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Rowan County Marriage Equality & Religious
Liberty Project

Fall 2015

Carla Rucker

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Carla Rucker

Interviewer: This is a conversation with Carla Rucker for the Kentucky marriage equality and religious liberty oral history project. We're in the studio room of Breckenridge Hall at Morehead State's campus located in Rowan County, Kentucky. It is 10:30am on June 23rd, 2016. My name is Sherry Kelly.

Carla, can you give us a little bit of biographical information? Do you care to tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

Rucker: Sure. I grew up in Mount Washington, Kentucky, which is right outside of Louisville in Bullitt County. Raised there on a farm and then I graduated high school, came to MSU as a student back in 1975. Graduated in four years with a double major with honors and all that good stuff. Raised in the Baptist church. Have met my husband here, he's from Fleming County and so we've lived in Morehead in Rowan County since 1981 I believe.

Interviewer: You have mentioned that you were raised in the Baptist church. Do you care to tell me a few of your childhood experiences?

Rucker: Okay. As related to church? Okay. When I was eight years old I was up in the balcony and I heard somebody call my name. They said Carla and it was so real. I looked around and there wasn't anybody there, and at that time I knew that God had called my name. Regardless how flaky that may sound, it's real and I know, I know it's real. So, I became active in the youth group. And we did, we had a small ensemble. We sang, we traveled and sang. Had a large youth choir. We did musical programs in our high school at the time. And that's always been very real to me, very important part of my life.

Interviewer: What about your current church membership or your organizationally, organizations that you belong to or involved?

Rucker: Okay, as I said I was raised Southern Baptist. When I met my husband, he was actually raised a Methodist, and somehow, we ended up in the Assembly of God Church. So we are members of the Assemblies of God. My husband is actually an ordained minister. Currently, we just have church in our home and we have a family that comes all the way actually from Montgomery County and meets with us. And we've been doing that for a number of years. Involved with some other friends, locally that we pray and we, you know, meet together and there's some unity there and so that's always good.

Interviewer: How did you become involved in the religious liberty movement or did you become involved?

Rucker: You know, when they scheduled the prayer vigil, we participated in that because we strongly believe in the sanctity of marriage. That marriage is between a man and a woman, period. You know, when God said to multiply, you know, to procreate, multiply. You can't do that unless you're a man and a woman. And that's just one of the reasons. He said in order how things are to be and when we don't do that it's not that He's a God up there with a stick going to

beat us. It's because that's what's best for us. He loves us so very much that He wants what's best for us and that is what's best. That's how we can actually be fulfilled.

Interviewer: You mentioned the prayer vigil.

Rucker: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Is that the prayer vigil that you went to here?

Rucker: Yes?

Interviewer: Were there other prayer vigils?

Rucker: Yes, the one that we went to. Of course, we prayed at home and then we heard that, you know, they were having that the prayer vigil in, at the courthouse so we met there. I don't remember how many there were. There were quite a few that were there and we prayed together there. There was the, you know, that whatever happened in Grayson on September the 8th. We weren't able to go there because we'd already scheduled, and actually the statewide Assemblies of God was having a prayer meeting that day at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County. So, we had about 300 people there that were praying, not just for the marriage equality stuff but just praying in general for an awakening to come to Kentucky.

I: How did you first react to the US Supreme Court's decision on same-sex marriage, which was on June 26th 2015?

Rucker: I was very grieved. It hurt, because it tends to legalize something that God has not set in order and it's wrong. And like I said before, it's not wrong because God is waiting for a stick to beat us with, it's not wrong because it's a don't do this, it's wrong because it goes against the natural order of things. The natural order of way we were created. And that hurts us. That tears us apart. John 10:10 says "Satan comes to kill and to steal and destroy, but I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." It's that it's part of Satan's plan to steal and to kill and destroy. He wants to steal our joy. He wants to kill any life in us. He wants to destroy our happiness because he hates us and that's what he's out to do. But that's not what God's about, you know. He loves us, every single one of us, and He wants us to be fulfilled and happy.

Interviewer: What about your reaction to the Rowan County Clerk's decision not to issue marriage licenses to either straight or gay couples. What was your reaction?

Rucker: I guess my honest reaction is I get pretty, I got pretty frustrated with the people that say "she just needs to do her job." She did her job. According to state law, marriage is between a man and a woman. That's what the state law said. And she upheld only not only her personal convictions but what the law said. You know, if we don't stand up for what we believe in then our lives are pretty purposeless. So, it's important to be who we say we are, genuinely. But always with kindness and love and not pointing fingers and not bashing anybody because that's also against who God is.

Interviewer: What was your involvement in the movement? I know you said you went to the prayer vigils.

Rucker: Yeah. Really didn't, you know, as far as demonstrating or marching, didn't do any of that because it's, you know, it to me it's God moving on our hearts is what does it. And I have spent and continue to spend a lot of time in prayer for the whole situation. For the people involved on both sides. And other than actually going to the prayer vigil that one time I really haven't done any other kind of demonstrative actions aside from praying and most of that's been at home.

Interviewer: So, would you consider yourself an activist before the events of last summer and the marriage equality religious freedom?

Rucker: I don't think I consider myself an activist at all, in anything. You know, I'm active in that I believe what I believe and I want to live it day by day. And it's hard, you know, we're all people. We're all humans, we all make mistakes and goof up. Actually, we all make mistakes. We all sin, but I want to be who I am and I'm not ashamed of who I am. You know, I want to be a light and hope for people that have none.

Interviewer: What was your immediate goal last summer with everything that went on?

Rucker: My immediate goal was to see lives change, you know. Again, broken people need hope. We know we need love. We need to be one so that, you know, there's...I pray that Kim, I support Kim Davis with my whole heart and I pray that she stands strong. She's been through way too much to be to be threatened with losing your retirement. It's ridiculous, you know. She's been sued, she's been, you know, she's been...they invested...and verbally beaten. It's just, it's awful the abuse that she's had to withstand. It's wrong, you know. I think part of the, one of the things that that bothers me most, you know, they say well, you know, "we want tolerance, we want tolerance." Tolerance should be both ways and it hasn't been, you know. It's not, people have been intolerant on both sides and that's wrong. So, that's how I feel.

Interviewer: When you were at the prayer vigil, did you feel that the environment was safe or did you consider it unsafe?

Rucker: No, I felt absolutely safe there. I didn't feel any threat of danger or anything at all from any side.

Interviewer: Do you think your tactics were effective? I know you mentioned prayer, going to the prayer vigil and praying at home.

Rucker: Yeah. I think it's an ongoing process. I think that there's a lot, you know, that goes on underground that you don't see on the...to an extent yes, it's, you know. Thankfully, Kim has kept her job. She has stood strong and that's been part of our prayer. So, yeah.

I: If you had to do over again, would you have done anything differently?

R: I don't think so. I don't think so. You know, I still feel as strongly or even more strongly than I did last summer. Right is right and wrong is wrong. And again, we need to stand up for what's right and what we believe in with kindness and love, not with bashing in a militant, you know, "I'm going to get you" kind of attitude. That doesn't get you anywhere.

Interviewer: Do you think the Rowan County Clerk best represented the cause of religious liberty?

Rucker: Yes. I think she did. She stood her ground. It's frustrating when things aren't consistent, when a person can stand up for what they believe in one venue and oh it's wonderful it's great, but another person standing up for what they believe in, which may be different from what the first instance was, then they are condemned and verbally horsewhipped. So that whole equality thing isn't so equal sometimes. You know, again it's I want equality for this but in that equality, you're stepping on somebody else. So, you know, it goes both ways and so, you just need to be a little more tolerant on both sides.

Interviewer: Do you think that the Rowan County Clerk deserved to be imprisoned?

Rucker: Absolutely not. In fact, I just, no. Absolutely not. She was, not only was she upholding her personal beliefs, she was following the law and should never ever have been arrested for that. Never.

I: I think that's why they said she was imprisoned because she was not following the law.

R: But she actually was following the law according to Kentucky State statute. She was following that law.

I: Do you think she should have received any punishment?

R: No, absolutely not.

I: I thought you might say that.

R: And in essence, even though, you know, the Supreme Court does not have the ability to make law and that's what they did. They returned a judgment that they had no grounds, no basis to make. The state, the Supreme Court does not make law. The legislators do. So, they stepped beyond their bounds. They were actually unconstitutional in what they did. So, I have heard some say that they should be all judged for treason themselves because they did not uphold the Constitution. And they didn't. So, no. She's absolutely right and again I you know we support her one hundred percent.

I: I know you said you didn't go to Grayson when she was released or, you know, but what were your thoughts upon her release?

Rucker: I was proud of her because of what she withstood and that she was strong enough in her faith, in her own personal beliefs, that she did what she did. I was glad that she was released. I

was glad for the support she was shown. I was a little dismayed at some of the reactions from both sides. You know, we don't need people coming in from out of state that are, you know, shouting things. You know, like the whole Westboro Baptist Church thing, you know. We don't need that. That's not what this is about. It's about her being able to stand up for what she believes in and not being punished for it. And it's also about what's right and what's wrong, and that marriage is between a man and a woman. And when you break down the family, which is what that does, then we have very little hope for mankind.

Interviewer: You mentioned the out-of-state reactions.

Rucker: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you want to elaborate on that a little?

R: Well, you know, you have people coming in and they'll have hate stuff all over their vehicles or they have their megaphones and they're shouting hateful slurs on either side. And that's wrong. You know, and you can tell that it's, some of them are paid activists, you know. We just don't need that, you know. If you want to do your protesting you protest where you're from, but you can leave us alone. You know, mind your own business is kind of I guess how I say that. I don't mean that unkindly.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on the reactions of your local elected officials?

Rucker: I'm currently serving on a grand jury, and I'll be real honest, I was a dismayed. Not real happy with some of the comments. You know, "I was in Florida and they even brought up Kim Davis down there" and acting like it was you know she was a poor representative. Not as far as I'm concerned. As far as I'm concerned, I'm proud that she's from here, that she stood up for what's right. Like I said, we just, we don't need that outside stuff coming in.

I: What about your thoughts on the mass media and political leaders that were involved last year?

R: I don't really have a great appreciation for media, to be honest with you. You know, I think they so often try to skew and have it to say, you know, they want to say whatever they want you to think, and unfortunately so many people choose not to think for themselves and they go with whatever they hear and that's a shame. So, I really don't care for mass media that come in from anywhere. I don't, you know, I listen to the news but sometimes I wish I didn't because you can tell so often it's so slanted, you know. They so try to change your perception of what's really real so I don't care for that at all.

Interviewer: Kind of as a follow-up question, do you think that it deserved the attention it received?

Rucker: I think it...the attention it received was because they have an agenda and they're trying to shove that down our throats, to be honest. It's extremely important, what's going on, because it really is going to shape the future of our nation with those kinds of decisions. Obviously, it has caused unrest. It has caused, you know, with the recent shooting in Orlando, you know, that, with

the Islamic in the gay club there. You know, it is a big deal. But I just wish people would tell the truth, you know. And, you know, the president is, you know, they've talked about him trying to delete things out of the 911 calls, you know and not give the truth on those transcripts. You know, why can't we just let the truth be the truth and quit trying to change it into what we want it to be or our own agendas? And I think that that's really, really frustrating.

Interviewer: What are your opinions on the outcomes of the religious liberty movement? You have kind of touched on that.

Rucker: Sorry, say that again?

Interviewer: Your opinions or your thoughts on the reactions or the, I'm sorry, on the outcomes of the religious liberty movement. And you've kind of already mentioned that, so if you want to elaborate on that more that's fine.

Rucker: You know, if we're truly talking about religious liberties and its outcome, you know, America was founded based on the fact that they wanted religious liberties. And I heard recently that our history books since 1920 have been changed into, I guess, more or less propaganda. If you really want an accurate picture of history, go back to the books published before 1920. And I can see that. You know, there have been some things that have been proven true there. So, the outcome of religious liberty should be that we can actually be free to choose our religion. You know, we're not forced by the government, you know, that keeps talking about the separation of church and state. That's not in the Constitution. And where it came with, I think it was Thomas Jefferson that wrote a letter to somebody, to a Baptist association and it's where religion is forced on a people. And, that's not what we want. That's not what we have. Or that's not what we have had, where we can choose to worship God or not. That nobody can say you have to do this or you have to do that. But you can do whatever you choose, as long as it doesn't break the law. Which is what's happened.

I: That's a very interesting comment with the religious liberty, where it's choice. Would you call your efforts a victory or failure?

Rucker: Well, I don't think it's over yet, you know. There's still more to come. Still, you know, still praying, believing, you know. God's Word is true. And, you know, He says there that everyone has sinned. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." He says that the wages of sin is death. So, if we choose to sin, either we pay the penalty or we ask Christ that penalty that he paid be applied to our lives. So, that's, I think, how it relates to me. And, you know, I think just knowing that that hope is always there will help with that outcome that we want. And that's for those for those people to be saved and have joy and peace and to be who they've been called to be and not believe the lies of the devil, you know, that you can do this and be happy, because it doesn't work.

Interviewer: I know you mentioned that you don't think it's over now but with the debate over religious liberty or marriage equality, what do you think might be in the future, you know, since we you don't think it's really over yet?

Rucker: Well, I know there's a gay pride parade scheduled for August. And I'll be real honest with you, you know, I have some friends and family members that say that they are homosexual and I love them. I love them. I care about them. I want what's best for them, but I'm praying against this, you know, the parade. I don't want, and the reason it's not because I want to be mean and say you can't do this or not because I want to be intolerant because I want them to be whole and happy and free. So, you know, I don't think it's over because of things that happen and until it's actually resolved -

Interviewer: Things have already happened. You mentioned Orlando.

Rucker: Right, exactly, and it's going to continue to happen until things are resolved.

Interviewer: Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Rucker: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Well, thank you, Carla.

Rucker: You're welcome.