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Georgeann: My name is Georgeann Wilcoxson, and I’m called “Georgia” in certain decades, and “Georgi” by my family - and one time I told a group of federal executives that and they all started calling me “Georgi” – they thinking that they were my family.

I never had a time in my life when I felt that I was not accepted as a person, who happens also to have an orientation toward intimate relationship being with women rather than men. So, as I discovered that I was, in fact, not a heterosexual, it was often in the context of churches or conferences or in my case going to seminary and preparing and deciding which seminary to go to. And, my calling as – when I was identifying primarily as Presbyterian – my calling was to find a setting in which I could utilize my/the talents and gifts that God has given me. And, that’s always been kind of the question of: Where am I being called?

So that took me to teaching in public school, seminary, work in action-oriented kinds of learning, and experiential learning and a major stream for that was always civil rights – the rights of human beings. So, in 1960 when I was in Nashville and college, we were participating in sit-ins with Fisk University students and our white professors at Peabody College, now Vanderbilt, had kind of secret meetings of students who wanted integrated groups. We didn’t know that we were part of a national movement – we were there – being faithful, as we understood we needed to be.

And, that kind of approach has been what's happened. I have found myself in places where I could see what I needed to discern, what is required of me in this setting to be faithful, and that's always been a process for learning.

I think I identify myself most centrally as an educator.

I went to PSCE, Presbyterian School of Christian Ed and experiential learning, the teaching learning process was a major part of that. Later, after getting fired from a local church for social justice issues, but I learned that, in fact, there was a background of suspicion that I was, in fact, gay, even though I was engaged to a Jewish man, we ended up breaking up when I got clearer that I really am a lesbian. But I never saw that as any threat to my relationship with God.

So, I'm 76. Yes. I started taking a med to work on my memory, but it's still a challenge...and all of these decades....

But, a critical time for me was when I was serving on the Southern Presbyterian Board of Christian Education. And, at that time, there were no known out gay people in either denomination: The Northern - The United Presbyterian Church in the USA or the Presbyterian Church in the US, at that time. And, having been in one of the first merged congregations in Kentucky, I was looking both to the Northern Church and the Southern Church, as to where I would serve.

And, I went to a conference at Montreat and learned about a new curriculum called "Covenant Life Curriculum," and that took me into the Southern stream and to PSCE. While I was there, I became clear that, in fact, my loving relationships were, was toward a woman. And, that's been kind of what I've always discovered, even though - I got engaged several times to men, and then I figured out they were so wonderful, but I just couldn't marry them. So, that's been the pattern for me in terms of sexuality.

When I came out to some friends at the Board of Christian Ed, I then was clear and, in '73, actually I came to a conference here at Stony Point, which is amazing, with Paulo Freire, who wrote Pedagogy of the Oppressed. I was at time was leading simulation games that I had written on world hunger around the country. And, my profits from the simulation games were negotiated more than the normal amount that John Know Press paid for, because it was not a book - it was a simulation game on world hunger.

And, I had had an experience meeting Odetta, when Odetta was singing in this night club about urban poverty and the ghetto, and it was a bar where I was spending a lot of money to hear Odetta, and the money I was spending was from a game that I wrote about poverty! And I had that moment of – I can't do this. I can't be a privileged person and be working for the – I can't say it now – but revolution that would turn the world upside down.

So when I came here, they committed to do that, but when I came here Paolo Freire said to us, "You Americans know what you are against, but you don't know what you're for." And, his model of the oppressed and the oppressor just being turned upside down is not going to help anything. We're always going to have the oppressed. And the concept then was "transformation." Where we all have a new paradigm, which is not an "over and below."

So that's guided me in how I've worked for liberation, of whatever groups are oppressed. And, so, in the Presbyterian movement to include gay and lesbian and all sexual minorities, I've tried to understand that I am primarily the person with power. I may be a woman. I may be a lesbian. But, economically, I'm a person with power. And, so, I wanted to work with people to do *conscientization* – to raise the consciousness of people who have power and help all of us with power create a - live by a paradigm of abundance for everybody. So, that's been a primary guidance for how I've worked with this.

So, that led me to leave the Presbyterian denomination, after I was serving on the Northern Presbyterian Program Agency in New York as Director of Youth Ministry for the denomination. It led me to the local level. And, that's where I've tried to work since then.

So, I felt I was not able in the denomination to be changing things. So, I moved out of that, but always my spiritual path was the facilitating process for what I did next.

And so that took me into the Federal Government, took me into private corporations, took me into computer sciences, took me into process improvement, business process reengineering, a whole different world of technology, mostly working with republicans when I was a democrat. Always working as kind of the minority voice within what was the dominant culture. That's kind of been my strategy.

Then I learned – Letty Russel and I were talking about, what is the most strategic thing we can do. And, I was trying to be strategic and Letty said, "We can't have a hit parade of oppressions. We don't need to have – what's the worst anywhere, that's where we have to go." And the whole concepts of systems came when I was working at the Board of Christian Education in Richmond. And, to me the biblical concept of

the body and all its parts is a perfect image for understanding. So, helping organization and groups understand themselves as a system has been a major part. Experiential learning has been a major part. So, my doctoral work was in how do we create environments where people can learn – because that’s one of our greatest needs. And, how can we create environments in which people create. So my doctoral work was in management and education. And all of that was influenced so much by the Presbyterian School of Christian Education.

So, I was a DCE, Director of Christian Education; and so I’ve now been a DCE in federal agencies, and in private corporations and so forth. And, my primary way of trying to work for change is to be the most faithful person I can, and be as open as I can. So, I was open in the Southern Presbyterian Church in early – prior to the 70’s.

And, I’ve been a Quaker now, for about twenty years, and Janie and I were very early the oldest lesbians who came out first – Southern and Northern. And, Janie called me up the other day and said, “Do you want to come to this conference? We have to have a Southern perspective.” And, so, I came with my life-partner, of now twenty-six years, who is a Presbyterian minister, who has been blocked from her serving a church.

And, we are working now as Quakers in Charlottesville, Virginia. And, it’s wonderful; it’s a small enough unit that we can have the relationships that I believe, for me, is a primary way to work for change.

Warren: Incredible story...so, if you could take it from where you just paused, in this present moment, being with the group that has gathered at this new time of...where inclusion is legislatively the rule of the day, so it changes the texture of the conversation and the move forward. I wonder if you could celebrate or give some emotional reflection – reflection about your emotions of the gathering. And, then kind of look forward, using your experience to kind of sketch a path forward, as relates to the movement and some of the priorities that in your view are called for.

Georgeann: I think my major feeling is comfort. Someone said, just in the last group, “Don’t use comfort as your measure for what’s the right language, as you’re seeking language; but for me, what I feel right now, is a deep level of comfort. And my feeling has to do with – it doesn’t matter whether I work in the Presbyterian denomination or the Quaker Meeting or the city council – I’m comfortable, and I have a lot of confidence that though I’m not going to be working in the Presbyterian denomination – it’s just one – there are just many, many settings and I have the sense that we’re all going to just keep going forward.

We're not going "to win" – we're going to continue the struggle. But we can continue the struggle with much more peace, by knowing that the struggle is being won in process. And, that is – that is the dominion of God, being engaged in that struggle and being able to be peaceful in that process.

I think that, I didn't have any need to tell people that I'm not going to be working in the denomination. I didn't have any need to say the things I'd heard over and over, in order to emphasize them. I feel like we're just finding our way, and an image for me is that during these years in the Presbyterian denomination, it's like we were all singers in this huge opera and everybody had their part. And, we were just singing with such power and passion and fear and hurt. And, then right now the opera's kind of over. This part. And the curtain comes up and we look around and we understand each other's parts, so we're no longer in any contention.

So, the different strategy we use of confrontation or dialogue or whatever they were, people who are in – people who are out, kind of melted away. And being here has helped me feel that "melting away," and more important to me – see it melt away in some people for whom it had not melted.

Warren: Singers in an opera... so, if Act One has just closed, what is Act Two feel like, as you project from the story line perspective.

Georgeann: How wonderful! How wonderful! Yes! For me, the networks are kind of renewed. As somebody who is looking toward the years – probably of dementia – I think about all these networks in the brain and, like my medication just kind of kicked in here, and I've reconnected a lot of these networks going on, and I'm looking forward to having that added energy and awareness. For me, where those settings will be, I'm working mostly in mental health and Israel and Palestine. Those are the two areas that I feel called to work in.

I don't call myself a Christian – I call myself a Quaker. For a while, I called myself a *Trans-Christian* that I haven't given up Christianity, I'm just moving beyond it. So, to me, one of the most important things is for us to get different faiths to understand each other. One of the most important is to work on economic justice and class issues. I think racial issues, I think gender – all of those are important. To me "class," meaning privilege, that's what I plan to be working on and am working on.

Warren: So, as a final closing comment, with all of your experience and with your current perspective, the people that will be watching these are people that will have some historic interest, but here will some who will watch them in some sort of identity quest. So, as a message – for those who are – from your community, who are trying to make their way, I would like you to give a message to those folks from your seasoned perspective.

Georgeann: Keep walking the spiritual path. And, there will be times when you cannot imagine that there's an answer, that there's faith, that there's God, that there's goodness. And, if you just keep at it, there will be light, and you will know, and you'll feel strength and comfort. That's – the key thing is "keep at it." And, then observe how that's happened and you'll build up more and more strength.

Warren: Thank you, Georgeann. I appreciate your being here. You've introduced to me the metaphor of networks and synaptics....