

Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love Interview Series
A Ministry of That All May Freely Serve

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Jane “Janie” Adams Spahr and Jim and Jackie Spahr

Janie: I’m Janie Adams Spahr; I am from San Francisco, California. This gathering means so much to me, because I am seeing people, some of them I have not seen in twenty years! And, we’ve been a part of this struggle for almost forty years. To be able to be in the same room again, and to be able look across or be next to the people we have struggled with and for – to see younger people who are here, to feel this liberation movement from the inside out has – has ... it’s so extraordinary. And I am so grateful to Ray and to Stony Point and so on that they would set this scene so that we could be here, to not only reunite or reunite but to gather together, listen to the history and herstory so people won’t forget our founder David Sindt, and so on. But that we would also then - what does our future look like, having come through what we’ve come through? Where do we go from here? So, it’s wonderful to be here.

Jim: I am Jim Spahr, and I was Janie Spahr’s last husband, or no, yes, your last husband, and Jackie is my last wife!

Jackie: If he knows what’s good for him!

Jim: You are!

Jackie: I’m Jackie Spahr and I came to this movement through Janie and Jim and my love for them, and for the love I have had for the people that I have met. For our friends... and

Jim: That picture of Suzie...

Janie: Lots of memories...

Jim: Memories, yeah... All the pictures that they are showing; the ... I can’t walk by Howard (Warren)...

Janie: Yeah. Yeah. I know...

Warren: So, Janie, from your perspective, I think maybe 74% of the speakers with the microphone have mentioned your name! And, that’s probably an undercounting.

You are a giant in the movement, and I'm wondering how that looks to you, as you look back, and as you look forward, and as you assess what's true now about the movement. I'm wondering, in the midst of it being nice to see people, how you're feeling and what your vision is. How you're being inspired as you see...

Janie: Well, I think... you know we're all part of a movement, and we all have our time, and that's why you're hearing everyone's story and how important they are. So the thing is, it was just at a certain time and in a certain place and it was like my turn, but everybody has a turn in this. So, I just feel like it's just part – being a part of something, a movement, in time in which we all, like I say, have our time.

So for me, I'm not only interested in the liberation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people and Intersex and Queer and Questioning – the words get bigger and bigger because we learn so much more, but I'm also interested in the impact...

Let's look at the, I spoke with someone today, the culture, the environment, what are we doing – how do our oppressions connect? How do our liberations connect? What do we do about, certainly sexual orientation and so on, but also what do we do about race, class, gender, it just gets more – what do we do about climate change, what do we do about – because they all impinge on one another, and I think we see these connections now so much more.

And I think, when coming out, it saved my life because I was on a script, you're on a script, and when you come off the script I think it saves your life and you begin to ask these questions: Who isn't at the table and why? And why not?

And I think it frees you then to ask different questions. To hopefully help be a part of the change – again, that we look at systems of power and how they work and I mentioned this before: who defines and who doesn't? A friend of mine dying of HIV said, "You know, them that ask the questions know the answers and they got it." And the words, whoever owns the words owns the world. Stuff like that.

So, the thing is, I think, for me, it's this whole years, it's seeing several of my friends dying, it's burying so many of our friends, it's loving our people through their life and in their death. It's all of that together. And they were young people. It's looking at our family and the transition of family.

I'm very lucky because Jim could have made it so difficult in the early years, because people *were* losing their children; they *were* losing their families. So, Jim and Jackie and I have met with families going through this transition. So I have a support team. We have sons and daughters – we have people that love us, so that, so that – and I see this color of my skin and I know white privilege, so I know I have access in certain ways and access in not so certain ways. You know. So, all of that comes to bear when we answer that question.

So, I've been most fortunate. Because Jim could have said, "I'm taking your boys and this is how it is." But we went to a higher ground. And I think what we said was, when we separated, we said, "How can we be the best friends that we are, ok?" and "What would this mean for our children?" you know. And I think one of the great things that Jim said, he said to the boys, "Everybody will say that the reason we are not together is because Mommy is a lesbian, but it's as much that Daddy is a heterosexual. And he cannot beat Mommy. But nobody will tell you this."

So, I think, *those moments* that – and when your children – when I was on trial and they were saying terrible things, you know, like I was a child molester, at the first trial – just terrible. And I watched in this film that they were doing, Jimmy just taking me around and he said this to me, he said, "I thought Presbyterians were educated." He said, "This is evil. And, anyone saying anything like this about my mother. Do you have any idea, Mother?"

And he literally moved me away from the court. It was those kinds of things. And then you watch your children, where they are, and how they've been affected, and so on. But because we were a team – I did Jim and Jackie's wedding...

Jim: Both of them.

Janie: Both of them, yeah...

Jim: Thee of them!

Janie: So, the thing is, what are you modeling? What are you modeling to your community? And the thing is, it's all real and it's authentic, and this love is not casual. It's very intense. It's – I mean I love her, as much as I do him. You know, but there was an understanding that they had, that we all knew, like when we were on trial, when I was on trial. I mean... They're my advance team. They go and find the places where we're going to stay and so on... so, I got, man... I got... they have my back. Do you know what I'm saying? So do you know how lucky? How fortunate that is so that then we can really get at the big issues 'cause I don't have to worry about, "Will I have my children or not? Will they take...? You know. What will happen here?"

So, it's a different... I go this... I got this. And not only that, now I have Rhonda, Jackie's daughter; I mean the whole family comes on these trials. And so on, so it grows out.

Am I saying...is this answering your question? I mean it's...so I know access, but if I didn't have *this* ... and that's why Jim and Jackie and I meet with families and like Jim said, we just get new information. And, what do you do with that new information? You can either remain friends and be friends and extend your family. And, that's what he said, we just extended our family. You know, but that's, that's been so ...

Like Jackie and I did a conference together in the (?) and they thought we were sisters. On sexuality and spirituality. And Jackie said, "Well, can I introduce us?"

She said... this is how we started this workshop, she said:

"Well, this is Janie Spahr and she used to sleep with Jim Spahr, and I'm Jackie Spahr and I sleep with him now."

And, the whole class from then on... You can't believe what the people shared with us, because the atmosphere was open. People share to us their deepest secrets, all that kind of thing.

So, for me, the work that we have done as family and then going our from the Downtown Church, what I said to the church was, "I became your secret holder."

Because, when you talk about sexuality and spirituality the secrets begin to come. Way more than whether they were Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender – people were coming out about incest, about rape, about drug abuse, about every kind of thing. So the LGBT thing was the gift that I got, but the other stuff was, "Wow, this is serious..." We're talking about date rape in schools.... so we had to meet them and get these kids safe, do you know what I'm saying? It's like people had these secrets, worried about mental health and what would people think and what would people do about it...

And, we just said, "The church should be a place where you can say anything...and you can get the help that you need."

So, it was that going around the country and getting this, and when it was a secret that was harmful then we had to deal with it right then. When it was a secret that you say, "OK..."

So, so I'm talking too much, but this is....

Warren: So, Jim, when I met you yesterday it is the, it is the first time that ever heard someone introduce themselves in the way that you did, "This is my first wife," you said, "and this is my last wife, speaking!" And, listening to Janie describe the – what you – your reactions were, I'm wondering if you could just give a window into those motivations, how it is that you... what was happening for you, I mean in a moment that if someone were reading it it seems like a crisis kind of ... but what you've transformed it into is really a ministry of a unique perspective. And, I'm just wondering if you could share part of that journey....

Jim: Well, Jane and I didn't emerge from the womb of our wedding, of our marriage if you will into full-blown comfortable understanding people of one another. It was a process. Alright? I was aware that there was something between Jane and I that wasn't right.

You know, all the “equipment” was appropriate to man and wife, and we did all the man and wife stuff, and we had babies, and we went to church and did our thing. But there was something that didn’t fit. I could see that. And, if you ever have the experience, you’ll see it. I hope you don’t, but you’ll see it. But, it’s obvious from what you are seeing here at the conference, I married an extraordinary woman. Right? And, I knew that! And, I don’t know why I knew it, but I did.

And, when we came time to divorce, I wasn’t so much worried, or even thinking, considering about whether I’d... Well, first of all, in 1977, if there’s a divorce the man always lost the children. Alright? At that point in time in California, I think there were maybe a couple of dozen cases, if that, where the man had succeeded in getting custody...so, I just assumed the kids were gone.

I was too busy being the big wheel, flying around the country in the company airplane, and then later on managing my own business – I just wasn’t there. And, then I realized that what I thought might happen was *going* to happen. And, I had to do something to recover my family. And, it was real simple: there’s no standing between Jane and the boys. I mean, that was crystal clear. So it just, I don’t want to say options fell away, concerns fell away. This is just what it’s going to be. You know? Jane and I aren’t going to be married, but if I want to be in the life of my boys, I damn well better not diss their mother. It better not happen. And, I got that early on.

If you’re not busy trying to figure out, I think, if you’re not busy trying to trash people then you might have a opportunity to *see* who they are. And, I know who she is. I knew then. So, it was just a matter of standing back and seeing how in the hell we were going to deal with this disruption, or whatever you call it. And, in the meantime, she took me to church. And, I met this one, and it just – it – I mean there were a lot of time – things went on – but it became real clear to me that when I was with Jackie, people would ask me, “Well, what’s the difference?”

It’s real easy. The difference is when I turn to Jackie, Jackie turns to me. When I turn to Jane, she’d move away to avoid intimacy. OK? I thought, “Sorry, Jane! Lot better. Love you, Dear, but...” And that’s the truth. And, so, if you just sit there and pay attention and don’t get noisy....

And then, we started meeting Chris (Glaser) and David Sindt, she took me... we went to lunch at The Duo. You remember that? It was a wonderful time...just up the street from the Jaguar, which...I’m glad it’s gone. Anyhow, that was quite a time in The Castro.

And, after we divorced, because of circumstances, everybody assumed that I was a gay man because in 1977 there were no such things as lesbians.

Jackie: Certainly not pastors.

Jim: Certainly not pastors. So, I was a gay man and I started getting treated as such. And, I thought, "Not too cool." Alright? But if they think I'm a gay man, I might as well go into The Castro, we lived twenty-five miles away and that just...that transformed me. I went into the Golden Gate Business Association meeting in the city at the Italian Swiss...

Jackie: Swiss Italian...

Jim: Swiss Italian Club on Montgomery Street, and I walked into that meeting and two gay me started coming toward me and I thought, "Uh-oh. How do you deal with this?" Well, hell, they weren't looking at me as a *item*, they thought, "A new member! More membership!"

Well, after I got over my silliness of worrying about that, life turned grand. I had more damn fun in The Castro. I'd go in there, sometimes twice a day, I was an insurance agent with New York Life Insurance Company; you were supposed to be three-piece suits, you know what I mean and all that...

I had on jeans, a cord jacket, open collar, cowboy boots and a purse. And, I'd go into the city and I discovered that when I was dealing with these gay men and lesbians, I didn't know – *excuse me* – I didn't know they were so dissed...I didn't understand that. But after, I don't know, twenty or thirty clients of mine, I realized that I was the first professional person that walked into their life and said, "How's this family dealing with things? What's the family status?" And, nobody treated them as family. We'd have George and Fred. "OK George, you can leave while I take care of Fred's business," that kind of thing.

So, it was unfair. And, I had an advantage. And, I took great advantage of that. And, we now probably now have half our clients are – used to be about 90% of our clients were gay and lesbian – then we moved out to Petaluma and straight people started doing business with us.

So it's not ... so my journey was pretty much following Jane and discovering how much I did not know about what this was about. And, then, finding it. I mean The Castro was wonderful.

And, then I married Jackie. And, that just...I didn't have to worry about Jackie and Jane, except getting left behind. OK? Or, they – one would tell the other what stupid thing I had done – I mean other than that kind of – I didn't have to worry. Some folks have a divorce, and you know they wind up with ex - an ex and a new one... it wasn't part of my life. It wasn't part of my life. It still isn't. And our family just got bigger, and bigger...it's wonderful.

Warren: So Jackie, then, your perspective is ... I'm interested to know the ... the how it happened for you, your vision because, you know, for me, I'm looking at the three of you and you're "a trio, right...."

Jim: We're a foursome, but one of us can't be here...

Warren: OK, yeah, so, I'm interested ... how in your story, in terms of your engagement quite literally and figuratively with Jim, and how you found the circumstance and how's that - how that has fed you or contributed to your current perspective.

Jackie: I met Janie first. In a work situation. She was the pastor and I was on staff at that church, a financial secretary. I said in the room today that I fell in love with Janie, like everybody does. And, until I said it today, I didn't realize how true it was.

And, then when she came out to me - and I barely knew Jim - he traveled and was home on the weekends. I'd see him in church, but we didn't know one another very well. When Jane came out to me, I was very afraid for her. And, very afraid for our church. I had a heterosexual woman's perspective. I was totally ignorant about gay and lesbian issues; never had a friend that I knew that was lesbian or gay, gay man.

Is that true? Yeah, it was at that time.

And, and it was Janie. It didn't make any difference. She wasn't any different. And then, as things evolved, I met more and more - mostly lesbians, but a few gay men. And, I loved them, and then I saw the pain they were going through in the church. And, when the whole question of whether or not they could be ordained came up in the church, and I saw the pain in there, and when the decision went against us, it was a blow. I hardly could believe it. It was just so un-Christian. And, this is my naïveté, I just, I just - it never occurred to me. So, that's how I started.

Later on, I mean, it was six or seven years before Jim and I got together. I worked for him in his business, and we were still very good friends after they divorced - while they were divorcing, after they divorced. We remained very good friends. I was married to someone else for twenty-five years, and way down the road we got a divorce. And, then, one day - my friend Jim helped me move into my house when I moved - my house - I moved into another place, and Jim helped me move. We remained friends and then one time we just...it just...

Jim: Clicked.

Jackie: Clicked. And all of a sudden, it was, Jim was...I'd never met a man like Jim, with his heart. I'm very proud of him, and his heart and his integrity ... and it became a justice issue for me.

Janie: We were all rooting that it would be her!

Jim: Yeah.

Janie: You know, I mean, the community was like, "Yeah!" She would be... this would be great! But you know, you're...you know, all her lesbian friends and so on, "They just have to get together!" kind of thing, you know. So we were all rooting for this relationship.

Jackie: And, I'll say something here that I've never said out loud before, I'm not sure how it'll go on the tape, you can cut it out... But, Jim and I, the first time we were ever together, he had the boys. And, I spent the night. And the next day, Jim – Jimmy, Jim, Jr. said, what did he say? "What is this with you and Jackie, what's happening?"

And Jim said, "We're helping one another." Or...

Jim: Something like that.

Jackie: What was it like? Oh, darn, I wish I could remember the words 'cause, these boys are, I mean with parents like this, these boys just...we can tell stories all day long about how wise they've been all along. But, Jim said, "You know, we're just... we're helping one another." And we were; we were both in rough places, and it just worked.

Jim: We married and the boys adopted Rhonda or maybe Rhonda adopted them.

Jackie: Rhonda adopted them; she'd always wanted brothers.

Jim: It just fit.

Janie: The boys love her.

Jim: And, now, Janie and I have two boys; Jackie had Rhonda; and now we have a collection of grandchildren. And, they don't participate much because I don't think they can believe it's – they think it's stupid – that you know what's going on that there's, "Whattya mean they won't ordain Janie, or somebody..."

Jackie: Well, they're much younger people; as young people they don't get it.

Jim: Well, who does?

Jackie: Well, the church gets it. The church has said, "No!" all this time, but I think young people just say, "What?!"

Jim: We had a very intimate Easter, we couldn't have all the family out there, so it was just the thirty of us! OK, what started out as Jim and Jackie and Jane and I look up and down the table and I'm not sure what the composition was, are you? I mean I think we were mostly straight, weren't we?

Janie: No, about half and half.

Jackie: Yeah.

Jim: About half and half? Hard to tell.

Jackie: Who cares?

Jim: So that was our Easter dinner ... was wonderful and I just wish that for everybody, but you can't get there if you get hung up, you know trying to decide the worth of somebody based upon what you believe to be their orientation, or their skin color, or their ethnic ... ethnicity. I mean, we just made it, didn't we?

Janie: Well, and I think ... I think the thing, you know when people are like, "Oh, well what's it like?" And I think just exactly what Jim said, when he said to me, "Janie, you have to think to touch me." You know. He said, "But Jackie reaches out for my hand." I mean, it's that thing.

And, he used to follow me around the kitchen [and he'd] touch me, [my] head, [and] so like that. But I never thought to do that with him. But, now with my partner, I mean ... she's there ... it's just that simple. It's that's easy. And, I've always said for me, I mean – it's like a dear best pal. But like for my partner, it's like, I ... there's a God place in us some how. There's the deepest part of us. And, Jim is touched by Jackie in that place as I'm touched by my partner. And, I'm ... that's the place I have to be met.

So, why the church gets nervous sometimes is – as I travel the country – I say the reason why I'm lesbian is because of God. Because, when you're in a script and you're going down this path, this this God keeps coaxing you into yourself. And, I think, that's what I had to hear from me. I had to hear that or feel that.

Jackie: Well, and when I divorced, it would have been really Dan, frankly if I could have been a lesbian, I had a lot of lesbian, great lesbian friends and it would have been so much easier. You know women are so much easier to get along with, in a partnership. But it just wouldn't work for me ... I am a flaming heterosexual. And ...

Jim: Self-affirmed.

Jackie: Self-affirmed. Practicing. Well, no. Quit practicing. Got it made.

Jim: We know what it is now.

Jackie: Anyway, anyway, so that's – you know I understand that because I've got that same thing here, and I don't frankly understand why other people don't understand it.

Jim: You heard Jane's name mentioned out there, so much, you know, the number of times? And that came about because once you get turned on, and you see what the church in our early years – everybody else was doing to folk – without reason or, you know, destroying lives, tearing up families - you just – you can't leave that behind. You can't walk away and say, "Gosh I hope they work that out." I mean it was us.

And, now we match-make. Our biggest match was a nice gay couple.

Janie: So, we've gone way over our fifteen minutes. Thank you.

Warren: Thank you. Thank you.

Jane, Jim, and Jackie: Thanks...