest day of my life.

JULIE:

We have an extra special celebration tonight because after many years of struggle we are moving on and now have domestic partner health benefits for city workers.

NAT:

When I was able to get my domestic partner benefits for David to enjoy the privilege of maintaining the same doctor that he always had, and go to a hospital that could take good care of him, that itself was a whole other victory in our lives.

DAVID:

As being registered as domestic partners, it means very much to me, because as you know we've been together for 11 years. And each day, even though I think he'd more of a pain in the butt, I still find new things about him that I love. And I know I'm not going anywhere, he knows he's not going anywhere. It says that

we are together, we are recognized by the city that we are living together and we are responsible for each other, and willing to take that road together.

CHERYL:

I got up at 3:30 this morning.

DEVIN:

Why?

CHERYL:

To go and work. And I had to haul those heavy papers, and do all that walking. And now you're going to make me walk over there and get that hat?

DEVIN:

Yes. Go get it.

CHERYL:

Please, you go get it?

DEVIN:

No, you.

CHERYL:

Who did I have to make some money for?

DEVIN:

Me?

CHERYL:

So why can't you go over there and get me that hat?

SANDY:

We had been trying to seven years to get pregnant, with two different donors. And we had about given it up when Cracker Barrel fired Cheryl.

CHERYL:

So actually in some ways Cracker Barrel did me a favor, huh?

SANDY:

Jeff came to us one night, he was the legal coordinator for Queer Nation, and he said, "If you need help, I'd be willing to be a donor."

CHERYL:

With Jeff it only took, what, three tries?

SANDY:

He was so embarrassed by the whole thing. Cheryl used to swing by on her way home from Atlanta and she would pick it up and it would be in a little Tupperware cup, wrapped in a bag, inside another bag, so that nobody would

know what it was. She was, as far as I know, the first and only ever Queer Nation baby in the world.

CHERYL:

Queer Nation doesn't exist anymore, it folded. But I don't believe that most of the people that we were with will ever tell you they feel that we were not successful with it. I may not have gotten my job back, but activism itself just grew and it was like a knock on the door and it opened up and I saw all this and it changed my whole outlook on life itself and the world.

TEXT:

Cracker Barrel has not changed its policy.
There is still no federal legislation preventing job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

PRIEST:

We commend to Almighty God our brother David. We commend his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. May the Lord bless him and keep him, the Lord make his face to shine upon him and be gracious to him.
Amen.

NAT:

Thanks to my union, thanks to my library, thanks to the people in the community in which I work, it has helped me to continue on my life. Because otherwise, I don't know what I would have done. Because in situations like this, you have people that actually take their own life. I, in turn, want more life, because I think there's more that I can do.

TEXT:

More than 35 municipalities have won domestic partner health benefits for city workers.

At least 500 other employers also provide these benefits.

RON:

I stand firmly in support of this contract demand for all groups listed, including the words "sexual orientation." After I became known as gay in 1991, my life became a living hell due to extreme harassment and discrimination. I ask that my union do the right thing by steadfastly demanding that such discrimination be forbidden contractually. Please take this very seriously and understand that we must protect all of our members. Thank you very much.

I think it is time for people to understand that workplace rights are for everyone, that an injury to one is an injury to all.

TEXT:

The UAW Convention voted unanimously to add a clause to all contracts prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

THE END