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Rowan County Marriage Equality & Religious
Liberty Project

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Melinda Andrews

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Melinda Andrews

Interviewer: This is a conversation with Melinda Andrews for the Kentucky marriage equality and religious liberty oral history project. We're in the seminar room of the library at Morehead State University campus located in Rowan County, Kentucky. Today is August 10, 2016 and the time is 10:30am. My name is Sherry Kelly and, Melinda, I'd like to thank you for coming. Being willing to help us out with this project that we're doing.

I would like to ask you just a little bit of biographical information. Where were you born? And if you wanna tell, a little bit about where you grew up.

Andrews: Of course. I was born in Mount Sterling because when we were little we lived in Owensville. There was no hospital there but we lived in Owensville for until I was about six or seven they were moved to Fleming County. We lived there until I married so then I moved to Morehead.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you want to tell us about some of your childhood experiences?

R: I mean, I grew up on a dairy farm. I was a tomboy so.

Interviewer: Okay. What about your current occupation?

Andrews: Right now, I'm disabled.

Interviewer: What about your religious upbringing? Do you want to elaborate on that?

Andrews: Really occasionally when we were young we went to my grandmother's church. About all I can remember, the church was, we had to be very quiet. So really, we knew about God but that was about all. I just knew about it. That, you know, we were supposed to go by His, you know, Commandments and all. But I didn't have a relationship with Him at that time.

Interviewer: What about your current church membership or involvement with church right now?

Andrews: I go to House of Prayer. I've been going there for about 17 years now. Let's see there...my sister, she had been going there for a couple years and she kept bugging me at that time to come to church. I lived in Nicholasville at that time so it was about an hour and a half drive but I decided to come one Sunday and I got saved. So, I continued to come to church there until me and my ex-husband got divorced. And then I moved back to Morehead and I've still gone there ever since.

Interviewer: You kind of told me a little bit about how you got involved but do you want to elaborate more about how you became involved with your current church?

Andrews: I'm not sure. I mean, I...

Interviewer: You've kind of already answered that question.

Andrews: Yes, I have. I'm a Sunday school teacher because once I started there after a couple years I became an assistant to the Sunday school teacher and then she eventually moved to another church with her husband and I took over the class. So, I just teach six, seven, and eight-year-olds.

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

Andrews: Really, I heard about it on, you know, on TV about what was going on and they talked about it at church and God just put it on my heart to go down one day. The day of the rally.

Interviewer: How did you first react to the US Supreme Court's decision not to or well, to issue same-sex marriage license?

Andrews: I was very saddened. To me, our country has been going downhill. That just, look, it's just such a horrible thing that this is what the government decided. Not the people. I mean they made it a ruling, but God had already made rules on this before.

Interviewer: And, what was your reaction to the Rowan County Clerk's decision not to issue marriage license to either straight or gay couples?

Andrews: I totally agreed with her. Yeah. Because of her religious beliefs, she could not do it. If she did, then she would be going against her beliefs.

Interviewer: What was your involvement in the movement?

Andrews: Really, I just went that day and someone gave me a sign to hold. But I just talked to some of the people that were there. I mean, just went to support Kim in that decision.

Interviewer: You mentioned that day that you went. What day was that that when you first went? If you remember.

Andrews: I don't remember the date. I just remember that was the first rally that they had in Rowan County for it. That was the day that, I'm trying to remember, she hadn't been arrested then because she was still in her office. But that was the first day that they had said that she had to and she was saying no, that she was not going to so.

Interviewer: Were there other protesters the other side?

Andrews: Oh, my god, yes. Both sides.

Interviewer: Did you participate in the protest?

Andrews: By participating, did I go up and talk with some of them? Yes. Some of them were very angry that day. Some of them were very calm. I talked to some who, yeah, I was cussed out, told, you know, that I deserved to die. You know, at that point I basically, stepped back, not out of fear but just because I didn't want to antagonize them anymore, antagonize them. And then I talked to some of the other ones who were a little calmer and all. But eventually, the girls that

had thrown the fit, they left and some of the others came to me and apologized for the things that the others had said now.

Interviewer: Why was the protest important to you?

Andrews: They were telling her that she had to do it, that it was a ruling. When she was elected, it wasn't a law, and therefore she didn't run for that office knowing that she was going to have to do this. They made that ruling afterwards. Therefore, she should have had the choice not to, but they didn't want to give her that choice.

Interviewer: What was your immediate goal?

Andrews: To support Kim. To let her know that there are other Christians out there who had the same belief and that we respected what she was doing and we were trying to give her encouragement.

Interviewer: Would you think that the environment there was safe or unsafe? What was it like?

Andrews: Like I said, there were some who were very angry and were screaming and, you know, chanting. But there are others who are calm, that they just wanted to have their say. There was one young girl I remember that she came and asked me, she says "hey, do you think that I'm an abomination" because they were saying that this was an abomination. Don't know. She's not an abomination, you know. God created her the same as He created us. What was the abomination was that lifestyle that she was living, but not her. He loved her just as much as He... He loves her just as much as he loves us. Or me. She also asked me, did I not think that since the Bible had been written over 2,000 years ago would God not have changed his mind on some of these things. And I borrowed a Bible from a gentleman that was there and I showed her in Revelations, the last chapter in Revelations, where it says that nothing should be added or taken from this book or all the plagues would be upon that person.

Interviewer: Did you feel safe most of the time while you were there?

Andrews: Yeah. Like I said, I had one individual who said that, you know, I should die. But no, they didn't, nobody was violent or anything. When they would try to become violent, you know, people on our side or their side, you know, I would remind them we're not here to fight we're here just to voice. This is supposed to be a calm place you know. So, you know, sometimes I felt like I was there just to kind of keep the peace but no, I did not feel unsafe at all.

Interviewer: Were your tactics effective do you think?

Andrews: As on trying to keep people peaceful? I think that was, but on talking with some of the people do I think that I was successful? I mean, I told them what the Bible says, but they were not wanting to hear that. Yeah. And it saddened me because like I said one of the young ladies that I talked to she was so sweet, so nice and it just broke my heart.

Interviewer: What would you have done differently?

Andrews: Probably been more prepared to give them some of the answers that they wanted. Which I could have. But otherwise nothing that I know of. I was there to support Kim and that's what I did.

Interviewer: Do you believe that your involvement in the protests made a difference in the outcome?

A: I believe every voice has a right to be heard. Mine and theirs. And I believe that every voice was heard. I believe that that was part of the outcome. But, me as an individual, I was just a voice. I was nothing, you know. It was not because of me or anything.

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

Andrews: I don't think that it was a thing of best representative. I think that she was the one that God had put there at that time.

Interviewer: What do you believe was the appropriate way to handle the situation?

Andrews: By the situation do you mean how they handled Kim?

Interviewer: This situation being, you know, the Supreme Court had said and, you know, they're going to start issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples and she said, you know, basically that she would didn't want to do that. Do you think that was the best way for her to handle that and even maybe even with going through it legally?

Andrews: I think that like I said she when she took the office that was not a ruling and she should have been given the choice of whether she wanted to or not. If there are others there who were agreeable to do this, you know, that was between them and God. But, you know, do I think it should have been allowed no. No, I don't think that she should have been trying to be forced to do it.

Interviewer: Do you think she deserved to be imprisoned?

Andrews: No. No I don't. She was standing for what she believed in. But sometimes we have to...the boss says we will be persecuted and I think that that was a persecution that she had to go through to make her statement.

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

Andrews: Me personally? I don't think that she should. As I said, she should have been given the option. The others that worked there should have been given the option. If they did not want to do it, then one of the other officers should have been able to do this. If it was a law, but I don't think she should have been made to do it.

Interviewer: What were your thoughts upon her release?

Andrews: I was glad. I kind of wish that the others that had been with her, had stood with her even if it meant going to jail because it seemed to me that if you don't make your stand, if you back down then you're not making a stand.

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

Andrews: I really don't know how to answer that one. I think they did what they had to do. Did they want to arrest her? No. I don't think so. But I think that they did their duty which they had to, because when they were sworn into office that was what they were sworn in to do. When she was sworn in to office that was not law, but when they were it was.

Interviewer: What about the media attention? Do you think that the attention of the media gave for this was appropriate?

Andrews: I think it was bias. I mean, I'm sorry, but I do. But then most things anymore on the media is bias.

Interviewer: Biased in what way?

Andrews: If you disagree with the changes that they want to evoke, such as gay marriages, the bathrooms, going to bathrooms, you know, you can go to whatever bathroom you decide to go to. I'm sorry. I don't know whether I answered your question or not, but...

Interviewer: What are your opinions on the outcomes of the religious liberty movement?

Andrews: What I would have loved to have happened was for them to say no, that gay marriages were illegal. I am glad that they have allowed Kim to not have to sign that paper. But then I allow the legal things that they are doing. I'm saddened by it more. But at least she does not have to do this.

Interviewer: Would you call your efforts a victory or a failure?

Andrews: I don't know that it was either. I do know that about a week later I got an email from a woman, and I'm sorry I cannot remember which state but I think it was Canada, and she was telling me that she was proud of the fact that I had gone to the rally to stand up for my beliefs. That she was trying to teach her children, you know, what to stand by and to stand by their beliefs and all, and that made me feel very good. Not proud of myself but very good that someone else had been touched too.

Interviewer: How you think Rowan County has changed because of these events?

Andrews: Regrettably, I think we have been divided by it. I wish that we could have all come together but everybody has different beliefs and regrettably, some beliefs will divide people.

Interviewer: So, you think that Rowan County has been drawn further apart or closer together?

Andrews: I think the Christians have grown closer together because they have tried to unite on this. I believe that the, and I'm not exactly sure the appropriate word, for I would say gays, homosexuals as it says in the Bible. I believe the homosexuals have grown more united. Again, I feel like this has divided us.

Interviewer: Do you believe this debate of religious liberty or marriage equality is over?

Andrews: I will never be over. There will always be more things that they are pushing, to push the Christians' beliefs out of the way. Recently, someone applied for a marriage license to marry a computer. No, it will not be over. There will be marriages with animals. As I said, regrettably, I think that our nation is going downhill and I think that was just the start of it. Well, no. It wasn't the start, but I think that got the ball rolling more.

Interviewer: How do you plan to continue the debate or fight?

Andrews: I just plan on standing on my beliefs and to teach the children who are growing up nowadays what the Bible says, you know. Not what I say, because it's not my opinion that matters. It's what God's opinion is that matters.

Interviewer: Has this event changed you?

Andrews: I think this event and all the other events that are going on has changed me. It has made me seek the Lord more, feel more compassion for people, with their different beliefs. I mean because they believe different from me that does not mean that I think that they are bad people. Like I said I feel sorry for them. I know they wouldn't like to hear that but I feel sorry for them that they are misled.

Interviewer: Do you have any other comments that I, you know, maybe didn't ask you or thoughts that you would like to add?

Andrews: Not really. Like I said it's, it's not me against them or them against me. It's what I believe. That God is telling me is right and what is wrong and just to pray for them and to try to talk to them if they'll let me.

Interviewer: Okay! Well, thank you Melinda, for this interview. We do appreciate it.

Andrews: You're welcome.