



Steve Adkins Interview

Kathy Hersh: This is February 27th, 2017. My name is Kathy Hersh, and I'm interviewing Steve Adkins here in the GLBT Miami-Dade Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.[00:16] I want to get the right name.

Steve Adkins: Correct.

Kathy: Okay. So, let's start out by telling us, Steve, when you first came to Miami Beach, and what brought you here.

Steve: Okay. Boy, almost 20 years ago now — I can't believe I've lived there that long, but, you know — a third of my life. I moved here in early 1999, and I moved here from San Diego, California, which is another great place.

I was in banking. I was a career banker for most of my adult life, and I had just gotten tired of being in that career path. I think banking had changed, fundamentally, during the '80's, and instead of being a career banker, who were more of a commodity. I think the banking industry changed to a point where the relationships that I had pretty much nurtured and fostered over all those years had changed dramatically.

The banks were in control, and they were very cavalier about the relationships they were establishing. I think they were trying to transition from a kind of collegial, very much relationship-dependent kind of industry, to something much more commodity-based, and I just didn't like that transition, so I decided I was going to leave banking.

I, at that time, was evaluating my options. As it turned out, I ended up buying a bed-and-breakfast here in South Beach. I went on the Internet, and looked all over the country, and I wanted to find a place that was similar to California, but different. I wanted an East Coast experience.

Lo and behold. I found this wonderful little jewel on Jefferson Avenue, called the Jefferson House Bed and Breakfast. It was the only licensed B&B in Miami Beach. So, in 1999 I purchased that property, and I did that until 2005.

I fell in love with not just Miami Beach, but South Florida — the people, the energy, kind of the international climate, and how crazy and zany that kind of made everything. That was really great for me, and so I made that transition, and really enjoyed the experience.

Kathy: So, south Florida is very different, you would say, than southern California?

Steve: Very much so. It is, like California, a melting pot, so people are from other parts of the country, primarily, and from other parts of the world, but San Diego is your typical southern California laid-back city. It's in the shadow of Los Angeles. Everything is, I wouldn't say "complacent," but certainly like Los Angeles, where there's that energy of business and buzz. It's a much more low-key place.



As a result of that, I think it kind of marches on at a very different pace. I really wanted to experience kind of an East Coast melting-pot kind of location, and found south Florida to have those elements that I liked about southern California. It was as frenzied as, say, New York, but it was much more educational-based, much more international, because of its location and proximity to Latin America. It had those things that I was missing from my California experience.

Kathy: [03:37] It's very spicy.

Steve: Very spicy, very warm. The humidity takes some getting used to during the summer, but you do, and I've just loved it here.

Kathy: The experience of running the bed and breakfast in south Florida, what was that like?

Steve: Different than I had expected. I think a lot of people, you know, when they're looking at a third career — you know, winding down — they look at the hospitality field as something that might be alluring to them. I expected it to be less business and more kind of collegial and congenial, and so I enjoyed that part of it significantly.

I loved the guest experience, the fact that they come back to see you each year, that you really do build that rapport together. The work of having a small property like that — it was 10 rooms — it was beyond what I had expected. I mean, you do everything.

I would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, try to kind of do my exercise, starting cooking at 6:00, wouldn't finish until noon. You're still answering the phone, checking in the guests, checking out the guests, cleaning rooms when the housekeeper doesn't show up, and all of that. It is more than a nine-to-five job, and the expectation when your guests are there is that they want your undivided attention, so you are really having to be on all the time.

Then you have the late-night experiences of "I lost my key," or, "I locked myself out of the room," and you're having to disrupt your sleep to go and take care of what's going on. I was never so exhausted in my life as when I sold the property and realized how much it took out of you.

At the same time, it was really one of the most wonderful experiences that I ever had, just because the people are in such a good mood when they come to visit. For the most part, my guests were very well-behaved. Just a really wonderful experience, just from that kind of camaraderie perspective.

Kathy: Running a small bed and breakfast — [chuckling] well, apparently it didn't feel small.

Steve: No. I didn't feel small.

Kathy: But for a bed and breakfast, 10 rooms is quite a lot.



Steve: It is quite a lot.

Kathy: You must, because you're relationship-geared, have gotten some insight into, "What brings people here? Why do they come to Miami Beach?"

Steve: Yeah.

Kathy: What are they looking for?

Steve: It's easy to say the beach. We pretty much have control of the hospitality world from around Christmastime — the holidays — until just before Memorial Day. This is the place to go, because the weather's so great. We have great beaches.

Our hotel properties really are geared towards being open and accepting to the world — to everyone. We've really worked hard on our diversity and inclusion over the last 30 years, to make sure this experience is good for everyone. We've made mistakes, and we've learned along the way, but I think we've corrected very appropriately and quickly.

Beyond the beach, I think it's the fact that, for my guests — our guest house was open to everyone, but I marketed to the LGBT market, primarily — that this was very much a place where they could be themselves. Miami Beach has always been that way. It really has been an inclusive city, and very progressive in terms of its politics, and, I think, very aware of its social consciousness.

I never had a fear that anybody who came to visit would have a problem, other than having a little too much to drink and not making their way home easily. I didn't worry about that. I think that's, to me, what really is remarkable about Miami Beach.

Kathy: That's not accidental.

Steve: No.

Kathy: Tell us about helping create that kind of ethos here, as either your organization, or informally — other LGBT folks living on the beach — and how that's contributed.

Steve: It's a fascinating story. Through the memoirs, you've talked to a lot of people, especially people who very much pre-date me. You and I were talking about Michael [phonetic][08:29] Aler, who was Mr. Miami Beach, and was on our board, and was a city official for a long time.

He was really the first openly gay employee of the City of Miami Beach. Mayor [phonetic][08:41] Gelber hired him into his constituency, and really gave him an opportunity to shine, and show Miami Beach as a diverse and welcoming place from an LGBT perspective.

So, we kind of took that lead, as Miami Beach started to change demographically, and said, "What do we want Miami Beach to be about?"



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What do we want to say to people who are visiting Miami Beach, when they come here, when it comes to the diversity platform?"

I think the city was really working on its African-American outreach at that time. Certainly, the Latin population had exploded, but from a visitor's standpoint, Latin America was really opening up to south Florida as a destination with significant financial clout.

From the LGBT perspective, we wanted to make sure that the visitors who were coming here would have a great experience, places to go, things to do, but would leave feeling good about having spent their time here. We worked with the Greater Miami Convention and Visitor's Bureau, we worked closely with the City of Miami Beach, to make sure that if there was a problem, it was corrected quickly, and that there wasn't a media backlash over it, that people felt safe, and that we created space places and safe spaces for folks.

We worked really hard behind the scenes to make sure that we had our things together. I think that reflected very positively on the visitor experience.

Kathy: Was there any kind of overt campaign, where there was really very specific outreach, in the media, for example?

Steve: We did work with the Convention and Visitors Bureau. At the beginning, what was the typical visitor to south Florida? We tried to create kind of an image of what that was. At the time, we felt that because the hotels were spending all of this money and upgrading their properties, that that was kind of an upscale visitor profile.

The advertising early on, during the late '90's and early 2000's, that imagery was very much, you know, the professional business traveler, the upscale couple traveling on vacation, because it became, very quickly, an expensive destination to come to. As Miami continued to diversify, so did the mass of the LGBT population who came here.

Now I would say that really, the one demographic within the L, G, B and T that we don't have as many visitors as we'd like, and we're working on that, is the L. So, we're really looking at more women, and making this attractive to all those pockets of diversity.

Kathy: That's very interesting.

Steve: It's very interesting, and I think people don't pay attention, sometimes, to how travel patterns are unique to different demographic constituencies. Even with the gay market, there are definitely divisions when it comes to people's buying patterns.

Women have frequented other cities that they feel are more welcoming to the lesbian experience, and certainly there are other things that women like that men maybe don't, and vice-versa. I mean, we have to pay more attention to that, and make sure that women find Miami Beach as inviting and welcoming for the things that they're looking for, as the men do.



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Kathy: Maybe lesbian women feel a double vulnerability, because a lot of women are loathe to travel on their own, for example, in a lot of places.

Steve: It's a good point. I think that safety has always been a concern to a traveler, especially someone traveling alone, but I also think that we tend to be very clannish, especially if you come from a minority that — and I classify the LGBT community as a minority group — where you have been oppressed for a long, long time, and so you don't want to go somewhere where your safety is a concern.

I think, for a lesbian, the double — and sometimes, the triple — where you're a woman, you're a sexual minority, and you also may be an ethnic minority. You've got all of those things of concern that you have to really consider when making a destination choice.

Kathy: Overall, aside from the fact of your desire to attract more lesbian tourists, would you say that the campaign has been successful?

Steve: I definitely think so. I think, with women, this is a more recent desire — to create that experience — and I think the marketing campaign will certainly be evident of that. The LGBT outreach has been significant, and a very large percentage of the [phonetic][14:11] GMCVB's marketing budget.

[phonetic][14:16] George Neary, who is also on our board, travels with the Bureau on behalf of cultural tourism and LGBT travel. Everywhere he's going, he's espousing the virtues of south Florida, specifically Miami Beach and greater Miami, as a welcoming place for the LGBT traveler — and doing a remarkable job.

Kathy: One of the things we're looking at, and we're hoping to get additional funding to expand on, is the role of the LGBT community in historic preservation. The fact that South Beach even exists — you know, the Art Deco District.

Steve: Right.

Kathy: I know you came a little late, but you're no doubt aware of that.

Steve: Oh, my goodness...

Kathy: So, if you could kind of comment on that from your perspective, that would be good.

Steve: Preservation is so important to the beach. As you come into Miami Beach, on any of the causeways, one of the signs says, "Art Deco District," and the preservation movement protected and preserved a significant portion of our little island here, to make sure that the unique distinctiveness of that heritage — that construction — was preserved.

Part of the story that is really near and dear, I think, to most gays and lesbians, is that we were part of that early trend of migration to the



beach, who wanted to see that Art Deco District — that Art Deco architecture — preserved. We have a list of folks on here that contributed to this conference room in honor of Mr. Aler, and many of the people on there were part of that movement.

It's still something we have to be aware of, because the development that's going on on the beach right now — you know, we're having another wave of increased density, and I think it's really important that the uniqueness of the architectural timbre here is preserved. It's really one of the only places in the world where that many properties exist in one place.

Kathy: It just occurred to me that maybe the scale of this place contributes to a sense of security, in that you aren't presented with block after block — you know, a "condo canyon."

Steve: Right.

Kathy: It feels more like a small place.

Steve: Yeah. It feels like it could be your home. It's not large. I mean, Miami Beach, width-wise, is what? A mile and-a-half at its widest place. It's easy to walk across it, and as you do that, you're walking through a mostly residential community, and that makes people feel safe.

I think the other thing is that it's such a livable and walkable place to scale, that a lot of our European visitors, and many of our Latin — urban — visitors, really feel like this is very similar to their home experience. You don't have to have a car. We have great public transportation, and it's easy to really move around and enjoy everything we have to offer here.

People who go on vacation to other large cities sometimes feel walled-in, like you said. You're stuck in one place, because you feel so overwhelmed by what's going on, or the density of the population or whatever it might be, that you don't get a full experience of the location. In Miami Beach, that's not the case. You get it all, which is really remarkable.

Kathy: Back to the role of the LGBTQ in the historic preservation. Can you, even though you weren't here at that time, talk about that legacy?

Steve: Sure. Back in the late '80's, we had a lot of people who were starting to move here, for many different reasons. Some were looking to retire — you know, leave the cold climate to come to a warmer climate — but many were looking for a place where they could settle in affordably. Through the '80's and '90's, Miami Beach, because it was transitioning so much, so quickly, was a very affordable place to go.

You could also get involved in the politics of that change, and make an impact. I think the LGBT market — and there were some things going on that really were unique to the LGBT market, AIDS being one of them. The AIDS crisis brought a lot of people down here to die. If they were going to die, they were going to live in a place where there was a warm climate, where they could at least enjoy the sun before passing away.



You had a lot of people who came down here that didn't expect to live as long as they did, and because of that, became immediately involved in something that they had brought with them. A lot of people had come here with a preservation background, and became involved in that during that time.

I remember Gary Farmer, who used to work for the City of Miami Beach — he moved here during the late '80's, and he opened a restaurant here on the beach. He said, "One, it was affordable. I didn't have to go through near the bureaucracy that you'd have to go through right now."

You got to know the people in Miami Beach so easily, and so quickly. It's always been the city of camaraderie. You got to know your neighbors, and you helped each other, and there was no time more evident than the '80's and '90's where that was such a fact.

The guest house that I ended up buying, there were some guys that opened a couple places south of 5th, that saw that as a great opportunity to not only preserve this beautiful Mediterranean-style property, but convert it to what they liked — which was, having a restaurant in it, have a guest house in there.

They came in, and they bought the property with that specific idea of preservation, and showcasing the LGBT community in Miami Beach. There are so many names of people who moved from Coconut Grove, who moved from Coral Gables, who even moved from Broward down here, because it was affordable. The energy was really spectacular. People just saw the potential of what Miami Beach could be.

The other thing that happened is, within the LGBT community, we always try to create safe spaces around ourselves, and one of the things, until now, that's been very prominent about the LGBT community is that we have a lot of clubs — a lot of bars and clubs where we could gather safely, and meeting other like-minded folks. Miami Beach had tons of them that popped up during that era.

You had big nightclubs, you had small neighborhood bars that reflected all aspects of the community, and you also had a lot of modeling agencies that popped up during that time, that employed a lot of gays. So, this huge explosion during the '90's really did happen. That made Miami Beach the place to be, and a lot of it had to do with the gay population.

Kathy: Did you come after Leonard Horowitz' time? I think he died probably before...

Steve: Leonard passed away before I did, but I know [phonetic][22:21] Saul and Jay Gross, and Leonard used to live on their property. I'm glad you brought this up. Leonard worked with [phonetic][22:30] Barbara Kappedman to ensure — I mean, they were chained to fences to make sure that a lot of these properties didn't get torn down, and were really the mother and father of preservation here in Miami Beach, and are responsible for the Art Deco District being what it is today — and he was a gay man.



Leonard, to continue the conversation, was really responsible for the color palette that the city adopted — the pastels that are part of the preservation platform. When something is preserved, there's a lot of components to that, and the color palette is one of those. Leonard was really the gentleman that did that.

Kathy: He really started something with that.

Steve: He did.

Kathy: Miami Vice picked it up, and [crosstalk][23:22] Don Johnson wore the colors.

Steve: Yes. Yes, absolutely. It did. It became more than just the Miami Dolphins' colors, or whatever sports team might have. The pastels, especially the blue and the orange and the pinks and what have you, that became Miami. We marketed that all over the world. Miami Vice couldn't have done a better job. That was Leonard.

Kathy: Leonard's first building, I understand, was the old [phonetic][23:51] Freedman Bakery.

Steve: Yes. Yes.

Kathy: What's going on there now? It looks like that whole block, maybe, is going to be undergoing some kind of renovation.

Steve: There is so much happening right now, I can't even keep up with it. It's taking place in two different locations. When the current mayor and commission came in, there was a lot of emphasis placed in the North Beach area, in trying to bring not just preservation, but activities and visibility to the area.

At the same time, the whole discussion regarding global warming and climate change brought new awareness to this seepage that we're getting from the ocean, and the fact that we need to address this as an island community. So, with some of the new plans to make sure that we don't have severe flooding has come a lot of new development projects, to replace old properties that might be more prone to the flooding issue, or the seepage issue from underground water.

I know a lot of [phonetic][25:07] Alton Road is being planned for redevelopment, and some of it is certainly planned for Washington and Collins, which includes the property that you're talking about. I haven't seen those plans, at least at this particular time.

There was a blue ribbon task force that met under the mayor's call for action that was spearheaded by Saul Gross and one of our architects. I apologize — I've forgotten the name, but it will come to me. They have put together a wonderful plan that's been approved by the city, to preserve much of the business identity of Washington Avenue, because Washington really has been the business district of Miami Beach since the



'40's.

We don't have this major thoroughfare to get inundated with new construction, but at the same time, we want to bring residents back to Washington Avenue, so there's a lot of emphasis being put on cafes, sidewalk cafes, bringing the residents into whatever the new development is that's going to take place here, so that maybe the second and the third stories of some of these buildings will be residential in nature, rather than business in nature.

Certainly, parking is a discussion that is on everybody's tongue. When you talk about Miami Beach, the lack of parking is an issue. Some of that's being planned for Washington Avenue. It's amazing how we have transformed, and how quickly we have.

Kathy: One of our early interviews was with Saul, and he talked about just what you're talking about — trying to preserve the feeling of a residential community on Washington Avenue, where he owned a lot of property.

Steve: Yeah.

Kathy: I think he turned down a Starbucks, because he had this vision, as [inaudible crosstalk][27:13] many did, that this is a community. There is a tension here, at times, [crosstalk][27:20] between the residential needs and the tourism needs.

Steve: Definitely.

Kathy: Could you address that a little?

Steve: Yeah. You're seeing that on Ocean Drive, and we'll go into that in just a second. Saul is a very thoughtful man, and a really good businessperson. He owns, like you said, several — this block here, another one up there. One of the things that he'll really tried to be sensitive to are the needs of the businesspeople. His rents are very reasonable by comparison. The properties haven't really materially changed, out of a desire to maintain kind of the look and the feel of Washington Avenue.

I think he also realizes that at some point, it does have to change, because it's just getting dated, and the properties here, because of the weather, tend to age much more quickly. So, that's why I think he felt it was so important for him to be part of that discussion, so that residents had a say, as well as some of the business owners.

The other thing that happens, and it certainly happened more on Washington than on any other street, is, as Miami Beach has gotten older, the owners of these properties have passed on. Their families have inherited the properties, and most of them don't live in Miami anymore.

That connection to the city is not what it used to be, and I think that's why this blue ribbon task force felt such a need to make sure that their voices were heard, and that outside voices were not having undue influence. I think it was a very good blend of new and old that was finally



agreed upon for Washington Avenue.

To your point about the residents feeling somewhat disconnected from the tourism experience that takes place, this has been going on for a number of years. Once you cross from Washington into the residential district, it's like, if you don't work over here, there's no reason to come over here, and that's not a good thing, because the businesses on Washington, Collins and Ocean really do depend on the residential community for a lot of their business. Because of the tourism inundation, especially on Ocean Drive, you've seen the residents stop going.

There a host of reasons for that. I think the city did encourage residents to speak their mind, in terms of why they weren't coming to Ocean Drive, and a lot of those opinions factored into the blue ribbon task force's 10-point plan that was just recently approved for Ocean Drive, which includes making it more pedestrian-friendly, stopping the over solicitation that was going on from the restaurants and some of the other patron facilities, and really cleaning it up at night — because Ocean Drive is a really different place after dark than it is during the sunlight hours.

We don't want the locals to feel like Ocean Drive doesn't belong to them anymore. It's really an important place, and it's right there on the beach. It's our most famous street, even more so than Lincoln Road. So, Steve [phonetic][30:49] Haas, who's a good friend of mine, and is a restauranteur, was hired by the Merchants' Association of Ocean Drive to help not just implement the 10-point plan, but to go through the 47 restaurants — that was a shock. There are 47 restaurant licenses from 5th to 15th, on Ocean Drive.

Steve's job was to work with each one of the owners to ensure that there was a point of customer service training that took place, to help bring about this kind of backing off the solicitation, helping the customer make an informed decision as they were looking at all the different options that they have available to them in terms of their dining or bar experience on Ocean Drive, and really making it have a much softer tone, in terms of how we were treating both our residents and our tourists on Ocean Drive, with the hopes that as opinion changes, the residents are going to feel more inclined to go back to Ocean Drive.

The restaurants are very competitive in terms of their pricing, excluding alcohol. You can get a good meal on Ocean Drive, and have a really good experience. The thing that I think people were worried about was it was just so overrun with tourists that they wouldn't feel comfortable there again.

The other thing that's happened, and this is a big issue with redevelopment, comes the cost of doing business. You'd be surprised at the leases, and how much people are paying for those restaurants. The least expensive lease, right now, is around \$50,000 a month. Some of those restaurants are paying \$110,000 a month, for 20 tables, because a lot of them don't have inside space. If you look at it from an owner's perspective, what you have to generate, income-wise, off of that street traffic, to make that business go, is extreme.



Kathy: Now wonder the vendors were so aggressive.

Steve: That's why a lot of them really were reticent to back off of that, but every week, at least twice a week, I go up and down Ocean Drive, just to see if the work that Steve and the city are doing is taking form and having a positive result, and it is. I'm happy to say, since they've moved the tables in, and people now have a path all the way up Ocean Drive, all the way from 5th to 15th, where they don't have to jig-jag and walk through this barrage of people asking them to sit down and dine with them, it has changed the experience significantly.

I'm no longer haggled every step of the way. You know, it was causing people to go to the other side, walk up and down [phonetic][33:59] Lumas Park, and that's not happening anymore. So...good thing.

Kathy: I'm glad to [crosstalk][34:05] hear that, because I cross to the other side.

Steve: Let's see how it goes. I know, and I would, if not — because I wanted to see what's going on. I'm very happy to say that it looks like it's working.

Kathy: [phonetic][34:18] Carl?

Carl: I'd like to get back to the gay and lesbian, GLBTQ experience.

Steve: Okay.

Carl: Also, how that's changed, because certainly, in your lifetime, we have seen the GLBTQ community come out of the closet, and I'm wondering about the Miami Beach — I mean, in the last 15 years, it must have changed dramatically. I'd like to sort of have you address, even in your experience on the beach, how the times have changed. I'm wondering if you address that in the context of your work, and what you see here on the beach.

Steve: Absolutely. Great question, because it really has changed. When I first moved here, the political climate and also, I think, the lifestyle of the LGBT community, was still protective. We had our places that we went to. We went to our bars, our particular little restaurants that we felt safe in, and it was as much a social experience as it was feeling safe. In the last 17 years, the change that has taken place socially has been significant.

When I moved here back in 1999, Miami Beach was still very much a party city from an LGBTQ perspective. People came here for the beach, but they also came to have a good time. We had clubs, we had bars, we had restaurants, all for the LGBT community. It was as a result of, you know...the gay community formed these gay ghettos all around the country, kind of urban-centric places we felt safe. We had our own communities, our own bars, our own restaurants, for safety and for socialization.

After 2000 — and I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that so many people in the community had come out, whether it was because of AIDS,



or because of, "I'm just tired of living in the closet, and not being my true self" — this wave of change started to manifest. The youth of our country really did embrace that more than the adults. I think there's still trepidation for someone who's 50 and over, especially in the workplace, to be out, and openly gay in their profession.

The youth of this country — you know, 40's and under — not an issue. "I am who I am. Deal with it." It should be an issue, anyway, and so as a result of that, not only has the social infrastructure around LGBT travel changed, but the traveler has, as well. The demands upon a community, certainly from a tourism standpoint, is much more expected, so that diversity-inclusion is a policy. It is a way of running your business, is the expectation, and if you are not, you are ostracized, or even picketed online, in social media, so that people will say, "Look, this place hasn't changed," or, "It is not as welcoming and accepting as you would expect. Don't go there."

Social media is as much a catalyst for the change that's taken in the community, as, I think, lifestyle changes, and that's a really wonderful thing. Of course, in the last eight years, under the previous administration — the Obama administration, probably within the last two years of its first term, and certainly in the last four years of its second term, did an about-face on LGBT politics, and, I think, really spearheaded so much of how we view the LGBT market today.

We now have equality in marriage, certainly equality in employment in the government — hopefully that doesn't change. We'll see. It pervaded the social infrastructure of our country, and so now, when you take polls about, "Do you know someone who's LGBT?" pretty much everybody does." "What is your feeling about inclusion and diversity?" You know, you're getting approval ratings in the 70th and 80th percentiles, which pretty much says, "This is something that's here to stay." Those numbers are much further north of that, if you take a look at kids under the age of 40.

Kathy: If a typical tourist goes to Lincoln Mall and sits there for any length of time, they could not but get the impression that anything goes here — that all are welcome, [crosstalk][39:48] because you certainly see the parade there.

Steve: Right. Yes, you do. Yeah. On purpose. I think, you know, it used to be that on Sunday afternoons, Lincoln Road was "the parade." Because Miami Beach is open and inclusive and accepting, even back in the late '90's, if you wanted to hold hands with your girlfriend or your boyfriend — same sex, opposite sex — catch a kiss, whatever it might be, Lincoln Road was the place to kind of exhibit that behavior. One, because it was expected to, it was okay.

Now, it's like, "You know, if you're really surprised by any of this, you didn't do your homework." I see it everywhere now. It's wonderful to see two guys, two girls, you know, man and woman, whatever, walking up and down Ocean Drive, Collins Avenue, Lincoln Road, and it's like, "So what?" Which is great. That's how we should be, period. "So what?"



Carl: I'd like to follow-up on the changes. You mentioned the clubs. You mentioned the bars.

Steve: Yeah.

Carl: We're historians, and so if you actually have some names, and what the experience in a specific club or bar would have been like, or you could sort of...obviously, we're interested in what the experience was at the time, [crosstalk][41:24] and then, of course, how it's changed.

Steve: Right. Okay, sure.

Kathy: How about the Deuce Bar? That was one of the longest-running, [crosstalk][41:32] oldest bars.

Steve: That pre-dated me. Yeah. That preceded. So did Torpedo's, which was Lee [phonetic][41:35] Schrager's bar. Lee Schrager, who is, you know, the pioneer of South Beach wine and food — his bar was on Collins. Torpedos. That was one of the first ones on the beach, and that was back in the '80's.

Let's go back even further. I think George and Michael may have talked about this when you interviewed them. The gay experience here in Miami Beach used to be up on 20th, 21st, 22nd Street. Where that big parking lot is, between the W and the Days Inn, that was the gay area, way back until before the '80's. There was actually a gay theater up there. I don't know if there was a gay bar, but I know that that was the gay beach.

[inaudible][42:27] Point was up in that area. They used to do these tea dances, which is just a DJ and an accumulation of people on the street, having a good time. The city back then, because it wasn't so populated, allowed these pop-ups to take place anytime, anywhere. The diner over here on 11th Street used to do it, and certainly it was on 12th Street here, on occasion, during the '90's. That was the place for all the gays to kind of hang out.

During the '90's it drifted down to 11th Street, because you had the Palace Bar, which opened on Ocean Drive and 12th, and you had Twist, that opened here on 11th, and it just became an aggregating point for people going to the beach. The city made a concerted effort to move it to 12th Street, and now you see the rainbow flags flying, and it's kind of considered the gay beach, but now everywhere up and down the beach area is the gay beach.

Back to your question about how things changed. During the '90's, especially, the LGBT clubs were the clubs to go to. You had people moving down here from New York, you had a lot of promoters, and you had a lot of people in the entertainment business that would put together these elaborate shows with drag queens and performers and what have you.

You wouldn't just go to the bar to have a drink or to dance. You went to be entertained, and so you had Warsaw Ballroom, which is where — now



it's Señor Frog's, but before that it was Jerry's Diner, and before that it was nothing, and then it was Warsaw for about eight years. Prince used to own the club over here that's now — it was Mansion, but it was Paragon, [crosstalk][44:22] way back —

Kathy: Prince owned that?

Steve: Prince owned that for a short period of time. It was a major club that catered to the gay community. You had Salvation, which was where the Office Depot is on West Avenue. That was a two-story major nightclub for the LGBT community. It's where what I would call the heavy partying took place.

There was a lot of drug culture back in the '90's, and Salvation kind of exhibited all that. That was the place to go for all-night dancing into the wee hours of 5 o'clock in the morning. It would close, let people out on the street, reopen at 6:00, and you'd continue doing whatever you wanted to do. There was an after-hours — a number of them — here on Washington Avenue. I'm trying to remember the name of the one, but it was just a couple of blocks down here on Washington Avenue, and it was a place where you could go after the bars let out at 5 o'clock. They didn't serve alcohol, but you could go and continue dancing and wearing off whatever you had done the night before.

There had to have been — because I kept a little map for my guests — there had to have been seven or eight bars, at least, and four or five clubs. The way you mapped out your week is, on Monday, you'd go to Crowbar, and one Tuesday you'd do this, and on Saturday you'd go to Salvation, and Sunday you would go to Mansion. That's kind of the way it was.

Everybody who lived here in the community, who was into the clubbing aspect of life — that's what they did. You could be busy morning, noon and night, just wrapped up in all of the fun that you could have while visiting Miami Beach. I would say, it wasn't the predominant part of my guests' itineraries while they were here, but certainly they were either a big Twist fan, or a Score fan — Score was up on Lincoln Road. It had a more Latin vibe, but it was really a great place for a certain crowd-set, or the Salvation group.

So you knew, when a certain group came into town, whether they were into clubbing, and what kind of clubbing experience they were into. It was remarkable. The Warsaw, before it closed, was really the club that set the standard for the entertainment perspective of what to expect when you went to a nightclub here in Miami Beach.

It was very much New York in south Florida. Amazing. It was a time that, if you didn't experience it, you don't have anything to correlate it to, because it just doesn't exist like that, as it once did — which is a little too bad. It was a lot of fun.

Kathy: Maybe it'll come back.



- Steve:** Maybe it'll come back. Everything's cyclical.
- Carl:** The other question, which obviously goes along with is, the police attitude, [crosstalk][47:36] which we haven't gotten into yet.
- Steve:** Yeah.
- Carl:** I'd like you to sort of maybe give me that historical perspective on [crosstalk][47:45] on the police attitude, from where you saw it.
- Steve:** Yeah. You know what? That's a great question, because from my perspective, I've never had a negative experience with the police department. When I had the guest house, if I had a problem, I could call the police and they were there in a minute. If there was — you know, the only times I remember that was, I had somebody that had a mental disorder that we had to deal with, but we had a couple of thefts, and everyone knew the Jefferson House was an LGBT property. There was never any problem at all when it came to the police reaction to the marketplace.

Now, I think there have been issues on the beach over time, with certain officers, and I think what we've done with the police department is help educate the entire force about respect, and treating people equally, and not trying to characterize a particular group as behaving universally the same way.

Flamingo Park — you know, since we're talking experiences and history — Flamingo Park was a very heavy cruising park. It was known by the LGBT community as that kind of place, and so after the bars closed, or on your way home, or whatever it might be, everybody seemed to wander through Flamingo Park. I think there were certain police officers who knew that, and sometimes took advantage of that. Sometimes they looked the other way.

There was a period of time during the late '90's, early 2000's, where we had to kind of go through a re-education process with some of the officers, but the police department itself — and certainly I think it's because of the city's intolerance to any kind of bigotry — they were right on it, if they saw something happening that was not within the construct of what they were trying to build with the police department. They got involved, and really reached out to us to help them resolve the situation.

Today, my goodness. You know, you've got on-staff police officers who are LGBT, who work as liaisons with the LGBT community. Every single event that we have, here in this town, the police department is ready to serve. They're involved. At Miami Beach Gay Pride they have a recruiting event for the LGBT community, to make sure that it's equally- and well-represented in terms of the profile of the police department employ.

It's really an amazing collaboration and relationship that we have with them, and I think — I'm not trying to white-wash it too much, that there haven't been occasional problems, but they just haven't happened while I've been involved in what I do. When they have — and they have —



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they've been quick to try to resolve it.

Kathy: And there are enough events, certainly, like the Out Games that are coming up...

Steve: The Out Games are coming up, but there are 11 LGBT events that take place throughout the year that we formally promote. The big ones, of course, are Miami Beach Gay Pride, the film festival, Winter Party, White Party, Aqua Girl...there are so many different things happening throughout the year.

What's really great about those events, and it's always been this way, is that the city and police department look at those events as really what they'd like to see all the events look like. They don't have crime issues. They don't have concerns about derelict behavior on the beach. The attendees are well-behaved, and pretty much do what they are expected to do. That's always been the case, thank goodness — knock on wood — and I hope it will continue to be.

Kathy: Okay.

Carl: I'm great.

Kathy: Excellent.

Carl: The only question I would have is more of a practical approach. We would very much like to document, which means photographs and images...is there any kind of archive of images that might reflect community gay pride, that would go back years? I can understand why photography might have been [crosstalk][52:35] frowned upon, because [crosstalk][52:37] you're not out, you know...

Steve: Yeah.

Kathy: Totally.

Steve: Yes and no. The publications, especially since I've lived here, all had photographers that went to the bars and the clubs and the parties and what have you, and took pictures. Then they would display those pictures in the magazines.

What I would suggest — there's probably three different places. Stonewall Archives, which is based in Fort Lauderdale, has become the national repository of all this historical stuff. Because we're in south Florida, there's a bunch of stuff from Miami Beach, and they do actually have a Miami Beach-specific archive of material that you could probably get. I think TWN, which was major LGBT paper for south Florida back then —

Carl: TWN?

Steve: TWN. The Weekly News. [muffled/inaudible crosstalk][53:27] The Weekly News. It's no longer in business. It went under quite a while ago, but they have a lot of that information. There was a magazine called Miami Go that



— Steve [phonetic][53:39] Baird was an investor. He's got all the old magazines in his garage, so we should probably get those from him.

The Wire, which has been here, and it still exists, even though it's a new owner. It goes back to...I don't know if [phonetic][53:58] Delaplane was the first owner, but he still lives on the beach. [phonetic][54:04] Karl Zablotny bought it from him. He still lives on the beach, and then [phonetic][54:09] Rava Karvahal owns it now. He doesn't live on the beach, but it's primarily a beach-centric publication.

Carl: Have you ever thought about bringing this stuff together in an archive?

Steve: I haven't, because I just don't have the time [muffled/inaudible crosstalk][54:20] or the space for it, but that's what we're trying to do, is push all of that to Stonewall, [crosstalk][54:25] so that we have a really rich archival repository of that information.

Carl: Okay.

Kathy: Is it Stonewall.com?

Steve: Stonewall.org, probably.

Kathy: .org. Okay.

Steve: They have a full-time executive director. They have a strong board. There's at least two representatives from Miami-Dade...

Kathy: And they're based in Fort Lauderdale?

Steve: They're based in Fort Lauderdale.

Kathy: Wow.

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