

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Tom Healy
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
September 1, 2015
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <https://pryorcenter.uark.edu/>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
 - annotations for clarification and identification.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Tom Healy on September 1, 2015,
in Fayetteville, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: All right.

Tom Healy: Hmm-hmm.

SL: Well, let's see—um—Tom, we are here at the Pryor Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The day's date is September 1, 2015.

TH: Um—and it's a . . .

SL: And—um—first . . .

TH: . . . beautiful day out there [*laughs*], too.

SL: Uh—the first thing I have t—it—what is your full name?

TH: Thomas Patrick Healy.

SL: Thomas Patrick.

TH: Yes. It's a—an Irish family. [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: My first name is actually Patrick.

TH: Is it?

SL: I go by Scott . . .

TH: Right.

SL: . . . my middle name, but—um—so when and where were you born?

TH: So I—I was born on August 5, 1961, in a little town in suburban Westchester, New York, called Valhalla. And—uh—my father

was a young police officer, and my mother—um—had a son already. We're Irish twins. We're eleven months apart.

SL: Wow.

TH: And they left—uh—a barbecue to go the hospital with me. But when I was four—uh—my family moved to a farm in upstate New York, which is where I say I grew up because I did. And it was really the animating feature of—of our lives was to have a dairy farm. But the—the deeper truth about it is it—that it was somewhat ridiculous. My parents were working-class, suburban kids outside of New York City who didn't know anything about farming.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: And they went upstate New York about six hours from New York City. Um—our home was on a dirt road, and it had actually—the farm had been abandoned. There had been an older couple, the Robinsons, who lived at the farm. The kids had moved away, and they stopped farming. [00:02:01] And my parents—this was 1966, [19]67, so my mother was—uh—a kind of *Reader's Digest* Republican . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . so that—you know, she hadn't had a college degree. She was curious about things but, you know, a condensed version

of—uh—enthusiasms, and yet the [19]60s were starting to happen, and she wanted in in some ways. And—uh—my father was—uh—a—uh—police officer and a hunter, just like a lot of suburban guys are. And so they'd occasionally drive upstate—uh—to go deer hunting. And so my mother thought, "Well, we could just move to that kind of area, and maybe I'd"—she'd get my father away from some of his girlfriends and dalliances if they did. And I'm not sure why my father agreed to that, but off they went. And—uh—they had no idea what we oo—they were getting into.

SL: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm.

[00:03:10] TH: So—but all of us remember the first winter there. So we were in a big—uh—fourteen-room farmhouse with no heat except wood and no storm windows or anything. And we had, almost the entire time that I grew up, a party-line phone with eight families. And—uh—we got one television station, Channel 2 outta Utica, New York. Occasionally if you get up on the roof and turned the antenna, you could get a—a little bit of somewhere else. But you know, it was a—people don't think of New York state as being isolated and rural. But this was as rural as—uh—I think you can get in—certainly in the sense that for a child, there is nowhere else. You don't read or see or hear about

anywhere else, and you're not going anywhere else. You're there working. And—uh—it was an interesting thing to realize that in retrospect my family learned to become farmers through—uh—the Farm Bureau pamphlets, through trial and error. And they were very much outsiders to a rural county, so—uh—you know, you'd be an outsider if you hadn't been born there for a few generations at least. So it's funny, I always—I've—this is my fourth time to Arkansas, and I felt so immediately at home here.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: Because same kind of rolling hills and—and landscape, same—uh—agricultural atmosphere, and a same sense of that the world is elsewhere, you know, in some ways.

[00:05:02] SL: Yeah, there is—um—there's something about—um—the rural rolling hills a—there's a—um—hardscrabble, pioneer . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . sense—uh—of community—uh—there. And it's sometimes—you know, it's separate. Everyone wants their own domain and—and not to be interfered with, but then there are also—uh—there is a community aspect about—um—surviving together . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . on that. So—um—I—I do wanna—before we—we move on—
um—with your experiences there d—did you ever know either
set of your grandparents?

[00:05:45] TH: I did. Um—my father's parents had come from
Ireland. And—as young adults, and they met at—um—a famous
old dance club in Manhattan called Roseland.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: Still exists and is used for different kinds of events and parties.
But—uh—the Democratic party used to organize socials and
dances for different—uh—different immigrant groups. And so
your way of meeting a young girl or a young boy to date would
be there where they'd be registering you to vote and—uh—
getting you engaged. And so my—my grandparents met there.

[00:06:30] My other—uh—my mother's parents—her mother
grew up in a coal-mining town in—in Pennsylvania and—and
moved to New York as a—uh—house girl, as a, you know, maid
at sixteen.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: And her father—uh—was actually Italian descent. So he had—he
had moved here as a boy with his family from Southern Italy,
not Sicily, but the south. And—uh—none of them was pleased
about my parents becoming farmers. [*Laughter*]

[00:07:09] SL: What was your—uh—mother's maiden name?

TH: Her maiden name is Marinaro.

SL: Marinaro.

TH: Yes.

SL: So—um—was your . . .

[00:07:17] TH: So mostly Irish but—uh—an Italian grandfather who is the person I look like the most in the family and—uh—from all accounts I'm the most like. I do remember him visiting us on the farm a couple times, and he'd come in a—a big Oldsmobile. And we had, you know, a dirt, mud driveway because it's always mud season on a farm.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: And I would remember he would come, and he'd be in a suit. And I never saw anybody in a tie or suit of any kind. We didn't—first suit I owned was for my junior prom, and my mother made it. So . . .

SL: Wow.

TH: . . . uh—so for him to come in an Oldsmobile and not a pickup truck and be in a suit and to have such utter distaste for where he was. That he'd come to Mars. Uh—it was always compelling to me to—to see him. He wasn't a good man. He wasn't a kind person, and—uh—and he and my mom certainly had—uh—a lot

of distance and difficulty. But he represented something to me about—uh—about overcoming hardship. And—uh—he didn't do that with love, but he decided that, you know, making things better than they are, making yourself better was important. And somehow, as a boy, he seemed to represent that to me in ways that other people in my family didn't. So I made him into a figure.

[00:09:00] SL: So what did he do for a living?

TH: So he was—uh—he first drove a milk truck for Borden's . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

TH: . . . which seemed ironic given that [*laughter*] we ended up having a dairy farm. So—uh—but then he eventually became—uh—a restaurateur, and he owned a couple very successful steak houses in Westchester, and they had—uh—some real—a rise to prosperity while my mother was a teenager. And then—uh—he was a gambler and a drinker, and so he lost his businesses. And he ended up managing a restaurant. So—uh—and his wife—uh—and he—actually, they never divorced, but she and he lived apart for thirty years, and she'd had—my grandmother—five strokes and lived . . .

SL: Mmm.

TH: . . . in—uh—a nursing home for a long, long time.

[00:10:01] SL: Catholic I . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: I would assume.

TH: That's whole ca . . .

SL: Yeah.

TH: Uh—catholic all around.

SL: Right.

TH: Yes.

SL: Right.

TH: Yeah.

[00:10:07] SL: Okay. So what is your—um—you know, we're talkin' about the farm life, but I—I—I like to kinda quiz on your earliest memory. What—I mean, what's—what's the earliest thing that you remember a—as a child?

TH: Well, so I'm deaf in one ear, in my—uh—right ear. And we were too poor to go to doctors and things, so I'd never had hearing tests or other things and didn't really know that I was—what that would've meant because it's just—uh—the hearing I had. And I vividly remember discovering that I didn't hear out of my right ear because I—my—my parents were fighting, and I had covered my ears. And I just realized at that ti—when I took this hand off, this one still on, I didn't hear them, still. And I did that.

And I didn't tell anybody for a couple of years. So that's—that early memory of having some knowledge about yourself that you are gonna keep secret, and also to feel way—you may be damaged in some way . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . what is that feeling? The—that's a early memory.

[00:11:41] SL: That's—uh—that's so personal. Uh—you know, usually it's someone—someone will say, "Well, I can remember my mother standing at the sink washing dishes."

TH: Oh, right.

SL: Or "I can remember my dad coming home from work," or something. But in this case, this is a very physical, personal . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . event. So are—do you . . .

TH: Probably, if I think hard about it, maybe it's the first memory of agency.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: Maybe a first memory of my self . . .

SL: Self. Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . in some way. Um—memories of—of my family—I do remember earlier my grandmother, who was from Galway, she never spoke to us. She always would love to see us, and she

was full of smiles and things, but she would always be in the kitchen, and she'd always have kind of animated—uh—expressive sounds, but she wasn't be—she never sat down and told you a story or did something if—the minute that might happen, she'd move away. [00:12:53] But one thing she did that I'll never forget. It was one of my earliest memories that she had this record, old 78 that was just laugh tracks. [*SL laughs*] And so I was a little boy, and I remember her holding my hand and just listening to that record of laughter. And that was her communication. I don't think I ever remember a conversation with my grandmother, but I remember she always laughed. She was always smile—I don't know if she was happy or not. [*Laughter*] But I do remember sitting with her and—and hearing that laugh record.

[00:13:38] SL: That's quite remarkable. I'd—I'd like to have a laugh record . . .

TH: Right?

SL: . . . actually, [*laughter*] myself. I mean . . .

TH: There's nothing better than laughing [*SL laughs*], I tell you. It's important.

[00:13:48] SL: All right, so—um—your recollections before the farm are probably not . . .

TH: Not so strong. But . . .

SL: Not so strong.

TH: . . . some—I do have some memories. I—uh—one of the strangest things about Facebook and social media . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . are—people talk about this—but are people you haven't thought of for thirty, forty, fifty years . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . who suddenly are now your friend on Facebook. And so one of these is a girl named April. And she just recently appeared on my Facebook. But one of the early memories I have is that April Lindholm's brother died when we were all about four.

SL: Mmm.

TH: They were the next-door neighbors . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . where we lived in Westchester, and—uh—I don't remember the—what happened to him or whether we went to a funeral or w—what I do remember is the emotion of this in the four or five homes nearby. And I think it was because the Lindholms had a real presence. People loved them, and so obviously their son dies. You know, there's kind of no worse tragedy, I think, than having a child die. And just the sense that everything was dark.

Nobody could talk about things. April disappeared from our lives for seemingly forever. And it was probably a week [*laughs*] or something . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . but—uh—I just remember the emotion of that loss and the sense that nobody knew what to do about it and feeling as though there's something wrong with not being able to do something. It's a feeling I ended up having a lot as a child—but the sense that—um—you need to have control of your destiny and in—and have bit of a way to move somewhere forward with your life. I think my mother moving us to the farm was one attempt at that. And hers always—I think for so long my mother's attempts at agency and taking control of things were thwarted or that she felt tentative about them. And so maybe that's part of—I'm telling you these things—I haven't talked to anybody about these or thought about them a l—but—uh—that sense of whatever memory it is, whatever field you're in, do you have any control here? And the need to do that, to feel, "I don't think I'm in the right place."

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: "I don't think I'm supposed to just stay here and be like this."

That animated me from—from early childhood.

SL: I w—I would . . .

[00:17:00] TH: Now another memory's coming back when . . .

SL: Good.

TH: . . . when my mother first brought us all to the farm. My father's there too, but I d—I don't know where—uh—my father is at that time. My father—we used to joke that—uh—when we're all working on the farm that he would—if people came to visit, my father would go give guided tours, so he'd be disappearing, giving tours on where—while everybody else would be working. But—uh—so we sat down to have a picnic, and it was in June, and my mother had all of us at this farm that, at the time, was abandoned. They were, you know—but we were gonna move here. And my mother was telling this story of the animals we were gonna have and the new kind of life and chores. And—and these things were only her imagination, too, because she didn't [*laughter*] know anything about it. I don't know if my mother even had a pet as a child. That would be a good thing for me to go back and ask her. But you know, we had a dog at the time, but that [*laughter*] was it. And I remember—became a story in my family, too—when—talking about what that would mean to have all these animals around, that I said, "Well, I'm gonna need a chef's apron like from Grandpa's restaurant to be able to keep

clean during all this [*laughs*], you know." So automatically, right from the beginning, I had my doubts about—uh—this new venture and a need to keep some distance from it.

[00:18:38] SL: You know, the—the loss of the neighbor's child—um—I—I can remember at one point in my youth, I started worrying about, "Well, what happens when my parents are gone?"

TH: Mh-hmm.

SL: "Who's gonna take care of me?" Or you know . . .

TH: Right.

SL: . . . a moment of hopelessness . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . about future. How you don't really have dominion over that.

TH: Uh-huh.

SL: Um—and I'm just wondering if . . .

TH: I never had that feeling.

SL: You didn't?

TH: I don't know that any of my siblings did. From the earliest times, we were always told that we would be on our own, and I think we were on our own for a lot. Um—my parents got divorced when I was—uh—thirteen.

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: But they hadn't really been living together. We had this—by this point a pretty big dairy farm, sixty milking cows and, you know, hundreds of chickens, and we had pigs and goats and—uh—horses and yu—you name it. We—for a family farm, it was full-time work. And my father had become the police chief of Cooperstown, where the Baseball Hall of Fame is . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

TH: . . . it's about twenty miles away. But that could be forever away, I mean . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . it was not somewhere you got to. So he was gone, and my mother—uh—you know, was trying to struggle, with—with four kids, to hold the farm together. It was two teenage boys who were tryin' to be men and work.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:10] SL: Right.

TH: And she's got two younger kids. And she's set up by a local, other farmer with someone on a blind date. And the next week, she went to the hospital in Cooperstown, Bassett Hospital, to have a hysterectomy, and she ended up having a lot of complications for that and was in the hospital for over a month and almost died. And what—during that time, we didn't have

relatives who lived near us, but it became clear to some people, "Well, you have two teenage boys running this farm and taking care of two kids," and we might miss the school bus, so we'd drive the pickup to school, you know, about six, eight miles. And nobody really cared about teenage kids that didn't have a license that—you know . . .

SL: Right.

TH: . . . bein' safe drive—but so the strangest thing that happened, though, is that the man that my mother had dated once came and moved into our home 'cause he felt, "Well, I'll help take care of them." And he was a really dangerous, violent, drunken person. And within a month of my mother getting out of the hospital, she'd almost died, she married him.

SL: Oh.

TH: And what she needed was a hired man to help with the farm. Because to my mother at that point, keeping the farm meant everything to her. She had really come to love this way of life, and I think it meant, you know, resistance to her own family's past and what they thought as approval. And her own husband didn't want this way of life, but it meant everything to her. [00:22:07] And so in her mind the only way she had to keep it was to marry this total stranger, which she did, and it created,

for all of my siblings, it created the real hell of our—the rest of our growing up and a real distance between us and my mother and certainly this man who my mother—who was a good Catholic. You know, the church disapproved of her getting divorced, so she was actually able to get an annulment from her marriage, and she married this man in the church. You know, it was all part of her sense to do the right, moral thing. And but she knew within a few months of her mind getting cleared from medication and recovery she'd made a big mistake. But she stayed for another five very, very destructive years. In fact, it was when I had gone off to college that their marriage ended. [00:23:22] And when I was going to college, my mother was very envious of that. It seemed like a way of escape. It also seemed like one of the major people helping run this farm was gonna go disappear. And that wasn't fair. But I told her she should go to college, too. She should really—she had actually had a basketball scholarship to Middlebury College, but her father wouldn't let her go because he said, "Girls don't go to college, and certainly not for sports." So she never went, and instead, partly in spite to her father, she married my father, who was exactly the kind of wild, Irish kid that he wasn't gonna like. And in any event, by the time I was going to college, she felt she

could find a way to do that. And my stepfather could actually run the farm enough for her to be able to take some time. And he, of course, realized that this meant she was going to leave.

SL: Yes.

[00:24:27] TH: And so the—my first year of college, while she was going to school, too, became the most destructive year of our family's lives, and I felt very guilty and lucky that I was not there for it, but really violent for everybody else and destructive. So my step-father did things like say, you know, to my mother, "You're not gonna have anything when you leave." So he literally would—drove a tractor off a cliff with the hay baler and wagon and everything attached to it, just jumped off to let it go. It was a new tractor with debt and things behind it, so you know, there'll be all that. And so all kinds of crazy, destructive, violent things happened in that last year before she left. But the—so it was, I think, late in my sophomore year by the time my mother actually had moved away. She started going to school full time. She moved into a trailer in a town not too far away. My younger brother and sister went to school there. My mother lived on food stamps and student loans. And she is very competitive, and she said, "Well, if you're getting your four—your degree in four years, I'm getting mine in three." [SL

laughs] And she went from . . .

SL: I kinda love that.

TH: I do, too, but it was a [*laughter*] little bizarre but—and then she went and got her masters in social work in Albany, New York, at a university there, and turned out to have a very flourishing career. [00:26:14] She ran a program for juveniles in the LA County jail system. So her life trajectory was very dramatic after that. But it did mean that our life on a farm, which I've written about in particular in my—well, both books of poems. But it was hellish and violent, but there's—at the same time, there's nothing like country life, and there's nothing like the rhythms of birth and death and harvest and things on a farm. And I think one of the reasons I love coming here to Fayetteville and being in this area is that, as an adult, so, so many years later, things that I loved about farm life that I couldn't articulate or couldn't accept or couldn't wanna stay with. I, you know, I think my main imagination was how I shook the dust from my feet and left. And there was a lot of guilt about that but also a sense of that would be survival. That's the only way to live. It meant giving up something that was so fundamental to who we were, and so the farm was lost in bankruptcy and things auctioned off. There's nothing sadder than to be at a farm

auction of your own farm, equipment, your cars, your things in the house, your animals . . .

SL: The animals.

TH: . . . all of it. So—but on the other hand, that represented freedom for my mother, and there has not been any ambition from my siblings or my mother to be on a farm again. Although I know my mother likes—she doesn't live in a rural area, but she has that in her. I think I have that in her, too. But it's so—it's nostalgia and attraction and things, but it's not what we currently live.

[00:28:42] SL: So before your mother and your father split away from each other, I'm always interested in what happens for meals. Like were you expected, as a youngster, to be at the table at an appointed time?

TH: We were. Everybody ate together. It was a big farm family, and then, you know, my step-father had two kids of his own, so at one point we were six kids. And there might be neighbor's kids, too. But you know, there's a specific rhythm on a farm because you milk the cows at a certain time, and there are then all the other chores to do, and then there's the school bus coming at some point or other. So you know, every family has the tightness of their rhythms but so—and there were no other ways

to eat. You know, I think kids—people stand in the kitchen now and eat a little, or you can eat when you get home, but there're no microwaves or anything else. It was a woodstove. Things are cooked, everybody's involved in making it happen. Almost, you know, military style like that. And if you didn't eat then, you weren't—there probably wasn't gonna be anything. [00:30:04] But ironically, the fact—though we were really poor with no money for everything. But if you are on a farm, you have food. You know, there's a kind of—I think, rural poverty can be much better than urban poverty, and I've seen urban poverty around the world. There is a way you can feed yourself, you know, and you have maybe a little space and things. So we always had great food. And my mother, you know—we smoked meats. She made cheese. There was, you know—we always had lots of food and canned vegetables. And a lot of that was much less idyllic than it sounds because it was made with a lot of violence and urgency and yelling and, you know, people having jobs to do. I do think my favorite of these ever is my mother, who drank a lot of wine at the time that would come in big Gallo . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . gallon jugs of Gallo wine.

SL: Yes.

TH: So we had a lot of those jugs around, and my mother decided to make root beer. Had a recipe. Well, she hadn't really planned for how much expansion you'd need with the yeast [*laughs*] for the root beer. And these big, gallon jugs of wine started bursting all over the kitchen.

SL: Oh!

TH: And you know, in a dangerous way, I mean . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . big glass goin' everywhere. And my older brother just thought this was the funniest thing of—you know, [*unclear word*], you know. The destruction of all of that work and ambition. And so in my typical way of trying to find solutions to things and being the child who had to run things, I put on a snowmobile—no a—or my motorcycle helmet because we had dirt bikes—and my snowmobile outfit, and was—this was the summer—and went in there with big snowmobile gloves and the helmet and everything else and kind of did that, you know, with—[*laughs*] like they do with bomb squads and take the remaining root beer out of the house. [*Laughter*]

SL: So—and uncorked it, uncapped it . . .

TH: Yeah. Exactly.

SL: . . . so it wouldn't explode.

TH: Yeah.

SL: So how did it turn out?

TH: Oh, you know, with—we survived. You know, I mean, there was—it was fine. [*Laughter*] Yeah.

[00:32:31] SL: Well, so everyone played a role, and you kinda gave me a cacophony of sounds that are . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . going around to get the meals out. Once we were sea—you were seated at the table, was anyone in char—was the father figure in charge—did anyone ever say grace? Was there a time where it was quiet for a moment, or did it just keep rolling?

TH: Grace was said, but in a perfunctory way. And I was often the child who wanted that to happen and that we'd all sit and talk together. But the things that I was interested in were generally not of interest to my step-father, and I think, to some extent, my mother. It was just a really tough time. So we would be there, but it was, you know, "Stop pulling your sister's hair," "Why don't you"—there was always fighting. And you know, when there's drinking, there's more fighting. And then there was always fighting about money. You know, having enough of it or who should be doing what work and things for it, and to a thread that we had earlier, there was always the talk that

anything we complained about or wanted, "You're free to leave any time." And that was, you know, since the time we were twelve, thirteen, the sense that, you know, you're only here because I say you can be here, and you could be out on your own any time. [00:34:23] So I think that sense, when you talked about imagining your parents gone and who would care for you, that was always a threat to us, and so I don't—I think one part was, "Thank God. We'd, you know, be free at last [laughs], free at la"—but another part is that you'd probably have to prepare for that, that that wasn't an idle threat. And divorce made that somewhat come—my older brother did move out when he was just turned seventeen, so he spent the last two years of high school living a little bit with my father, but that didn't work, and then he lived with a friend's family. And we actually saw him at his graduation and hadn't seen him for a few months. And it was a such a painful—you know, at home. I mean, I have in school.

SL: Right.

TH: But wi—I went to school with over 400 kids kindergarten through twelfth grade, so not seeing your brother around is a big deal in a tiny [laughs] town.

SL: Sure.

TH: And that he's living elsewhere. I remember very—how sad that graduation was 'cause it seemed emblematic of what was happening to our family . . .

SL: Family.

TH: . . . generally was that that was the beginning of how we'd all go our separate ways. [00:35:44] I do think one of the great joys of my adulthood is that all four of us are close now, my siblings. And I'm close to my mom and my dad. You know, they are not close to one another, obviously, or nee—anywhere ne—live anywhere near one another, but one of the things I think, probably, that my greatest lesson in life—I don't even generally talk this way about lessons and life, but—is that, you know, we can be forgiven for what we've gotten wrong or—and wh—we can forgive, and the story's never over in a family. At least it hasn't been for us, and we've been able to build, I think, some really rich, deep connections as adults that we didn't have from my teenage years through probably my mid-thirties, at least. So twenty years. And then by the time I'm for—I'm fifty-four now. But you know, the last fifteen years or more have been really extraordinary ones of all of us having some real closeness again.

SL: Being family.

TH: Yeah.

[00:37:13] SL: That's interesting. You know, I know that you've—
careerwise—and I usually don't concentrate too much on career
because [*TH laughs*] it's out there, and people know about . . .

TH: Okay, sure.

SL: . . . it, and it's written about.

TH: Sure.

SL: So I try to dive into areas that aren't written about. [00:37:34]
I know that you have a great affinity for the arts, and I'm just
wondering what were the—what kind of media was available to
you out at the farm? You were talking about one and a half
channels—one—two . . .

TH: Sure.

SL: . . . a couple channels on TV. I'm assuming that you had radio.
And so you could hear stuff going on. Was there a kind of music
that permeated the house . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . traditionally, or . . .

TH: So there was, but it was very funny. So when I arrived here, the
flight attendant the other day—she had a great voice. Woman
about my age, and she started singing as we were landing,
talking. And she sang a song by Glen Campbell about Arkansas
that I didn't remember.

SL: Arkansas Lineman?

TH: Yes. [*SL laughs*] But—no, it wasn't Arkansas Lineman 'cause I did know that. But it was something about the joys of being home.

SL: Okay.

TH: And I just didn't recognize it. But she sang it so beautifully. And I listened to Glen Campbell on 8-track tape cleaning the barn and feeding the cows. So Patsy Cline was about as kind of authentic country as we'd hear.

SL: Yes.

TH: So we weren't really listening to Hank Williams and—you know, 'cause we were listening to—this was that moment, and I think Glenn Campbell embodied it, of country becoming a little pop.

SL: Yes.

[00:39:19] TH: And so we had, you know, some Johnny Cash, but then it would be more Neil Diamond. You know, that was what my mother's aesthetic was, and she controlled the—what was that? There was a company like Book-of-the-Month club. Maybe it was tape-of-the-month club, but you could get your 8-track tapes in, and so my mother would get these things, and you know, they'd be insanely catchy songs, but they weren't good songs. [*Laughter*] And we'd be trapped by them. But for me,

music in the school band was one of my escapes and first experience with having a sense of a skill that you would master that's physical 'cause I was not an athlete. It's physical and not just cerebral, and that the mastery of it would take practice and become teasin—it was not lost on me that it was martial, you know. I was the leader of the drum section. We had a, you know, one of those very kind of sports-town marching bands, and we . . .

SL: A drum major.

TH: . . . competed everywhere, did all that. And then—but I also played in the concert band, and I was a drummer in the jazz band through high school and actually joined the musician's union because my band teacher was a real charismatic guy, and I would play percussion in various professional gigs where he would be the star drummer or maybe the trumpet. He was a—played a lot of things. And I was never good enough where I could've imagined being a professional musician, but he was a mentor to me, and I made money, you know—as . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old being with all these adult musicians and gettin' out of the house. And if you came home with cash, you could miss chores. So music was really,

deeply important to me. [00:41:50] But even when we'd be playing jazz—it's a very interesting thing. I think something happened in American culture at that time, too, that—authentic, real jazz was not what we played. Like authentic country and all the folk music that might've been really—mean something to people. We were getting the canned, commercialized versions. And so you know, for marching band, we would play pop hits that'd been reorchestrated for a marching band.

SL: Marching—course.

TH: And jazz band—we'd be playing kind of medleys of things and soft versions of—so you know, we weren't learning about Coltrane or, you know, even big band stuff like Louis Armstrong. That interest and obsession with music came much later for me. And so it was not something people talked about with music. We didn't really have books in the house, and as I said, one TV station, and the radio was rarely on.

SL: Okay.

TH: As I remember. Yeah.

[00:43:13] SL: So were there any musical instruments in the house?

TH: I had a drum set, and I . . .

SL: A full trap set?

TH: Full trap set.

SL: Wow.

TH: Cymbals and . . .

SL: Ludwig?

TH: . . . and—oh yeah, it was a good Pearl drum set, and you know, I had made money, so I could afford to buy it, so it was—and it was in my room. And thank God, we had a big farmhouse, but you could hear it, you know. And I'm sure I smashed away on it. [00:43:43] But my brother played trumpet for a while, but he was really not all that interested in it. And there weren't really other arts, I think. My mother took up ceramics. That was big. And she got a kiln and did—but it was not something that we were invited to participate in or to learn fr—it was her . . .

SL: [*Unclear word*]

TH: . . . activity with some girlfriends or something to get away from us so—and I never—we never had art in our school. So music—you'd either play football, basketball, and baseball, which were the only three sports. There was no swimming, no tennis, no anything else. And you'd either play those three sports, or you'd be in the band. Those were the . . .

SL: That was pretty much the way it was . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . across the country for . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . a long time.

TH: Exactly.

[00:44:36] SL: Yeah. So you know, you've mentioned siblings several times. An older brother. What—tell me—I should ask you their names and their genders. [*Laughs*]

TH: Sure, sure, sure. So my older brother, Joe, he is a mechanic and lives not far from the suburban part of New York, a little more remote, from where we were first born. And he has three adult kids, now. My sister is—Traci—she is just retiring from the LA County sheriff's department. She's been a detective for . . .

SL: Wow.

TH: . . . her life.

SL: Is this the younger sister?

TH: Younger sister.

SL: Okay.

TH: She's five years younger, and she is a remarkable person. I think of my siblings, she's the most like me, and she was an incredible cop. She was undercover for many years . . .

SL: That's hard.

TH: . . . which you can only imagine in the violent drug culture that

she was a part of. I mean, she lost two partners—things. So she's coming to the end of a remarkable twenty-year part of her career. She was the last of the four of us to come sort of into the . . .

SL: To reunion.

TH: . . . family again. It's strange because I do think that she's the most like me and things, but she's most like my father in wanting to be—to run off and be away. [00:46:17] And then my younger brother lives outside of Dallas, and he runs a big electrical contracting firm that, you know, does electrical work for hospitals and universities and airports and things, so he's had really terrific success. And he has a blended family, two of his own kids and three with his current wife's family. They're just—they're terrific. So that's—and then I have a half-sister. My father remarried and has a daughter, Renee, who did not grow up with us at all. And I think one of the shames for the four of us was that we have a sister—shares our name—things. My mother certainly didn't have any interest in us . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . getting to know her. But we actually have as—partly as all of us have started to get a little bit closer to my father, who is now seventy-eight—as we've gotten closer to him, we've gotten

to start to know his daughter, Renee, my sister, who's getting married in—next weekend.

SL: Wow.

TH: Yeah. And she's a waitress. Just had her first child.

SL: Wow.

TH: Yeah.

[00:47:30] SL: So [*door opens*]*—hey.*

Randy Dixon: They're saying that to keep you on schedule so you can make your flight, we probably need to wrap up in about fifteen minutes.

SL: Okay . . .

TH: Fifteen minutes?

SL: . . . great.

TH: Oh.

SL: Thank you.

TH: Wait, what time is it?

SL: I don't know. I turned off . . .

TH: I think we probably have a little more time than that. We can probably do half an hour. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well.

TH: All right.

SL: As long as we're having fun.

TH: Yeah, exactly. [*Laughter*]

SL: So did you . . .

TH: 'Cause we haven't talked anything about politics or anything.

SL: No. [*TH laughs*] We haven't. I mean, I—I'm quite humbled.

'Cause you've had a great career, and I don't mean to slight it in any way by not talking about it.

TH: Oh, no, sure.

SL: And we can roll around to . . .

TH: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . that as we need to, but it's—so I have this belief that our path is really decided almost before we can remember.

[00:48:23] TH: I think that's true. You know, so much of cognitive psychology shows how much early childhood matters. And I will say both of my parents were fiercely smart, and somehow in that, their—the childhood we had was more protected than our adolescence . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . from whatever circumstances that had. It gave the four of us, I think, opportunities and even the mental growth and things that, had the violence and things been happening even a few years—had happened a few years—happened earlier, I think we wouldn't have had as much internal resources and abilities as we

have. And what I should say is, you know, I feel I've told a somewhat bleak tale, but I love my parents fiercely, and we've all worked to have relationships. I do think, you know, alcohol is a really deadly thing. And poverty's a deadly thing. And you put those two together, and you put kids having kids themselves—you know, it's not—it's an old story.

SL: Yes.

TH: And that's part of—I feel very blessed to have been given many opportunities to escape the traps of that story and be able to, which is also an American thing, right? You just have the chance. Some people don't. But many of us have the chance to invent ourselves anew.

[00:50:12] SL: Yeah. But you have—I think we gain those tools quite early . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . to do that.

TH: And again, if you were safe enough as a kid and there really—you know—none of—nobody in my family ever felt that somebody couldn't be something. You know, byu—the sense in my family was "Go do it on your own. We don't care what you're doing." But no one ever felt, "Oh, no. You can't do that."

[00:50:40] I'll never forget—'cause my mother wasn't all that

engaged, but when I was a senior in—going to be a senior in high school. There was nothing, really, left to study at school. It's a small school, there's nuth—and I thought, "Well, I'll—maybe I'll go to the local college"—it's five miles' drive to Oneonta, New York—"and take some classes there." And my principal said to me, "You know, you're gonna go to college. You should really focus on some skills and go to the vocational high school part of it here and learn to weld and to"—and I actually knew how to do some of these things basically enough, working on a farm . . .

SL: Absolutely.

TH: . . . and being—so I at the time was very insulted by that and thought, "That's just dumb." It never occurred to me to graduate from high school early because I needed to be there at the farm.

SL: Farm.

TH: It was gonna be bad enough when I left. But so I have to just tell these one story that brings me to escaping all of that.

[00:51:45] So, like Bill Clinton, I went to Boys' State. And I talk to so many people who have no idea what Boys and Girls State were, but anybody who lived in a rural place knew them, in large measure because they were recruiting places for the

military academies. You know, you'd have the smart, successful, and often athletic boys, in particular, in these rural places gonna be—largely be from conservative families. It's good recruiting ground for them and so . . .

SL: Yeah, we woke up to reveille.

TH: Yeah. Exactly.

SL: Over the PA.

TH: So you know about it.

SL: Yes. I do.

TH: So anyway. [*SL laughs*] But what happened in our county—so damn rural. Nobody's been anywhere. They've certainly never to been someplace where there're gonna be a couple hundred guys together, and you're gonna meet the governor and do all this. So the American Legion ran it with the marines and the local American Legion chapter had a softball game with the boys from all the schools in our county who were going with the boys who were graduating from high school soon and—to meet them. [00:52:53] And I'll never forget this. We went to Morris, New York, to play a softball game. And I am not an athlete. I mean, I actually am. I do a lot of running and mountain climbing and things that were not team sports . . .

SL: Right.

TH: . . . and that's a whole other history. But I was not looking for, "Oh, yeah, let's go play ball with the guys." And but there was one kid, graduating senior from another school, who was wearing a Yale T-shirt. And he was this charismatic, tall, athletic guy. He was an athlete. And all the boys were gathered around him 'cause he was going to Yale. And you know, I went to a school where people didn't go to college, so the idea that someone was—you know, and nobody knew where Yale was, but I mean—and so—that. [*SL laughs*] And he was a really terrific kid. He said, you know, "All of you guys should apply to good schools. They want us, you know. They don't get a lot of poor farm kids to apply" . . .

SL: Sure.

TH: . . . "and if you're smart, you should do it." Nobody had guidance counselors telling them that, but this kid did. And some boy asked, "Well, what did you get on your SATs?" And he told him, and I can't remember the numbers, but I'm hanging back from this, and I'd just taken my SATs as a junior. And I heard what he said, and I said, "Oh my God, I did much better on my SATs than that. If he can go to Yale, I can go to Harvard." [*SL laughs*] And so [*laughter*] the great embarrassment of my intellectual life is that Harvard's the only

place I applied to 'cause I was sure from that one conversa—I didn't know where it was. I did not know. We requested the brochure. My mother said, "Great. Sure. Do all this." You know, "You won't really—you know, but do it." [00:54:54] And so my English teacher found this all ludicrous and bet me twenty-five bucks in front of my class that I wouldn't get in, and I wouldn't be smart enough, and they're all rich, bleh-bleh bleh. It was a real humiliating experience.

SL: Wow.

TH: And he never paid. But I did apply. And I got in in early action, in November. And so I'd never been there. The only real college campus besides State University at Oneonta I'd ever been to was for 4-H to show cows at Cornell.

SL: Okay.

[00:55:33] TH: And so I get in, and I go to visit in January for the first time. And I drive our family's pickup, and it still has hay in the back [*SL laughs*], and we had not washed it. And the thing I remember most is that I have to, in Cambridge, make a left turn across four lanes of traffic and a highway to get there, which I had never done before. And I'm in a pickup truck driving around Harvard square thinking, you know, unlike here, "Where's the university?" And the gates—you drive in and it—it wasn't there.

So I actually finally park in a parking garage, and I ask someone, "Can you tell me where Harvard is?" And the guy says to me, "It's all around you, idiot." [*SL laughs*] That was my welcome. But so I got there and realized I'd won the lottery to go to such a great university. But my most important feeling there was of great shame that I didn't know about any of the rest of the world. Maybe Harvard wasn't even the right place for me. It was out of this kind of childish arrogance of, you know, he did that, I'll be compet—I'll do this knowing nothing about it all. And so I went home from this trip by myself 'cause I could—my step-father and mother couldn't go with me because somebody's gotta be at the farm . . .

TH: Right.

SL: . . . at different times. [00:57:06] So my—I didn't talk about it. And it was out of a real sense of both personal embarrassment that the world's a hell of a lot bigger than I knew and should've been prepared to think about and be sophisticated about, but also harboring this thing of "Oh my God, my life is going to be changed by this." And so my mother and step-father went up few weeks later. And I think my mother's very afraid. She doesn't know why I haven't really been able to talk about it. And she's thinking, "He's gonna feel like he's not gonna fit in,"

which was never the thought I had at all. And so when she got there, the guy who gave them a tour was a football player from Quincy, Massachusetts, and a real guy. And my mother and step-father and he went out for a beer after he took them on the college tour. And my mother's thinking to herself, "I can go here. This is an amazing place. How dare Tom [*SL laughs*] not come back just dancin' around in love." [00:58:18] And so my mother barely spoke to me from March until September when I went off to school because she was gonna then start to try to start with the state university and deal with her husband, and I was getting off scot-free and didn't even show joy for it. And it took us a long time to get over that drama of school. But yeah, that was my big . . .

SL: Epiphany.

TH: . . . shift away—yes. And I had a remarkable time at Harvard. I studied philosophy and you know, had just incredible teachers like Seamus Heaney and all—so—and it was terrific. And I had nobody in my family say, "So what are you gonna do with anything?" You know, no pressure to say 'Why aren't you studying to be a doctor or, you know, an engineer or something?' So.

[00:59:15] SL: So a huge cultural difference, of course.

TH: Yeah.

SL: But on the farm, I'm assuming that you guys were, like, on well water.

TH: Yes. Oh, yes, we . . .

SL: There was no . . .

TH: . . . actually—they—you know, the guys came with the divining rods when we put in our first well. And we also had a big, beautiful pond that put some fresh water for the barns and things, so yes. Well water.

SL: And so was water pumped into the house? Was there actually running water in the house at all?

TH: Oh yeah. We got—we had running water. Yes, from the . . .

SL: Fr—okay. Well that's good.

TH: Yeah.

SL: That's good.

TH: Yeah. But the—but it was, when we first got in this farm house, it was only on the ground floor and not upstairs . . .

SL: Upstairs.

TH: . . . and—yeah. And our one bathroom was on the downstairs of the house.

[01:00:05] SL: Well, that's better than a lot of rural . . .

TH: Oh yeah, yeah. No. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . living.

TH: Yes.

SL: So and the school—you're saying grades one through . . .

TH: Yeah, kindergarten through . . .

SL: . . . high school . . .

TH: . . . twelve, yeah. In one building.

SL: It was four hundred kids?

TH: Yeah. Yeah. And you know . . .

SL: So now you're—go to Harvard.

TH: Yes.

SL: And the campus is ginormous.

TH: Yes.

SL: You're now in the city . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . that you haven't really seen for quite a while.

TH: Right.

SL: I guess maybe you'd . . .

[01:00:38] TH: Well, I never saw a city. And you know, we lived in Westchester as a very little boy, but that's the city, and you know, a lot of working-class suburbanites don't ever go there if they don't need to. So you know, I knew nothing about urban life before then. But I took to it fast.

[01:00:55] SL: So was the—were the kids at Harvard, were they accommodating to . . .

TH: Well, so what . . .

SL: . . . your background? I mean . . .

TH: . . . made my life really easy was I got very involved with the Catholic student organization.

SL: Okay.

TH: And so it was a very warm and welcoming place in ways that I'm sure the rest of Harvard—you know, Harvard's not unlike any other competitive place. There are good people. There are callous people. There are, you know, caring p—and I met lots of wonderful people, and I had this safety place of a spiritual community that made me feel right at home. And I thought for a very long time of becoming a priest, and the Jesuits at Western Theologian Seminary were right there involved with all this, so that became a really animating part of my college intellectual life. And so a really nurturing place to be.

[01:02:00] SL: Maybe we should talk about this for a moment.

TH: Sure.

SL: The—so just grace by habit around the dinner table. Did you go to church every Sunday?

TH: Yes, we did. Every Sunday.

SL: And . . .

TH: We went to a Lutheran church. There were no Catholics in this part of upstate New York, so there was—it was a missionary part of another parish, and on Saturday nights we used a Lutheran church for Catholic mass. So weirdly, we would have mass, but we didn't have a Catholic community. That was far away and occasional that you'd go to. And but my mother's very Catholic at the time, and so it was—had there been a Catholic church local and priests that were not just coming through to do mass, we would've had—definitely had them more in our lives. My mother eventually left the Catholic church, and she's a Methodist now. But—and I don't think any of us is an active—she's an active church goer, but I don't think anybody else in our family is. And nobody's involved with the Catholic church.

[01:03:18] SL: So once a week?

TH: Yes. Once a week.

SL: Catholics as a family.

TH: You know, and it was a place where I flourished because Catholic priests, at least the ones I knew of—you know, these were examples of men who were respected for being intellectuals and for being sophisticated and not, you know—they would—they were the model that was better than a high school teacher

'cause nobody really respected the schools, and everything else. There was something [*unclear word*] of being a little sad about that in a rural school. But being a priest had a kind of mystery, and you probably had traveled and lived elsewhere, and you know, probably unconscious—certainly unconsciously to me because I wasn't aware of it, but you know, I came out when I was twenty-three. But so probably that unconscious sense of "here is a way to live without being married to a woman by d"—you know, but there was some deep attraction to me about this as a model of how a person like me, whoever I didn't yet know I was, might live. And also probably a way out. So and fortunately, you know, my story does not involve any of the terrible things that happened to young [*laughs*] people in the Catholic church. I had just really terrific priests, and then when I got to Harvard, it was a very serious, intellectual kind of theological engagement and a real commitment to social justice. And so I was active in a soup kitchen and things so—but it made me feel very at home when I got to Harvard.

[01:05:11] SL: So did you take theology classes?

TH: Well, I studied philosophy. That was . . .

SL: That's a . . .

TH: . . . my major. So—it's funny. What I chose, I thought, was

to—and it—I would take more rigorous philosophy classes and have the theology be things I studied kind of in the study groups and other things at the student—Catholic Student Center. They were different. Yeah.

SL: Well, maybe—how is that different? I mean . . .

TH: You know, I think, also unconsciously, I was having my resistance to the Catholic church. And this is—John Paul became the pope and instituted a lot of conservative bishops, including Bernard Law in Boston. You know, who was disgraced later. But they came down hard on all kinds of social conservative issues and things. And which didn't make sense in a liberal place like Harvard. And you could easily see so many people like myself—like myself pushed away from the Catholic church because—a place with a rich intellectual tradition and ability to accommodate doubt and everything else, but if you weren't toeing the line for them on these specific positions and some of them even political positions—it seemed, you know, "All right, you have no place here."

SL: In the church.

[01:06:41] TH: And then when I came out, it clearly was "You have no place here." And I had no interest in accommodating—at that point, there was really no reason to—I had all the freedom in the

world—to accommodate to a tradition that you'd have to lie within and things. So what I regretted is that it felt like I had to throw the baby out with the bathwater . . .

SL: Yeah.

TH: . . . that tradition that I loved and people I thought were smart. But you know, that's an inherent drama the church has had for centuries. And it's wonderful that this pope seems uninterested [*laughs*] in that drama himself. But so it gave me a safe place at Harvard. And then I think what I wanted was my education to feel less safe and more rigorous and maybe secular. And so that's what I got in just extraordinary terms. Really great teachers, and philosophy department is very small, so you had some of the great minds in contemporary philosophy that you'd have seminars with five people. And so somehow the giantness of Harvard, I really had a lot of close, good teaching.

SL: Yeah, my son—one of my sons chose philosophy at . . .

TH: Oh yeah?

SL: . . . Washington and Lee, and I . . .

TH: Oh, that's a great philosophy program, too. Yes.

SL: Yeah, he was very . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . appreciative of it.

TH: Yeah.

[01:08:09] SL: Yeah. So I would think that all kinds of things happened for you, personally, when you got to Harvard. First of all, now you're really exposed to the rest of the world . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . that you had not been a part of. I mean, your role was basically daylight coming up and getting the chores done and . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . twilight and getting the chores put to bed. But at Harvard, now you've got museums, you've got art galleries, you've got theater, you've got every flavor of music.

TH: Yeah.

SL: And also you're there, I guess, in the early [19]80s?

TH: [Nineteen] eighties, early [19]80s. [Nineteen] seventy-nine, September of [19]79 I started, June of [19]83 I graduated, yeah.

[01:08:56] SL: So the whole rock-and-roll thing . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . has . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: . . . matured . . .

TH: No, we had every kind of thing. But you know, some of that I took with a grain of salt. I'll never forget—so Malcolm Gladwell was asked once in a Q&A if he had the power to change anything about education in America, what would he do? And he said, "Well, I don't really know about those sorts of things and have power to do something like that in a sense," but he said, "I think one thing that would be great is if, when you were applying for a job, you could not tell and people could not ask where you went to college." And I think he's right about that because I think that what I was given at Harvard was a privilege and an access to an elite world that has been immensely beneficial to me and—but it isn't about the quality of the education. You can get a damn good education at hundreds of colleges around this coun—I mean, one thing I love about being here is the conversations I have with such gifted scholars and intellectuals here. And I knew that early on. I wasn't gonna say no to this privilege, but I knew it wasn't about me, you know. There were countless other people who were doing amazing things, working really hard. But yes, I was put into a life of real privilege. [01:10:41] And I do think maybe my engagement with the church still—you know, you can't work at a soup kitchen or you can't go home to a mother who's going to the state university with student loans

and food stamps until Ronald Reagan, actually, the next year, took them away 'cause he felt students getting food stamps had to be on the make somehow. But so you couldn't have that life and not know this was a real privilege that I was having that, you know, first of all, wasn't necessary. I wasn't gonna—it wasn't Harvard or nothing . . .

SL: Right.

TH: . . . for me. And it also just made me feel that I needed to make the most of it, but it wasn't something that I necessarily deserved, you know. It was a gift. So I've never—I loved Harvard. I just had the really extraordinary time. But I've never been a rah-rah alumnus of feeling that, you know, this is the be-all and end-all, and to be honest I would never financially support there as opposed to many of the other places where I do feel it's urgent to support certain education projects and things because there's no other . . .

SL: Right.

TH: . . . body doing it. So.

[01:12:10] SL: I—we're probably about to bump up on some of our time here. And you've mentioned coming out a couple of times just . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . in passing.

TH: Sure.

SL: So I'm gonna kinda take that cue.

TH: Kay.

SL: At twenty-three years old—and it's 1984.

TH: Yeah.

SL: What is the—what's happening in the gay community at that time?

TH: Yeah, so . . .

SL: And how . . .

TH: . . . I was . . .

SL: . . . much . . .

TH: For four years, from my senior year of college for the next four, I was with a girl that I fell in love with and loved, and we—it's the first sex I had and first real love, and it was an amazing relationship. But fast forward this, but I was kissed by a man one summer during that relationship and felt like the lights had gone on. These were—this was not something I knew about myself, not something I had ever experimented with. But I certainly felt as an adult then that I had to, but here was a woman I was really in love with, and we had a good sexual relationship, too. So it was a big confusion for me of what to do.

[01:13:33] And literally in—within six months of this happening, the cover story on *Time* magazine came out about this new, strange virus, so my coming out came right at the time of AIDS. And I think for a lot of people my age, we felt that the scythe of death had swooped just above our heads . . .

SL: Yeah.

TH: . . . because, yes, AIDS there, but it was in New York and San Francisco, and it was people older than me probably by a decade or more. And of course, that became much more complicated story than that. But I still lost far fewer friends to AIDS than, say, my—I've been with someone for twenty-three years, my partner, Fred, who's—he's the chairman of the Export-Import Bank, and he's the reason I met the Clintons 'cause he ran the SBA in Clinton's second term and has been actively involved with them. And so my life in politics and the public service and things have come through our twenty-three years together.

[01:14:48] But his generation—he's nine years older than I am. He had far more friends die.

SL: That he lost.

TH: But it did define much of my adulthood. I mean, I was on President Clinton's White House Council on HIV and AIDS, and you know, I was active in Act Up and other activism things. So

no question that—and it was also this transformative time, and mine adult life has gone from Ronald Reagan not willing to mention the word AIDS and no money being spent on this health disaster to, you know, federal marriage protection.

SL: Yeah.

[01:15:32] TH: And just last week I was in Uganda meeting with gay activists there, which is a remarkable thing because these are people who get thrown out of their homes and jobs and beaten, and it's, you know, illegal. And to see people who are living with that kind of threat—it's a cognitive dissonance because I've lived my entire adult life as an out, openly gay person since twenty-three or -four. And quite frankly in large, urban, eastern environments as an affluent person in education and the arts, I've rarely felt any . . .

SL: Danger.

TH: . . . prejudice. And I've always had the freedom to define the scenario. You know, there're very little that I've had to suffer as a consequence of it, but I've also seen the culture at large just change so dramatically for that. So yes, it's one part of our story. But for Fred and me, I think, we've always been out and open, but we sort of don't live in a gay community. We've always both wanted to be in a larger community and—both

politically and socially and things, so I think we've always just been taken for another couple. [*SL laughs*]

[01:17:02] SL: I'd probably be remiss if I didn't happen to mention the Fulbright scholarship program.

TH: Oh, sure!

SL: 'Cause . . .

TH: Yes. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . you're here at Mecca [*laughs*] for the—did you ever get to meet Senator Fulbright?

TH: I did not. Last night I gave a speech about that and not meeting him because I felt—I told—called my talk "Searching for the Senator." And you know, I traveled to forty countries in sharing this pro—really remarkable program. But—and I met so many people who have met him. You know, older Fulbright scholars in different countries. And I told the story of one man that I met in Nepal who kept the letter from Senator Fulbright giving—announcing that he'd won his Fulbright Scholar from 1952 . . .

SL: Wow.

TH: . . . and he kept it in his breast pocket over his heart his whole life. [01:17:56] So what I have learned about him has been this quest. I didn't really even know about the Fulbright program so much, but because of, you know, Fred and I were

supporters of Hillary for—first and then jumped on board when she was out and supported the president but—so the president appoints the Fulbright Board, but had it not been for Hillary Clinton and my closeness to them, I probably would not have been chosen by the White House itself. So she was very instrumental in making that happen. And my partner was chairing the Export-Import Bank and would be really based in Washington as a big member of the president's economic team. So I wanted to have some role there, somehow. I wasn't really wanting to live in Washington full time but—so being on a board like this seemed like a terrific way, and obviously that's about your access and who you know and other things. And you just hope that, well, if you're given that access and given a responsibility that you do a damn good job to, you know—so I didn't deserve this, but at least you get elected chair by your peers. So I was elected three times to be chair, and that really became more than a half-time job for me, traveling and trying to really make the program sort of adapt to twenty-first-century technology and how higher education is changing, and so I'm finishing a book of essays about that as a one thing. [01:19:31] But it's been a remarkable experience. And it's brought me here a lot because the archives are here, and the college is named

here, and he has that history here, and I wanted to find out who he was and what he came from, so I've read all his biographies, and I've been to the archives, and I've written about him, but I never did meet him.

SL: Really remarkable guy.

TH: Yeah.

[01:19:56] SL: I only met him late in his life, but I knew his family.

TH: Right. Sure.

SL: And I did get to sit across from Lee Williams . . .

TH: Yes.

SL: . . . who was his staff.

TH: Yes.

SL: Did you ever get to meet Lee?

TH: I did, yes. Yes. But didn't know him well, but, yes, it's—that was once that I felt like guess I—maybe I'll still have time.

SL: Yeah.

TH: But, you know . . .

[01:20:22] SL: Well, he's—he was very generous with our time together. And then there's David Lambert.

TH: Oh, so do you have an interview with Lee . . .

SL: Yes.

TH: . . . I could watch?

SL: Yes.

TH: Oh, that would be great to see.

SL: Be happy to share it with you.

TH: Sure. I'd love to.

SL: Okay.

TH: Love to.

SL: We can do that. Is there anything else that you want to talk about? I just sense that they're gonna be opening that door here pretty soon.

TH: I think they pro—*[laughter]*

SL: So I wanna give you a chance . . .

TH: Aw.

SL: . . . to just talk about anything that you want . . .

TH: Sure.

SL: . . . to talk about before we wrap up. Is—if there's anything . . .

[01:20:53] TH: Yeah. You know, I do feel as if talking so much about my childhood, I haven't talked about my adult life and my life with a partner for twenty-three years. And it seems odd not to because our relationship is so much of what—who I am and what I've had the freedom to be able to do, to be. Partner for—with someone who is very successful in business and then has been deeply active in politics and has pushed me to—I wouldn't

have even tried to be on the Fulbright board if it weren't for Fred believing that, "No, you're supposed to be at this league with me and with the rest of people helping to shape what our country's future is." [01:21:53] And so just one story about him. As you had said, I've always been involved in the arts and other things. And so when Nelson Mandela first visited New York City, I was working with Bob De Niro, Robert De Niro, on starting a—he was starting a film center in Tribeca, and so I'd gotten to know him. And so Mandela was asked, "What do you wanna do when you come?" And of course, the red carpets gonna be rolled out. And he said one of the things he wanted was to meet every great, living, American boxer. And De Niro said, "I'm hosting that." [SL laughs] And he said he would get that to happen, and we had to raise money for the African National Congress. But that was like shooting fish in a barrel. I mean, you know, come be with Mohammed Ali and Joe Foreman and [laughs] you know—and Robert De Niro and, you know, the one living saint.

SL: Right.

[01:22:51] TH: So I did that, and it actually helped launch a consulting business for me in the arts, those contacts and things. And fast forward a year later, David Dinkins, the mayor, was running for reelection, and he lost to Rudy Giuliani. And I got a

call from his deputy mayor, a very famed political strategist named Bill Lynch. And Bill said, "Tom, I'm goin' through the list of the mayor's supporters, and I don't see your name." And I'd never suppor—I just wasn't involved in politics in that way, certainly not electoral politics of—not as a donors. And so I said, "Oh, Bill, of c—where?" you know. And he said, "Well, where are you on the weekend?" And I told him where on Long Island, I—a weekend place. And he said, "That's funny. The mayor's gonna be there tomorrow from five to seven at this address, and you'll bring a check for \$2,500," and I said, "I certainly will, Bill." [Laughter] And so it was at my partner, Fred's, home, and Mayor Dinkins introduced us to one another. And as he said for years after that, we were the only good thing that happened out of that election. But so it was politics that brought us together. And it's been a huge part of our lives ever since.

[01:24:15] SL: I'm so glad you told me that story 'cause I was gonna ask you, "Well, we should start with how you met."

[Laughter]

TH: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

SL: Well, so your relationship with Fred just escalated after that? I mean, how soon . . .

TH: It was love at first sight.

SL: It was.

TH: It really was. It was one of those strange things. I had left the one relationship I had had with a man, which was five years, and it was terrific. We're still friends, but it was, you know, it was a young person's relationship. So I was single and thirty and—thirty-one. And Fred was just—had ended a similar five-year relationship, and you know, it was just . . .

SL: It was time.

TH: It was time and meant to be. And he's someone you should interview.

SL: Okay.

[01:25:05] TH: He's a remarkable person. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, tell him hi for me and . . .

TH: I will.

SL: I would love to . . .

TH: Yeah.

SL: I would love—it'd be great honor.

TH: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So.

TH: I think they're comin'. [*Laughs*]

SL: You think they are?

TH: Yeah. Okay. We gotta go?

SL: Okay.

RD: Sorry, yeah.

SL: We gotta quit?

RD: We've pushed it a little bit.

SL: Okay.

TH: Okay.

SL: All right.

RD: But . . .

SL: Well, thank you. Thank you.

TH: Oh, well, thank you.

[End of interview 01:25:28]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]