

Queer Newark Oral History Project  
Interviewee: C. Alicia Heath-Toby  
Interviewed by: Kristyn Scorsone  
Date: January 27, 2017  
Location: C. Alicia Heath-Toby's Home

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Today is January 27, 2017. My name is Kristyn Scorsone, and I'm interviewing C. Alicia Heath-Toby at her home, for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. Thank you for doing this.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* You're welcome.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You helped start the Newark LGBTQ Center?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* For clarity, I have a long history with the Unity Fellowship Church Movement. My journey started as clergy in that movement. In addition to that, we were, many, many years ago, like in '98, we were funded to provide HIV prevention in the City of Newark, under another name, called Loving in Truth. It was a prevention center.

Then we branched out and became the social justice—Liberation in Truth Social Justice Center. All through that time—during that time, Sakia Gunn was murdered. In 2003. There was an outcry for a center in Newark.

We, being the social justice center and the church, were promised by the former mayor, Sharp James, that there would be a center built. Or there will be a center for LGBT youth. A safe space.

It never happened, and so the community in 2000—let's get it, it's been three years, we're in 2017? In 2015 the community said, "Enough." Because there were killings of trans folks, and sexual abuse happening, and the rise of health issues in the community. Wrongful arrest, and all those things were happening to LGBTQ folks.

Particularly young folks, and so a group of leaders said, "Enough is enough. Let's take this place, this space, which is 11 Halsey, which was where we were for years, since '98, and let's just say this is the Newark LGBTQ Center." That's really how it came to be. It came as a result of people just being fed up.

My role in that was an evolution. It crossed a span of time, so I sat on the board for many years, in different capacities. Held different offices. When the community said, "let's do this," and we agreed to do it, for the first year I was the vice-chair. For the last two years I was the—or year and a half, I was the chair or the president of the board. That's how, so I wasn't the founding member of it, but I was—came along with the decision.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You retired from the board recently, right?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah, I resigned from the board, yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Congrats.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Thank you. It was a hard decision to make, but it was—what I was clear about was that it was time for a new energy to take on the work. I had been doin' the work since 2003, and—in terms of the community level stuff around LGBT-specific, safe-space, and stuff like that . It was time for me to move. It was time for me to move on, but it was a hard decision because it was something that I helped birth. I knew it was the right thing to do. I'm still involved in it. I volunteer and support in ways that I can. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* What were some of the challenges you guys faced when you first started it?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Always funding. That is the number one issue. There's no funding just—I won't say there's "no," it's been difficult for us to get funding. [00:05:00] For a host of reasons, and so we're always working at that, but that's been the biggest challenge. The second challenge is that the City of Newark has a, as I alluded to, has a history of not being as supportive as it can be, to the LGBTQ community. This is my personal opinion. I think that our administration, I believe, continues to show up in less-supportive—least-supportive ways. That's hard. It's hard to be what we are in a city or administration that doesn't really provide an adequate support when it's clearly needed.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* How do you start an LGBT center? Is it a matter of getting a space, or do you need—is there paperwork involved?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* We were always a 501(c)(3) before we were the Newark LGBTQ Center, so you have the—become a 501(c)(3). We already had space, because we had been funded by the State of New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services. It was just an—it was an easy transition. We didn't have to—we didn't have to do anything new, except for to change the name to the Newark LGBTQ Center, to a business as. It wasn't that hard, but any—if you wanna open an organization, you'd have to be—a non-for-profit organization, you have to be a 501(c)(3). We were already that, so it was easy.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. What kinda work did—so it was the social justice center first, right?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* It was the Liberation in Truth Social Justice Center, yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That was focused on HIV prevention?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* We did, right. We did HIV prevention under that—in that space. That's not just a physical space, because we had two spaces. We had a space on New Street, and we had 11 Halsey Street. All of our prevention work came out of those two spaces, and we had a number of programs. We said, "Why don't we—at the time, why don't we call ourselves the Liberation in Truth Social Justice Center? In that we'll be loving in true prevention, blah, blah, blah, like that." That's how True Colors was a youth program that came out of the social justice center. That's how the name came to be.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* The New Street, that was the drop-in center?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* That was the drop-in center, yeah, that's right.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you have any sort of memories that stand out to you?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* We were the first drop-in center in Newark. One of the things that I will always remember is that we proudly met the need, as we were. Folks came who were homeless, who needed food, who needed a shower. We gave what we had and who we were as LGBT folks. There was never a question of—it just came so easy. People cared for us, and we cared for them. It was sad when it had to end, because we lost the funding, but that's a fond memory I have. It was community. The real essence of community, like no-holds-barred. It didn't matter how we presented, just helping folks and meeting the need. It was appreciated, and it was a blessing to be able to be part of that.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you feel like with the Unity Church, you feel like there's a spirit of can-do attitude there?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah, the church came out of—do you know much about Unity?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Not much, no.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Okay, so the church was founded in '83 by a gentleman named Carl Bean, who now is the archbishop of the movement. It came out of the need to [00:10:00] provide a spiritual and faith environment for men of color who were being ostracized from the church because they were HIV-infected.

They were dying, and their mothers and grandmothers could not have their funerals in the churches that they grew up in. That alone was, the stigma around it, and here's this church who was openin' up. We were always driven by, "We can do this, we can do this, because we have to do this. If we don't do this, nobody gonna do this."

That energy continues to be with us. Now, there are many more churches that are HIV/LGBTQ-affirming. HIV is not such a thing anymore, but the one thing about the movement that is very unique, is that it is unapologetically clear that God created us just as we are, and our sexuality, our physicality.

That message still is difficult for even some LGBT folks, be they in their churches, or in the mainstream churches. Yes, we can and it's possible to be a healing space, and a transformative space, that still is part of who we are.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That's cool. Actually, what kinda duties do you have as a board president?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* As a board president, one is responsible to make sure that the meetings happen. You preside over the meetings. You make sure people have—the board members have all of the information that they need to do their job as a board of director effectively. Which is make sure they have the minutes out, and it's a really simple job. I actually had the simplest job of the—the treasurer has the hardest job, 'cause they had to make sure that the money—you know what I mean? It really was about making sure that the meetings went off as successfully as possible. It was easy.

The hardest, not the hardest, but the—I was the come-to person, right? If something wasn't right, the onus fell on me to make sure that it was corrected or whatever, but it wasn't a hard job. The other thing, is I had been—'cause I had been doing what I been—had been doing the leadership thing. I'm a leader. It's just in me. It never was something that required—it never made me feel like it was too much. The too much was more about it's time for me to do somethin' different. As opposed to, "This is too much work." It wasn't like that. It was just it was time, but it was—my job was to just make sure that the board members had what they needed to do their job that they volunteered to do, as effectively as possible.

*Kristyn Scorson:* You guys helped the New Jersey Seven, the women from the new *Out In the Night* documentary and everything?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes. One of the women, Terrain Dandridge just came. She's from Newark. She and her mom [Kimma Walker] used to attend church, and so when the tragedy happened, we were family. It was just easy. It was the thing that family does.

There was a need, and we supported them as best that we could. There's still her and Kimma [14:24] and her are still in my family. It was family. The church rallied around them. From the simplest

things like just sendin' them letters and visiting 'em. Showin' up at the court dates. Being support for their parents, when they just needed a space to cry and to scream, to vent. We do what we do. You know?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That's really cool. [00:15:00] Do you have an aspect of the work that you feel particularly passionate about?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I would have to say being available for folks in their journey, and knowing that it is not for us to direct the journey. It is for us to support the journey. I'm a true believer that coming out is a constant. I been an out lesbian since I was 17, but there are always—there's always an opportunity that will present itself for me to come out, and I'm 54.

Sometimes it is easier than other times. For me, I think it's important that particularly LGBT folks, and particularly LGBT folks of color, have a community that is there for them and their process. To the end of time, there will always be—we always will have to deal with as a community, LGBT, color, otherwise, with homophobia, but in communities of color, homophobia is steeped in religiosity.

It is the thing, as great as God is, it is often the bane of our existence as a community. Being able to be welcomed into somebody's journey, and support them in that way, is the thing that I'm most passionate about. It is the thing that I was born to do. As a young person, I've always been that person who had a knack for being with somebody where they were, and helping them to journey through.

My calling is ministry, and ministry not in the sense of Sunday church, but really being there to minister people through something. The work, that's the thing that drives me, because it's

real stuff. It's the thing that makes the difference between, literally, life and death.

Between goin' down the road of addiction, or committing suicide, or harming other people. It's the difference it can make, and I take that very seriously, and honored to be that for somebody else.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You mentioned your childhood. Who raised you?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* My mom.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Your mom, yeah.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* My mom and my sister raised me. My mother, I lost my mother it'll be four years.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I'm sorry.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Right? My sister's 13 years older than me, and so she was a great part of my raising, but my mother was—I grew up in the Church. Every time I tell this story, I go, "I told this story so many times." I think to myself, "It's not a big deal," but my mother was—I grew up in the Church. My mother was unique in that although she didn't believe that God creates you as other than heterosexual, she always loved me.

Always allowed me to take my journey, even though she didn't agree. My mother was loving, and she was gracious, and the women that were in my life, she treated them with honor and with respect, and so I come from, although I got the messages that homosexuality is an abomination, and all those things, that wasn't the thing that shaped me.



What shaped me was love, unconditional love. She voiced her opinion, but yet she loved me. My sister loved me, and when I told her that I was—gonna came out to my mother, [00:20:00] and she took me down to the village.

She's like, "This might be a place that you might feel safe." I come from that . That's just my experience. If I'm able to bring that experience to somebody else, that's—

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah, it sounds so similar, that love and supporting someone on their journey. Not trying to change their journey, but supporting them.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* What did your mom and your sister do for a living?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* My mom was a domestic, and my sister is a surgeon. Growin' up was hard, because my mother was unavailable in ways that I wish she could have been to me, that she was to the children that she was taking care of. That was a hard part for me. That was the hardest thing about my growin' up for me, than my sexuality. My sexuality actually just was. My sister, being so much older than me, she was—it feels like we're just becoming peers. Because she was away, she was studying, and she was becoming this amazing plastic surgeon. It was difficult for me, growing up in those kinds of dynamics, but they loved me, and they did the best that they could do.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You also worked as a program coordinator, the Lesbian AIDS project?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah. I was the coordinator, program coordinator, for the Lesbian AIDS project from 2004 to 2010. It was a program out of the gay men's health crisis. It was an amazing opportunity. I got to work with lesbians on—just the spectrum.

Women who had been lesbians all their life, but lived a heterosexual existence. Lesbians who were part of the Stonewall movement. It was just—lesbians impacted by HIV, addiction. Thriving successfully. It was one of the best experiences that I've had.

My job was simply to create programming for them, based on what they wanted. I had great mentors. I still maintain connections with some of those women, yeah, it was a great experience.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Was that in the city or was it Newark?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* It was in the city.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Newark. Okay.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* In the city, yeah. I'm from New York, and so it was goin' back to New York, bein' in New York every day. It was exciting, yeah. It was great. It was a great experience.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I was curious, did you hear any stories that stood out to you?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* The stories that stood out to me were the ones about how the women—women have always been at the forefront of the movement, in terms of providing—I don't wanna say care, because I think that that's too making it—minimizing it.

We've always been at the helm of—we've been the voice in ways that were easier for people to hear, than from a man's voice,. The stories about how the women were taking care of the men who were dying from HIV, and that they can go into places and speak on their behalf, in ways that another man could not, because he was gay. He would be, you know what I mean?

Those stories stand out. That's the history of women in the world, that's just what we do. If we have the opportunity to do it, we do that . Yeah, those are the things I remember. It was a great experience. Was one of the best experiences I've ever had.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I read in your bio on our site, you co-wrote the project's first white paper on lesbians and HIV?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes. I did [00:25:00] the interviews. In making the connection in-between HIV and being lesbian, was one of the most trying challenge. Because there are—the numbers don't say that lesbians can become infected, right, and so it was always a challenge to get funding for this project.

Because the numbers didn't prove that lesbians were at risk for HIV. A lot of the—this paper was to say that's not the case. These are the ways, and many of them—'cause the people think that—or used to think, that your behavior is indicative of your identity, and it isn't.

Lesbians were having sex with men for a number of reasons.

Because they were married, because they were trying to survive.

You know what I mean, but the Center for Disease Control couldn't—they couldn't make the connection.

This paper was really about getting at that stuff. Now, did it matter in the ways that we wished it could have, in terms of funding? No, but it was an experience that I'm glad I was part of.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. When it says the first white paper, is that Ryan White?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* No, it's called a white paper, and I forget why they call it a white paper. It's just the language. It's a research, so research papers are considered—they called white papers.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Mm-hmm, okay.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You also do life coaching?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I'm a relationship coach, and again, it's the natural progression of my life. I work with couples, mostly lesbian couples, who are looking to really actualize the greatest potential in their relationships.

The difference between a coach is—probably you know, is that a coach presents and works with the client to discover what works for them. As opposed to therapeutizing them on what—we don't deal with the past. We deal with what is now, and what results you want for your future. That's the difference.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I work with women, or couples. I haven't worked with a—I had one heterosexual couple. I work with couples around, "This is where we are. This is what we vision for our lives, both individually and collectively. How do we set up goals to have it turn out?" That's what I do.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* How do you start something like that?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* How do I start, how did I get into it?

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I took a course. I took a tele-course, a coaching course. It was ten weeks long, and I did it with the World Coaching Institute. Then I was certified, and took a final exam, and I was certified. There's levels, so I'm a professional life coach, but my niche is relationships.

Then I will go on to be a master coach. A master coach, you can—it requires you do more hours. It's just a different level, but right now, I'm doin' what I'm doing.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* What's the name of it? Do you have a name?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes. Into Me I See Life Coaching.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Okay. Do you feel like—do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah.

C. Alicia Heath-Toby: Yes. I've always had, I have an entrepreneur's spirit. Most of my life—I grew up, again, with a mom who—she worked really, really hard. Education and work were like "it." At 17, I started doin' hair. When I was 20—God, I got married to Honei [*her wife Sandra*], so when I was about 20, [00:30:00] I was in business for myself. I was doin' hair, and I was doin' nails. I was doin' really well, and so I've always—and I'm a barber by trade. I've always had the—I can make money without somebody payin' me. I can make my money, you know what I mean? I do consider myself an entrepreneur, it's easy for me. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: Do you find that to be empowering to be involved with all of these things?

C. Alicia Heath-Toby: I find it empowering, but I also—to be really honest, it is—I'm not the person who can just do very little. It keeps me busy. I struggle with depression. The things that I do is really about keeping me connected with my greatest potential. Because if I'm not doing, I'm feeling really bad. If I'm feeling really bad, it's a slippery slope for me.

I have a history of addiction. I'd used many drugs in my youth, and it was the way in which I dealt with depression . When I came outta that, I was like, "You gotta figure this thing out . You gotta feel good." Yes, it's empowering, but it's even deeper than that for me. It is the thing that really keeps me above the fray [*laughter*]. Yeah.

Kristyn Scorsone: What do you think about the revitalization happening in Newark?

C. Alicia Heath-Toby: This is where me and Honei have the biggest discussions, the most impassioned discussions. I think that Newark has great potential,

but Newark, in my short time here—I've been here 24 years, has not lived up to its greatest potential.

I have a real issue—I have seen gentrification happen a number of times in my lifetime. The thing that troubles me about the revitalizing of a community, is that the people who grew up here can't afford to live here and stay here.

It happens in Harlem, it has happened in Harlem a number of times. The community I'm talkin' about is the communities of color, and that—it just incenses me. It makes me so angry. I think that it's about money, at the end of the day. The city wants to make money, but at what cost, and who gets pushed out, and who gets to stay? I don't like it.

I understand it for what it is. It's good for the city, but is it good for the people? I have mixed feelings. Honei was born and raised here, and she just—she's thrilled about it all, and she gets to be, but I just struggle with it.

I feel like there's not a happy—there's not a happy medium. When they decided to build the stadium, tons of business owners got pushed out. People. Then, once they did that, then housing, and then the people who lived in the surrounding areas.

Yes, the projects are not the best place to live, but they had a place. They tore those down, and they moved it. Where did those people go? They go to the streets, and they go to the shelters, and they go to the prisons. It's just a vicious cycle. Again, at what cost? I struggle with it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* How did you come to Newark?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I was married, and I was going through a divorce. A friend of mine lived here in Irvington, who was a friend of Sandra's, and had an

apartment. I subleased the apartment. Fell in love with Sandra, and stayed [laughter]. That's the short of it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you have certain areas in Newark that you associate with queer people, like bars or clubs?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* There used to be Murphy's, but it's gone, so no—there is, I won't say emphatically, so there's [00:35:00] Diamondz N Da Ruff. Outside a that, no, there's no one place that I associate with queer folks. If anything, it would be the churches, but any social places, no. That's the other thing. I think the city has not invested—again, has not invested in LGBTQ community in a way that it could.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You have a nine-to-five job as well?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I work for FedEx. It's, unfortunately, not a nine-to-five [laughter] but yeah. I do that. Yeah, I do that.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Sandra has told me you drive the—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* - on the tarmac?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* That's cool.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah, it's pretty cool.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Are you ever scared?



*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* No. Not at all. It's all controlled. I like what I do. I do, I like what I do. I drive tug, and I move freight. I load friend onto aircraft. It's pretty cool, but it's not scary at all. The scariest part is that the weather, the inclement weather. It's icy, but other than that, it's—and it's an easy job.

That's a good thing, because it's easy in that it doesn't—it's not a lotta brainwork. Physical. It's extremely physical, but outside a that, it's not a lotta brainwork. It's pretty cool. Yeah, I like it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* For any of your roles that you've done, do you feel like you've had challenges that you've dealt with that were specific to your gender or race or religion or sexuality?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Of all the things that I have done? The hardest part of my life has been in terms of education. I grew up in the ghetto of Spanish Harlem. That was home, and I was schooled—I went into a private school, and it was not home. I was one of seven other black students in the school of all-white kids.

From high school, I went to Holy Cross College, which was another community of—it was maybe 50 of us in a college of—and that was the time, those were the times when it was obvious that I was brown-skinned. I was treated differently.

That was hard, but outside of that, I never felt that it was particularly hard for me because I was LGBTQ or I was a woman, but I also came from a strong—in my house, we read Booker T. Washington and *[inaudible 38:18]*. We read Zora Neale Hurston. We were proud black folk.

I went into those arenas being very clear about my lustrous legacy that I was preparin' for, and that what I came from in history.

Although it was difficult, I was grounded in that . I got through it because I had that.

When I came out, I didn't think about it. I was very clear that I liked girls, I liked women . I never backed down from it, I never was in a closet. I don't know what that—I don't know what that experience is like.

When I work with folks, I say that to folks. I say, "I'm hearing your experience but I don't know what that's like." I live unapologetically, Kristyn. I do. This is me. It's easy to do, because I am dark-skinned and I am butch. I can't be any—those two things, I can't change that.

Given my circumstances, I can't. I'm not gonna lighten up, and I'm not goin' to wear a pump and heels because it's the thing that I'm supposed to do, 'cause I'm in gender woman. This is it [*laughter*].

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Mm-hmm. Do you feel successful?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. [00:40:00] Do you have a personal mantra, motto or a quote that you—if you need peppin' yourself up?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Actually, you know, no, I don't. I don't have a one thing. I don't have one thing, that's a—I have to think about that, 'cause I don't. I do what's necessary to pep myself up. I walk every day. She saved my life. That's the thing that—I make time for me, but I don't have a one thing that I say to myself.

When I'm struggling, I acknowledge that I'm struggling. I believe in a Higher Power, and so I have a relationship with my God. I sit and listen, and sometimes it comes, and sometimes it doesn't come. I just wait. I wait for the wave to pass.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* How do you unwind, or where do you find inspiration for the things you do?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Walking. I like music. I listen to music when I need it. See, I'm a person that if I need it, I access it. I like to be with friends, but I love my time. I love to eat [laughter] and I like to travel. When we can afford to do more of that, we will do more of that, but I like to travel. I like being in community. Part of why I'm staying with the center, I volunteer, is 'cause I like being in the community . It feeds me. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Have you ever in your life felt like you had live up to normative measures of success, so to speak, of house or kid or marriage?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Oh yeah. When you ask me, do I feel successful? There's a, yes, I do, but do I struggle with what my success looks like, versus somebody else's, yes. I don't do Facebook anymore. This is a confession. I've only told this to Honei. I don't do it, because it makes me feel like I'm not valuable. Everybody's postin' all the stuff they're doin', where they went, and that's not my reality. I don't go, because it doesn't make me feel good.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Mm-hmm. Yeah.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* I can understand that.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Did I wanna get married? Did I wanna get—I wanted to have children. That was, for me, what was the—my mother was a single mother. My father left before I was born, so the normal was not mom and dad, but the normal was—and my mother only had two babies. For me, it was expected. It was expected, and I wanted to have children. That's my biggest regret.

I lost a son, and it was the time when I was discovering my sexuality. The options for artificial insemination wasn't even—it wasn't even a consideration. Then I drew myself into bein' who I was.

I didn't have sex with guys anymore, and so the opportunity to have a baby was not there. Had I to do it again, if I came out at this time, I would have had, I would have a baby. Yeah. Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* You guys helped with Lambda Legal with the marriage equality—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes. Another incredible experience in my life. I don't know, 'cause you don't know what you don't know, but I don't know if I would have done it if they would have asked me to do it as a single person. If I would have joined that work. Particularly at the time of my life, 'cause I was absorbed in other stuff, but Honei was the grounding for me.

She made it real, like it was important. I knew the work was important, [00:45:00] but I didn't think that at that time, that if I could have brought anything to it as a individual person, but partnerin' with her was—it was what we did.

It was a great experience. When it was over, I was glad, and I was disappointed because of the outcome. The team of people and the couples and Lambda, it was just a phenomenal experience. It was hard, it was hard because we were the only black family. The black

lesbian family. The community, black folks, again, don't do homosexuality well.

Even homosexuals, black homosexuals, don't do it. It's not easy for them. We're dealing with the everyday struggle, so for us, marriage was like this far-off thing. We just tryin' to make sure that we got these things in place so that—you know what I mean?

Being out there at those town meetings, and lookin' out there, and you see no black folks. Comin' home, and you doin' the town meetin' in the community, and your people aren't there. It was a really difficult time, but it was what we were supposed to do, and I'm glad we did it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did you feel pressure to be like a perfect you? 'Cause you're like the face of this—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I did. I felt like, "To much is given, much is required." There is a—you gotta toe the line. There is an expectation when—it's not any different than when you're on your gig. There's an expectation if you take this position, that there's some things you need to do. You need to set the standard, and I did, I felt that pressure. I felt like we were makin' the difference for many black lesbians who, if they ever thought that they wanted to get married to their beloved, that it could happen, it could be real.

It was heavy for me. In hindsight, I don't think that me and Honei ever had much time to even talk about what that meant. We were just in it. Thank God we had each other, because we were the respite for each other . Because it was work, it was grueling.

It was emotional, it was all those things. It was elating. There were moments in it when you could see the light at the end of the tunnel. Then there would be somethin' that would happen, and you would go, "Oh my God, we goin'"—it was a lot.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did people ever protest you guys? When you were going to things?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* There were people that would protest us. We got a hate response on a blog. We did some photo shoots, and somebody, some people did some hate—made some hateful statements, but we never got hate mail or anything like that. We would do a town, and we would be comin' into the town hall meetin', and there would be people with picket signs. "You're goin' to Hell."

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did you ever worry for your safety or—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Not really. Not really. No, I don't recall a time where I felt like, "Oh, I don't think we should do this because it's unsafe." No, it wasn't like that. It was more just some things that people would say, but I never felt like our lives were at stake.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Do you have a favorite memory from that time?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* One of the favorite memories is when we were asked to be a guest at—I think I forge the name. Marriage Equality in Chicago. Flown out, and had the party. Another time, when were asked to do a photo shoot in Los Angeles, so those were the highlights. Those were the fun things.

Working with [00:50:00] David Buckel, who was the lead counsel. He went on to do some other things. Amazing man, just brilliant. He invited us to the lawsuit, and just workin' with him was one of the best—I learned so much from his—he's just grace. He was a gracious man, and just smart and knew how to make you feel like everything you were doing was important.

Lisa Hardaway, I wish you coulda interviewed Lisa Hardaway. Another Lambda Legal staff person, who just—those people made

it worth it. Held out emotional hands every step of the way. Yeah, it was great.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Did your mom and your sister—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* No, my mother was in—my mother never was interested in what I was doing, in terms of social justice work. She never attended anything that I did, she didn't come to my wedding . She wasn't that mother . She loved me in the best way she could, but she wasn't—my sister, she gets it, but doesn't get it. Part of it is, I also am very guarded about my life. I'm not the person that you can just state anything about what's goin' on in the community, like, "We gonna fight." I held a lot to my heart, because if you didn't come right, we was gonna not be a fan. We gonna divorce, we gonna have a divorce goin' on. I didn't risk myself in that way, and put myself out there like that, for them to say something crazy. Or not gonna show up. I was guarded in that way about it.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Yeah. How about the LGBT community here? Were they excited?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yes, they were. They were excited for us, because they knew us personally. Our church family, they were with us. They followed the case, so when we won civil union, which was not what we wanted, it was still a celebration. It was a big deal, because it was, "We know you guys," and that was fun.

*Kristyn Scorsone:* Mm-hmm.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Yeah.

*Kristyn Scorson:* How did you feel when you saw—'cause Sandra was telling me, when she found the newspaper, and George Bush was on the cover—

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Oh, my God. She's a nostalgic one. I was excited, because it excited her. For me, Kristyn, I know—intellectually I knew that this was a big deal. This lawsuit was huge, and it would change the trajectory of our community and our right to wed one another, and have all the legality that come—all the benefits that come with it. I got that, but for me, it was always a no-brainer.

Things like seeing our picture on the front of the *New York Times* that should be the norm. For me, it was—I get that it's not the norm. I get we're the people, and blah, blah, blah, but we shouldn't have to be fightin' for this. This should just be.

I never was—again, I got that it was important, but it wasn't somethin' that I was like, "Newspapers everywhere." Buddy's like, "Newspapers, I've seen [*crosstalk 53:54*] like this."

That wasn't me, but having her be excited, made me excited. Those are the things that when I tell my grandchildren, it will be the stories about how she responded and reacted to bein' participatory in that process. It made history, but it was supposed to be, it's just like a, "Really?" Okay.

*Kristyn Scorson:* Yeah. Let's see. Do you have specific goals for the future?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* I do. This is a hard one, and it's hard because I believe that everything happens for a reason. Let me just say that. [00:55:00] I am the Reverend, and I like to preach, and I like to teach Scripture. I have been out of the pulpit in a very long time, and I miss it. The one thing that I wanna do is to have a faith community. The reason why it's hard, is because they say the thing that you speak



will come to be, but it also comes with a price. That is one thing that I—my personal goal.

In terms of my family, my goal is to be financially sound, so that my wife can reap the benefit of doing the thing that she loves, which is her art, and that she doesn't have to worry that the bills will be paid. That's, yeah, those two things are important to me.

*Kristyn Scorson:* Yeah. Is there anything that I didn't ask you about, that you wish I had?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* No [laughter]

*Kristyn Scorson:* I guess, what is your favorite kinda day look like?

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Up by 6:00, go to the park, take a walk. Come back, do some coaching work. This is my ideal day. Do some coaching work, have lunch wherever I wanna have lunch. Go back to the park, take a walk through. Do some reading, some more coaching work. Pick up Honei. Have dinner together. Watch a little TV. Maybe make love, depending on how we feel, and go to bed.

*Kristyn Scorson:* Nice.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* [Laughter]

*Kristyn Scorson:* That sounds pretty perfect to me. Thank you so much.

*C. Alicia Heath-Toby:* Thank you. I appreciate you.

[End of Audio, 00:57:33]