

Legacies Transcript

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Church Narrator: "What is a Mormon, what do they believe? What makes them so distinctively different? What do you know about the Mormons? The best place to go and seeking information about a people is to that people themselves. For this reason, we have brought you to Salt Lake City, Utah, headquarters of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to the historic tabernacle on Temple Square. It is my pleasure to introduce..."

Title: Rocky

Rocky O'Donovan: I was born into the Mormon church, baptized at eight. My parents were pretty agnostic. My father briefly joined the Mormon church just to marry my mother. When I was 14, my parents divorced, and then it was a year later that I came out to the Mormon church. I came out to my seminary teacher.

I thought that he would be really fair and a friend. I felt more like he was a friend that I could go to with a problem and that he could somehow help [00:01:00] me. Had I known what I know now, I wouldn't have done that. I mean, he tried really hard, but basically all he did was turn me over to the wolves.

He immediately contacted my Bishop and my Bishop contacted my Stake President, and then thus it all started, my journey into the belly of the beast. Ten years of negotiating my way through the Mormon church's torturous program for reorienting or, curing, homosexuals, trying to turn us into heterosexuals.

Title: Val

Val Mansfield: Probably around age 12 or 13 I was aware that I was gay, or although I didn't identify as that, I was aware that I was homosexual because I'd read the definition. Realized that there were some treatments, or allegedly psychologists could treat it or something- psychiatrists.

One thing that it pointed out was that they usually had more success with younger people than older people, and [00:02:00] I was wondering if I should tell my parents and maybe seek some kind of treatment, but I was just totally, it was totally a secret.

Title: Drew

Drew Staffanson: I think at the age of 16 is when I looked in the mirror and said, 'you're gay, and, and it's not just some adolescent or pubescent thing, this is like, it's real, and it's here, and it's not going to change.' I really didn't doubt that my feelings would change, but I just was hoping that I would be able to keep it in check, and I kind of think I looked at my sexuality as something as a handicap that you just work with and still do the right thing.

And I was really devout Mormon myself as well. Even as a younger child, I was- our family was the type that would, you know, gather on your knees in a circle for prayer every morning at six o'clock and family home evening was always attended, it [00:03:00] was required. So some people might consider that fanatic, but just really, we were Mormons.

Spencer W Kimball: " Out there are millions of the children of our Father in heaven. They go about their daily activities, enjoying part of the truth of their existence, but not all of it, and it is up to us to share the light we have."

Title: 1976

Rocky O'Donovan: I think at about that time that I came out to my seminary teacher I had read Spencer Kimball's book, The Miracle of Forgiveness. It had a chapter in it called 'The Crime Against Nature,' and in very certain terms described the evilness and sinfulness of my condition, and used really awful words to describe me and my feelings and my desires. Words like repugnant, evil, malicious, pernicious, [00:04:00] disgusting, vile, things like that.

Well, I started doing counseling with the Bishop and with the Stake President, and then that summer, when school was out they told me that I needed to go down to BYU 'cause there was this program down there that would help me to become heterosexual. And of course I jumped on it because they had told me, they had taught me that being heterosexual was the only way to be. I knew I wasn't, but I wanted to be heterosexual. So they said, you know, 'you need to go down to BYU,' and I'm like 15 years old.

And I didn't want my parents to know what was going on, or anyone in my family, so they arranged it so that it looked like I was going down for a special genealogical program, because they have these genealogical conferences down there. And so I went down there for that, and stayed in the dorms, and I was supposed to immediately go in and meet with the receptionist and sign [00:05:00] papers and everything, the release form. And so I went in and sat down and they kind of explained to me what was going on, and I was horrified by the whole prospect of what turned out to be vomiting, aversion therapy.

Well, they explained to me that they would place a heparin lock in my wrist, and then they could hook an IV up to that, and I would be placed in a room alone with a plethysmograph on my penis that would measure physical arousal. So when I started to get an erection, they would know, and then they would start to show me gay pornography slides.

I don't remember if it was films or not, but I definitely remember stills, and I was supposed to go through this stack of photos and slides that they have and select out the men that I've found attractive. And various-

Interviewer: Had you looked at-?

Rocky O'Donovan: No, I was 15 years old! I don't think, I mean, I had seen like a Playboy magazine, you know, just of naked women, but I'd never [00:06:00] seen sex before at all. And so they were going to show me this gay pornography, and using the IV and the heparin lock, would inject an emetic drug into my system. And I would start vomiting while watching the gay pornography, and then they would switch it over to heterosexual pornography, and inject a euphoric drug into me so that I would associate a feeling of euphoria with heterosexuality. I look back on that and I think if they had offered me electric shock therapy, I would have done that. But I'm extremely phobic around vomiting.

I was supposed to come back, like, the next day for the first treatment and I just didn't show up. And then I called in sick and then just ignored things, and then they just said, 'you just have to come in and tell us what's going on.' So I went in and said, 'I can't do it,' and so they wrote out a shaming letter for me, a letter of shame that I had to hand carry back to my Stake President [00:07:00] telling him that I had refused to go through with the Lord's program for my cure.

Spencer W Kimball: " But the truth of God will go forth boldly, and nobly, and independent until it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God and shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say 'the work is done.'"

Rocky O'Donovan: And that was also the same year that Boyd Packer gave his talk at the Priesthood meeting of General Conference, his talk called 'To Young Men Only.' And even though I don't remember hearing the talk, it was made into a pamphlet, and I was given the pamphlet, and that describes the evils of masturbation. And then he goes into, he never uses the word homosexuality, but he calls it 'physical mischief' between men.[00:08:00]

The Bishop found out, you know, that I had returned unsuccessfully or whatever; that he kept me in weekly counseling sessions where I would have to meet with him on a weekly basis and report what I was doing, how I was feeling sexually, what my fantasies were about, what I was daydreaming about, what I wanted to do, what I had done, because I had been very sexual as a child. Although at that point, in my life, the only thing I was doing was masturbating, but I was having homosexual fantasies while masturbating.

And in Spencer Kimball's book, The Miracle of Forgiveness, he states that masturbation leads to homosexuality. And so the Bishop, going on that information, said, 'well, you have to stop masturbating.' And the way that we figured out to do that was, I had to create this chart on a piece of paper with all the days of the month on it. And if I was successful in not masturbating, then I put like a little smiley face or a gold star on that [00:09:00] day or something, and if I was unsuccessful and masturbated that day, I had to color it in in red cause it was the red flames of hell, you know, burning me. And I was supposed to try and get as many days in a row as possible of smiley faces or gold stars, and I think my record was 17 days, which wasn't very good. "

Spencer W Kimball: "Should every young man fill a mission? The answer has been given to the Lord. It is, yes. Every young man..."

Drew Staffanson: I didn't have any gay experiences on my mission. Things like masturbation were not something that only gay missionaries had to go confess or whatever, and it was an easy time for me to just, you know, not deal with it and not worry about it.

Val Mansfield: I didn't do anything on my mission, but I did have very strong attraction to at least two of my companions, and [00:10:00] later found out that one was gay and another one was gay and dealt with a lot of guilt about it, but then I was still very much hiding, really paranoid, feeling that that people might suspect.

Rocky O'Donovan: All the mission rules are about, 'you can't touch the opposite sex except to shake hands, no hugging, no nothing, you can't go out, you can't socialize with the opposite sex,' and so anyone with any sort of homosexual inclinations at all in that kind of a situation where you have to be with a person of the same sex, 24 hours a day, who's the same age, comes from the same background, same heritage and everything, same culture, you know, it's bound to produce that sort of sexual tension that, it's got to go somewhere.

Spencer W Kimball: "Now, here's another true story."

Title: Ray

Raymond King: I was in my junior year at BYU and, of course you want to do, it was almost [00:11:00] like being, like, an apprentice or learning how to treat patients, and one of the things that we could do and we could volunteer for it, was to do the electroshock therapy for people who wanted to change their sexual orientation. And at the time of course I knew that I was gay, I'd had experiences and everything, and I had no desire myself to change my orientation.

However, I thought it was really interesting that there were people who did, and I was very closeted at the time, even though I did have a lover at the time, I was really closeted. And so we did the therapy as we referred to it then, in the basement of the Smith Family Living Center on the BYU campus.

Title: 1978

Raymond King: A lot of times, like, BYU security would catch people, like, in compromising positions or whatever, and they could have the choice of either being kicked out of school and their families called and informed about what they had done, or they could undergo this therapy. And so [00:12:00] we had quite a few people who were going through it, and then there were other people who felt, like, so much guilt over their sexuality, or had been promised that if they underwent this therapy, that they'd be able to marry and have children, and they would just be turned away. Of course, they had to have the desire to change. Therefore, if the

therapy failed, then it was always their fault because they didn't have enough desire to change.

But anyway, they would come in usually three times a week. I would be behind a glassed one-way mirror, quite a large mirror, I'd be studying behind there, and they would be on the other side of that. And we would, they had the choice, they could look at, pornographic magazines or, we would show videos up on the wall, and we would tape electrodes to their groin. And about three or four inches down from that on their thigh, then we would also tape up on their chest, and we'd tape somewhere [00:13:00] else too, I think it was up close to the armpits.

And then we had another machine that would monitor their breathing and their heart rate. And what we would do is we would let them look at this stuff and if they were looking at homosexual pornographic material, we would wait until we could tell a difference in their heart rate. We had a dial that we turned, and that would determine the amount of current that would go into the shock. And if they were a new patient than the current would be very low. And we would wait until we saw that they were getting aroused, and then we would push a button and the voltage would go into the wire.

And from the reaction that I saw them and also the muscle spasms that went on I'm sure that it was painful. And then after we did that, then the movies would automatically switch over and we would show a man and a woman having sex, and we would play very soothing music in the background to try and get the mind to relate to [00:14:00] that.

When we got into the higher voltage, with the people who had been doing it longer, you could see burn marks on the skin and quite often they would also throw up during the therapy. I mean, this is just speculation, but most of the students there at BYU had never seen any pornography. After undergoing that kind of pain over a period of a couple of months, anybody would admit that they had completely changed.

What they did was they kept records for as long as the people were at BYU, and then after they left BYU, there was no records kept to see what kind of success rate they had had. And the statistics from just the BYU, I mean, these people were lying, I mean, they were desperate to get their degree and to get out of that situation. They'd been blackmailed into that situation in the first place. We did have some people who became completely asexual after undergoing the therapy, but no, we never changed anyone from gay to straight.

Spencer W Kimball: " This is the way it must happen, this is [00:15:00] the way it will happen."

Title: 1982

Val Mansfield: I first went through about a year and a half of seeing a counselor. That was not aversion therapy, but it seemed really pointless to me because all we

did was sit and talk and there was nothing happening. So I said that I had heard there were other kinds of therapy, the aversion kind of therapy, shock therapy and stuff, and I asked him about that and he referred me to another doctor, also LDS, but in private practice, that was doing something on the order of what, I guess, they were doing it at BYU, except the things they were doing there sounded a lot scarier. This doctor was, I don't know if I'm supposed to say this-

Interviewer: You can say who this is-

Val Mansfield: - was Doctor Card.

When I saw him, he was calling it a form of biofeedback and it did involve shocking, but the patient held the button themselves and so the patient was able to [00:16:00] shock themselves. The electricity had a level on it, which you could set yourself. And he didn't really interfere with what I was doing, but I always kept it very low or moderately low.

He indicated that if you really wanted to change, you would set the electricity higher or something. And it really, I think scientifically, as a bogus procedure, basically it was the same effect as a cold shower. You were starting to get aroused and you just had some other kinds of stimulus that made you think about something else for a while, so the arousal went away.

Raymond King: I had experiences with Robert Card when he was the overseer down at BYU.

Interviewer: Really?

Raymond King: He was not my professor, but he would come down to Provo. And I met him several times as he was overseeing some of the results down there. Then I met him again in 1983 up here when he was doing electroshock therapy on a lover of mine, and [00:17:00] even at that time, I remember I confronted him with what I knew and how it had not worked in the past. And he had nothing to say. He simply denied the results and refused to show me any of his proof at the time.

Title: 1984

Drew Staffanson: I only saw Doctor Card for about three or four months. It was in the late winter, early spring, but he told me that he was going to hypnotize me each time, and that he thinks that he thought that he could slice away portions of my personality and find the part that was homosexual and get rid of it somehow. So the first time, I didn't even believe I would be able to be hypnotized, but I went right under, and the first time he spoke to me was very provocative and, caustic, you know, and I don't know if it was really part of my personality or if I was subconsciously trying to entertain his ideas or whatever.[00:18:00]

But this kind of low, dark, deep, voice was responding. And my brain was in the back of my head watching it all. And it was sort of, this confrontation, this fight, 'are you the part of the Drew's personality, that's homosexual?' Or whatever. And it became a big fight and I was sort of screaming and screeching for some reason. And he raised his hand up to the square and commanded the devils to depart my soul. And of course nothing happened. And then he came over and shook me, and then I sorta came to and was covered in sweat and tears, running down my face and really freaked out about this whole experience of what had just happened to me.

And he told me that at a younger age, when I was nervous about going out and growing up and being timid about life that I had basically invited Satan into my life, and that's why I was gay, and that those spirits are still with me and that's who he had spoken to this session. So I walked out of the room [00:19:00] and saw the people that were sitting in the waiting room, listening to me scream just prior to that and walked out to my car and bawled for about two hours and then went home and thought about it and prayed about it and went back to him the next week and told him, I thought he was full of shit.

After that, in subsequent sessions he tried to make friends with my homosexual side rather than to provoke it, and he did a lot of things. Showed me very explicit heterosexual sex films, not necessarily pornography, but instructional films for couples who have sexual problems or whatever. And then he would talk to me primarily about the women's physique, under hypnosis later on, and maybe he was able to heighten some heterosexual feeling in me, I don't know.

I was trying to go along with it and concentrate on that. But as far as putting a damper on any kind of homosexual feelings, [00:20:00] there was no effect. And only at the end of the session, I finally moved away from Salt Lake to work for the summer because I needed an excuse to get away from him. I didn't know how to tell him I didn't want to do this anymore. It looked like I was giving up. So I moved and the sessions before I left, he was basically trying to have me associate the male physique with bad smells or something.

He was the one that told me though, that he was involved in the shock treatment therapy. And he told me on probably the second or third session, he said that both he and BYU were somehow exposed by some documentary filmed by some Australian crew. And I don't know if the reason he told me that is because he was afraid that I would hear something elsewhere, or what?

I mean, he told me he wasn't doing it anymore. I asked him if he thought that it was a successful treatment, and he said that he thought it helped in some cases, but maybe, [00:21:00] I don't know anybody that has ever said that they've turned around because they were shocked after being stimulated.

Raymond King: We had several people who committed suicide during the therapy. We had three different people who hung themselves in the Harris Fine Arts Center from the balcony. If you die of a suicide, I mean, you're going to be punished

eternally anyway. And if you die while you're still homosexual, you're going to be punished eternally anyway. God'll getcha good if you don't follow the rules.

Rocky O'Donovan: The Mormon church is a patriarchy, and patriarchy subsists on homosociality. It's a very close knit group of men, men who spend literally 18 hours a day with each other. So you have this really intense homosociality going on, and it's often quite physical. [00:22:00] You'll notice during Mormon conference that the Mormon leaders are up there and they hold hands, and they kiss each other on the cheeks. I've seen them kiss each other on the lips. They're extremely physical with each other. They hug, they cry, they're very emotional. They're very homo-spiritual, homo-physical, homo-intellectual, homosocial with each other, where does that end? And it became homoerotic and homosexual. And I think they are terrified of that line and they try to draw that line very firmly.

Spencer W Kimball: "And may we emphasize again, that numbers are incidental, secondary to our main purpose, which is the same as that of our Heavenly Father, to bring to every soul the gospel which can open the doors to eternal life for men. Our objective is not power or domain, but it's entirely spiritual.

Rocky O'Donovan: I [00:23:00] think for Mormonism, this is going to be the most difficult issue that they're ever going to face. Seriously. They have painted themselves into a theological corner, either Mormon theology is right, and I am just a deviant heterosexual, or a, you know, elapsed heterosexual, or I am intrinsically, essentially queer. And if I am, then Mormon theology is wrong.