

## A CONVERSATION WITH EDIE WINDSOR\*

**EDIE WINDSOR, SUZANNE B. GOLDBERG, MADELINE M. GOMEZ & ANDREW CHESLEY**

**Suzanne Goldberg [SG]:** It is not often that a law school gets to welcome a rock star. But in our world, Edie Windsor is a rock star. She is one of the major civil rights plaintiffs of our lifetime, whose lawsuit challenged—and triumphed over—the federal Defense of Marriage Act. Her victory in that suit has been vital to changing the landscape of marriage equality for all Americans. It is a tremendous honor, Edie, to have you here at Columbia Law School, and we welcome you.

**Edie Windsor [EW]:** Thank you so much.

**SG:** I will start off by asking the first question in our conversation this afternoon, and then Andrew Chesley and Madeline Gomez, who are both Columbia Law School students, will be following up with questions we have collected from students throughout the law school.

Edie, you have shown courage in every imaginable way: entering the computer science field as a young woman at a time where there were few women computer scientists—in fact, there were barely computer scientists; making the decision to get divorced and then coming to New York City to find other lesbians; and then coming out in so many ways. So when *Time Magazine* called you the “unlikely activist,” it was not quite right because in so many ways, for so many years, you have been an activist, and you have been willing to challenge conventions.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s start the conversation by you just talking about how it was as a young lesbian coming to New York and confronting this world, and then also about some of the activism that you’ve done along the way before you filed your lawsuit against the United States government.

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\* This edited transcript presents a conversation with Edie Windsor that took place at Columbia Law School as part of the Center for Gender & Sexuality Law’s Symposium on Marriage Equality and Reproductive Rights: Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead. Professor Suzanne B. Goldberg and Columbia Law students Madeline M. Gomez ’15 and Andrew Chesley ’16 conducted the interview.

<sup>1</sup> Eliza Gray, *Edith Windsor, The Unlikely Activist*, TIME (Dec. 11, 2013), <http://poy.time.com/2013/12/11/runner-up-edith-windsor-the-unlikely-activist/> [<http://perma.cc/A2GM-9C4K>].

EW: First of all, I came out late enough in life that I missed a lot of the pain of adolescence when you're gay and don't belong. I first had any kind of real relationship with a woman when I was a first-year student in college. And I didn't fall in love seriously with a woman until I was in my third year in college. Meanwhile I had become engaged to be married to a great guy, who was my big brother's best friend. He and I did get married, but when I saw two women together on a Saturday night, I was jealous. I had never been out with a girlfriend even on a Saturday night. I went out with boyfriends. So it was a whole different world. I told my husband, "Honey, you deserve more and I need something else."

But as I said, I missed most of the pain. I came to New York and there was nothing but bars, and I didn't even know how to find them. The first time I went to a bar, I really wasn't living in New York yet. I came in for a wedding, and then I got on the Fifth Avenue bus and I went downtown. I stopped a woman on the street who had on a trenchcoat. And I said, "Do you know a bar where only women go?" She sent me to Thompson Street, L's Bar. I sat down at the bar, and I ordered a drink; I had never paid for a drink myself in my life until then. And nobody talked to me. I was dressed to the T, and nobody said hello, nobody said anything. I sat there for two hours and then I left. Okay. I thought, this is not going to be easy.

My first real experience with being afraid of being gay came when I worked on the UNIVAC at NYU, which was mostly subsidized by the government and used primarily by the Atomic Energy Commission.<sup>2</sup> We had to have security clearances. I got a notice from the FBI inviting me to a meeting and saying I did not need a lawyer at this point. I got a book to get ready—and the book was the first time I saw the word gay.<sup>3</sup> It also had an appendix with the states and what was illegal in each state. It said that as far as women were concerned, that in New York, as long as you weren't imitating a man or pretending you were a man, you were safe. And in the bars, everybody said that so long as you were wearing two pieces of women's underwear, you would be safe if the police raided. So I didn't want to lie. If they asked me, I wanted to say, "I am gay." I'll probably lose my job, but I won't be arrested. And with that I went to the interview. I wore a crinoline. It was very

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2 The UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer) was one of the first commercial computers to be used in the United States. See generally Paul A. Freiberger & Michael R. Swaine, *UNIVAC*, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA (Feb. 19, 2013), available at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/618031/UNIVAC> [<http://perma.cc/VYX6-QUNV>].

3 Edie added that she has just recently met someone who knew of the book while visiting ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, which describes itself as the largest repository of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) materials in the world. See ONE ARCHIVES FOUNDATION, <http://www.onearchives.org> [<http://perma.cc/SW4W-UHPL>] (last visited Aug. 15, 2014).

chic at the time. And high heels. And they didn't discuss "gay" at all. They kept asking me questions about my big sister. Then they mentioned some man's name. I said, "I think I met him in my mother's house." Turned out, he was a big communist in the teacher's union and he had my sister's name on a list. I left relieved. But I called my sister from a payphone right after. I was still scared, and I said, "Who the hell is this guy?"

So that was my only really serious sense of, "It's dangerous to be gay."

The second part of the question has to do with what I was doing before the case.

When I was at IBM, I was very close with everybody I worked with. We had the new mainframes but we had no software. My group was developing the software. About a third of us were women. They were all smart; they were all math majors. Ultimately I got to be a senior programmer, and I had some of the smartest women in the country working for me. We were all very good friends. But I lied. All the years—for sixteen years—I lied about my life.

I left IBM because they were going to close the New York unit.<sup>4</sup> They gave one year's notice, and I gave one year's notice that I was going to leave, because I was not going to take a job anywhere else. I was really tired. And I wanted to be free to travel.

At that time, I got a call from somebody at the Center in the Village.<sup>5</sup> It was brand new. Well, first Thea and I had received a flyer asking us to come to a party. It used the name of a famous singer at the time who was not gay but who had lent her name, saying, "Just come, we want to talk about this new Center and we need to raise some money." We needed to raise \$50,000 to show the City—I think it's called "earnest money"—that the community could afford to buy the building, a former schoolhouse. They were asking either for \$1,000 as a gift, or a \$1,000 loan without interest for a year. I had just left work, and so I said, I can't give them \$1,000 but I could loan them \$1,000. One year later, they returned the check to me, which said "Gay and Lesbian Center" on it. I took it in and I said, "I can't take this to my bank!" I was mortified. So I gave them the damn check. And the Center and I have been very related ever since.

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4 On this point, Edie added, "A lot of the literature is wrong about this. It says I left IBM to take care of Thea. Thea didn't have a symptom then. We had no idea she had anything happening for three years after I left IBM."

5 This is now the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center. See THE CENTER, <https://gaycenter.org/> [<http://perma.cc/SW4W-UHPL>] (last visited Aug. 15, 2014).

The next thing is, somebody from the Center knew that I had left IBM, and called and said that the Center's mailing list is in trouble. I spent a couple months putting things right, and doing special versions thereof—and after that I probably computerized maybe ten different organizations' mailing lists, before I did anything else.

Altogether, I volunteered for probably twenty or twenty-five organizations,<sup>6</sup> with the result that SAGE, an organization that advocates for LGBT seniors, gave me a lifetime achievement award, months before we even announced that we were going to file a suit against the government. And it was a very big deal in my life.

**Andrew Chesley [AC]:** Edie, I want to ask you about your relationship with Thea. You had been together for forty-two years when you went to Toronto in 2007 to get married. Just the year before, the New York Court of Appeals had ruled that the state's prohibition on same-sex marriages did not violate the state constitution. After forty years, there was no question of your commitment to each other. Why did you decide to get married then?

**EW:** Yes. So why did we do it? First of all, we were engaged to be married in 1967. At the time, I was right in the middle of working at IBM and Thea asked me. We met in '63, we didn't start to date until 1965, and 1967 is when she asked me. She said, "Well, suppose you got engaged, could you wear a diamond ring to IBM?" And I said, "No, of course not. They'll want to know who is he, and when will we meet him?" So she conned me into ultimately saying it would have to be a circle of diamonds. Just a pin. And when we got to where we were going, she got out of the car, and she got down on her knees, and she said, "Edie Windsor, will you—?" And I said, "Yes yes yes!" And she whipped out this pin with a circle of diamonds. For the next ten years she reminded me that she was annoyed because I never let her finish the sentence asking me to marry her. Here on my jacket is my ring. My engagement pin.

*Edie then talked about keeping silent about her life and shared this story about her time at IBM.*

**EW:** Before I met Thea, I got an IBM fellowship—school of my choice, degree of my choice, full salary. This was when IBM first understood that software was going to be an ongoing requirement, not just a one-time thing, and we had to upgrade the staff as fast as we could. There were no computer science courses yet, there wasn't even any literature. If

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6 For the list of organizations where Edie volunteered, see *Edie Windsor Profile*, EDIE WINDSOR, <http://www.ediewindsor.com/edieprofile.html> [<http://perma.cc/Z6HM-8Q6K>] (last visited June 22, 2014).

you had something you had to do, you had to invent how to do it, or find some of the more advanced people in the country who were doing it. A small group of us from different labs around the country all met twice a year on different coasts, and we really were doing what is now called open-source software. That's how we wrote the first systems.

Meanwhile, a group of us would meet the evening before our every-sixth-month conference. I would learn about their wives; I would learn whose kids were no longer on three-wheelers, they were on two-wheelers; and I never said a word. And then I met Thea, and I finally said, "Guys, I'm sitting here, and I'm not saying anything and the most important thing in my life has happened." And I told them. So they knew fifteen years before anybody at IBM knew.

When the case was first filed, I got a telephone message from one of the guys, saying, "If you recognize my name [a nickname that Edie had for him], please call me and tell me I found the right Edie Windsor." He proceeded to send me a copy of an email that he had sent to all his grandchildren—and there are a lot of them—saying, "Edie Windsor is a very important friend of mine, and I want her to win her case. So I want you guys to want her to win her case." And from then on, we've been in touch as well.

**Madeline Gomez [MG]:** After being with Thea for so long, you lost the love of your life, and then you were faced with a huge, enormous tax bill: \$363,053.

**EW:** That's not why I sued. A month after Thea died, I had a heart attack. I had had open-heart surgery thirteen years before. It was all stable and what have you. After Thea died, though, I had a heart attack that was characterized as broken heart syndrome. Light heart attack, no problem. Except a million difficult things happened while I was in the hospital, leaving me very sick and fragile. My cardiologist came back from vacation, and I said, "Send me home. I don't care if you're sending me home to die. I had a great life, and I had enough. And please just get me the hell out of here." Also, I had a memorial service to do for Thea.

So I was about to go home when one of the filmmakers who was making a documentary about Thea and me<sup>7</sup> came in to the hospital with a copy of an email from the San Francisco film festival—the gay film festival—saying, "Edie, can we be ready by June?" And I jumped up and I said, "Yes," and we were off and running. And I traveled with the film for two years.

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7 EDIE & THEA—A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT (BlessBless Productions 2009).

It was after I came back that I said, "I have a documented marriage." Most gay organizations said, "It's the wrong time" to bring a lawsuit. I've read recently that at least one of them said, "No, she was too rich. It looks too rich if she paid that much tax. And that's no good."

**AC:** Going back, what prompted you to marry? And how, and where, did you get married?

**EW:** Once marriage was possible anywhere in the country, once there were even civil unions, it became extremely interesting to us both. First, we tried with the Netherlands—I thought maybe Thea could get dual citizenship because she was born there, but the thing is that it didn't do any good. We needed to have real residence there, and we were not going to lie about residing with her relatives. So that was out.

We waited for Vermont. We waited for Connecticut. We waited—each thing fell through in one way or another. For Massachusetts, you had to commit to be a resident there at the time. I finally said, "Do you want to go to Canada?" By then, a lot of years have gone by. And she was quite crippled. She was, in fact, well on the way to being quadriplegic. I said, "Do you want to go to Canada?" and she said, "Not really, but if you really want to, we'll go." I said, "No, I'm not going to drag you there." I mean, we were dependent on lifts, and we were dependent on a car where you could push a button and a ramp came down that would lock in the wheelchair. So we would have to travel without all the equipment, and we weren't going to do it unless we both passionately wanted to do it.

Thea had an aortic stenosis in addition to the M.S. She felt she would not survive surgery for the stenosis, and she said, "I don't want to do it. Let's just have our life." Then, sometime later, she got a prognosis where they said, "You have one year." She got up the next morning, and she said, "You still want to get married?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Me, too, let's go."

We called two friends of ours. We had two best men and four best women come with us. Everybody had a function because we were going without our lifts and without our ramps and all of that stuff. Brendan Faye, who is a well-known activist in the city, introduced us to a judge in Toronto, who asked me for a bio. I sent him a story I had written about our dancing over the years. And he said, "I'll be happy to officiate at your wedding anytime you are ready! We can do it in my offices, we can do it anywhere you want." I had a lot of trouble finding a place to stay, so the idea was to try not to keep Thea even overnight—to try to do it in one day.

There was one complication because I had been divorced fifty years earlier. In Canada, if you've been divorced in a different country, you need a lawyer in Canada to vet your divorce and then a commission has to issue a paper allowing you to obtain a license to marry. It took months and months. Meanwhile, all these people who were going with us are working people, and they had to keep changing the dates when they needed to be out of work to travel with us.

Finally, the paperwork came through. And again, it was one of these miraculous things—the lawyer never finished it because the commission that had to approve what he was doing sent me a copy of what they were sending him, and it said, “If there’s any urgency, please describe it.” So I came back, “It’s not really urgent, but here’s our sense of urgency.” That did it. They said, “Go ahead, go get your license.” Which I did the next day. My plane trip to get the license cost close to \$1,000, round-trip. It was just that I needed it overnight and that’s what was available. Later, when we all went together, it was \$148 each.

**MG:** Thank you. I’d like to turn to your case now and ask, was there anything difficult in being a plaintiff?

**EW:** No. No. No. Not at all. My situation was heavenly. First of all, my friend Brendan Faye, who had also introduced me to the judge who had officiated at the wedding, was indignant because the gay organizations wouldn’t help me. He called his friend, Edward De Bonis, who has been a legal search consultant for over twenty-five years. He called me and said, “Brendan gave me your name, is that alright?” And I said, “Brendan could do anything,” and then he said, “I know a few lawyers who might be interested in your case. Would it be alright with you if I write to them?” I said, “Yes.” The next day, Robbie Kaplan from Paul, Weiss walked into my house.

We were a perfect fit. She was herself a lesbian, with a wife and a kid, and became my really close friend. So, that was easy. The first time we did a press release, she said to me, “Okay, we’re about to file,” and then she said, “there’s only one person I want to give a heads up to, James Esseks. I trust him and he’s a good lawyer.” James said, “I’m about to go on vacation, could you wait a week?” Then he called to say, “I want to join the case.” And so he did. Heaven. Just heaven.

So, as a plaintiff, I had this dream team. I had Robbie, I had Paul, Weiss, I had a thing called “Group Edie,” which was a group of young lawyers, each one of which had a specialty. They were all there to help me. I also had, through James, the ACLU. I had

national ACLU, and I had all the local ACLUs. I mean, to be a plaintiff in that circumstance is pretty easy. And it was easier and easier to come out all the way.

I remember James had asked me to take phone calls from members one day, and somebody asked me, "Do I have to come out like you did? Is that really necessary for me?" And I said a thing that I've repeated hundreds of times over the years. I said, "First of all, I am an out lesbian, and I am an out lesbian who is publicly suing the United States of America. No, you don't have to do that." But I was also saying, you don't owe it to anybody to come out. Most of us have spent most of our lives coming out to different people in different circumstances and very few of us have come all the way out in the world. Which was true in those days still. But I never forgot that. The day was so meaningful, with these kids calling in, "Do I have to tell my parents?" No, you don't unless you want to for yourself!

**MG:** I want to follow-up with one more question about being a plaintiff. Was there anything in the case that you had to change in terms of the way that you spoke about your life, or about your life with Thea?

**EW:** I was restricted by what I could say. Remember that the film about Thea and me was my introduction to the whole thing. In the film I speak honestly about sex. And so the first thing that Robbie said to me: "No sex!" We finally agreed that I would not mention the word "sex" until after a decision. We didn't know how far that would go, because of course it became after the Supreme Court decision.

One other restriction was that there was a point at which I made a ton of adjustments about what I spent. I took my car out of New York, that saved \$5,000 in garage and \$1,000 in insurance, and did a number of other things like that. So I needed less money, and I became less dependent on the money that I had put out in taxes. So when I talked about the case, I wanted to talk about gay people, altogether. I wanted to win it for all of us. And Robbie said, "You can't do that." And of course I understood, once she said it. You're not allowed to sue the federal government on principle. You need to have been hurt. And money was the hurt in my case. So I understood, I had to only speak about money.

Occasionally there were times when there was a small group of all gay people, most of whom were really close friends—people would ask, "Okay, what do you think will happen?" And my dream was it could be the end of stigma. Teenagers coming of age, falling in love for the first time, who don't have to think there's no future, so maybe it begins to be the end of suicides for kids. And I talked about the children of gay parents, which I was not allowed

to do publicly at all. That kids don't have to apologize for their families or explain them. I talked about internalized homophobia, and our sense of self-respect changing, which is happening like crazy. That's about it. Those are the only restrictions on what I could say.

**AC:** So your case goes through district court and the Second Circuit, and then you're in the Supreme Court. How did that feel, sitting in the Supreme Court?

**EW:** Well, one thing is, we picked up a third lawyer for the Supreme Court to advise us since she had a great deal of experience with it. One day Robbie said, "Pam Karlan's going to call you. We're going over to your house and she's going to call you there." Pam called and she said to me, "Edie, we could quit now. We're about to go to the Supreme Court. We could quit now and it would revert to the lowest court's decision." We wouldn't get the wonderful decision that we got on appeal, but it would give me my money back, really, in essence. It was called "as applied to." DOMA was unconstitutional as applied to me only.

Then she said, "If we go to the Supreme Court, you could win everything, but we could also lose everything." And I said, "We're going to the Supreme Court." Because I could not bear it if I had to face anybody in the community and say, "I won, and you lost." I could not bear it to call *that* a win.

So we went for broke. When we were in the Court, there was a moment when Justice Kennedy referred to information he had just gotten the day before during the Prop. 8 oral arguments, where he said, "What about 40,000 kids in California?" And I thought, "Oh my God, we're going to win."

It was interesting. I could hear, for one. Mostly, the previous cases, I would always guess what Robbie was answering. I could hear the Justices because they had speakers, and I could guess what Robbie was saying, because I read the briefs. I read every brief, I read every amicus. I read sixty-three amicuses. I assigned myself two a night, and I read them, and paid attention. I really knew the case. But I never heard the arguments in court. Then Pam, our third lawyer, asked for hearing things for me. So I could hear everything for once.

And I was amazed. Robbie was cool and calm, immovable from bait. Some of the justices were baiting her and it just flew over her head. Before the actual argument, we had been to a moot court with Tom Goldstein, who is one of the people who founded the SCOTUS Blog. Tom, who had been in the Supreme Court I think forty-some times and came to the moot court even though he had a smashed-up leg and was on his way to the hospital, was incredible. He said, "You know, if you feel doubtful at any point, look over

toward Kagan. Chances are, you'll get a clue." And Robbie said after that, when she was being baited she kept looking over and if Kagan was smiling, she just kept going—no way was anyone going to ruffle her.

So that's about it. I thought one of the other highlights, which is kind of silly and funny, was the people. Like Nancy Pelosi. She was on the far right and I was on the far left, and right before they started to the argument, she walked across to me, kissed me on both cheeks, and said, "I'm happy to meet you." That was a highlight of the day.

**AC:** It'd be a highlight for anyone, I think. There is an amazing photograph of you walking down the steps of the courthouse after the oral argument.



Kate Barrett for EdieWindsor.com

**EW:** There was a huge rally in front of the court. Right at the bottom of the steps. Before you get down the steps, there were all the press. Robbie had said to me, days before, "We are not going to do the press outside the court like we did after the Appeals Court. We're going to go back to Paul, Weiss to do it there." Paul, Weiss had offices in D.C. She forgot to tell me that they changed their minds.

As I'm walking out of the court, Robbie hands me a sheet of paper, single-spaced, and

I said, "What am I supposed to do with this?" She said, "You're reading it to the press." I looked, and I said, "No way, okay? I don't even know what that says and I can't even read the damn thing." After the first thing that was asked by the press, I said, "Somebody handed me this speech and I'm not going to use it." I crumpled it up and I said, "So ask your questions."

I was answering the questions, and it was going on and on. Then I saw a little head sticking out. It was one of my young cousins who had been to every case—their father brought them to every stage of the case—and I said, "Oh my god, that's my family. I hope nobody will be mad at me, but I really have to go over there. All those people came a long way to see me, and I just have to go say something." And I left. I went across the way, and that's where that picture was taken. I was walking across the second step up from the ground, saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." That's what was happening. And that's that picture. It's everywhere, and it's wonderful.

**AC:** Yes it is.

**EW:** I just got back recently from a lesbian cruise, with 1,900 lesbians on board, and there was one night I was guest of honor. That night, the cruise directors had asked people to please bring pink scarves or wear pink. And there were 1,000 people with pink scarves. It was great fun.

There was another night that was called "She-Heroes:" who are your sheroes? There were four young women wearing suits like mine, with sticks with my face full-size on it, and pink ribbons to represent the scarf. Just marvelous. It was grand.

**MG:** When we were getting ready for your visit, we collected questions for you from law students, and everyone wanted to know if you could offer advice to someone thinking about bringing a case challenging discrimination against them. What advice would you give them?

**EW:** It's an extremely difficult question. I think you don't file a case in just any circumstance. Many years ago, when somebody would cheat you or do something like that, people would say, "You're going to sue." Thea and I always said, "How much justice can you afford?" is the question. That includes emotional anguish and time and what have you. I don't think you file a lawsuit casually. I think you do it if you can't bear the injustice. And if you think that you have a path.

That means you need a lawyer. You need either a ton of money or you need a lawyer who's pro bono, so that things are going to get paid for. You need somebody who's congenial with you, and as I said before, I had this dream team. It's not easy to come by. Now the ACLU doesn't only take big cases like this one, they're also taking smaller cases. There are people who will help with justice, if that's what the case is about. But filing a lawsuit is not an easy decision to make altogether. So I have no advice. Luck out. I lucked out. I think that's really true.

**AC:** On the day of the decision, you're in New York. Can you talk a little more about what that was like—the crowds in New York and the celebration in New York?

**EW:** The first thing was, again, that I was told I didn't have to behave at all after the decision. All rules about behavior were aimed at how the Justices would look at it. Now it's over, the Justices have looked at it, and we won.

The same people who were coordinating those rallies outside the courts and contacting people all over the country wanted to rally outside Stonewall,<sup>8</sup> and wanted to be sure that I was going to come and speak. Somebody arrived in a car for me with my schedule on the decision day, which did not include any such thing. I said, "I want to go to Stonewall." I was told it wasn't a good idea. I called my friends and I said, "I will get a car, and I will come there by car." Everybody was saying, "Security, you need security, you can't do that, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Tell me what time you want me to speak, that's the time I will arrive. And I want ten people to immediately be there when I open the door of the car. I want something I can stand on, and somebody to help me stand on it, and a microphone." So that's what we arranged. Suddenly, it sounded like a great idea to everybody who was telling me no before. And now, I read all these things about the triumphant Paul, Weiss car going down the street towards Stonewall.

Pressure was brought on the rally organizers to have other speakers that they hadn't planned to have, and didn't want to have for various reasons. But other than that, it was grand. It was wonderful. We were all beside ourselves. Everybody was crying, and laughing.

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8 Stonewall is the historic bar in Greenwich Village, New York City, where LGBT people fought back in June 1969 against police harassment. Today, the Stonewall Riots are considered the formative moment of the modern LGBT movement; the bar itself was made a national landmark. David W. Dunlap, *Stonewall, Gay Bar that Made History, Is Made a Landmark*, N.Y. TIMES (June 26, 1999), <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/26/nyregion/stonewall-gay-bar-that-made-history-is-made-a-landmark.html> [<http://perma.cc/E5RS-MJ6B>]. See generally DAVID CARTER, STONEWALL: THE RIOTS THAT SPARKED THE GAY REVOLUTION (2004).

*Two audience members then posed questions:*

**Q1:** Hi, my name is Roni, I'm a first-year student at the business school. Thank you so much for speaking today. You mentioned very briefly your young cousin being there at the argument. My question is, what role did your family play throughout the process?

**EW:** There's not that much of my family left. But all that is, was there, no question. All the time.

**SG:** Before we open to other questions, I want to share one thing about the first time I met Edie, which was at the Second Circuit oral argument. I had filed an amicus brief in the case, and Edie came up to me, and said, "I read your brief." I was impressed. And I thought, "I don't even think my students have read my brief." So when Edie says that she read all of those briefs, that's no joke.

I don't think many litigants actually read all of the briefs filed in their lawsuits, and even when they do, not often with the level of care that you gave to the briefs in your case.

**EW:** Oh, I loved it. I loved the whole process. However, I must say I did not read the opposition briefs after the lowest level. I thought they were mean and nasty, and I decided I wasn't going to hurt myself anymore. I never again read one of the opposition briefs. I saved them. I'm meaning to read them someday. But I didn't.

**SG:** I think those are good for . . . recycling. Another question from the audience?

**Q2:** My question is: you have this defiant spirit about you, but at the same time you also have this infinite good cheer. I'm wondering, where does that come from?

**EW:** I'm the youngest person in my family, and that's where my need for justice comes from.

Let me also say something about the gay community and what has happened. It's something I originally prepared to say only to all-gay audiences. But I realize it also applies to our allies. You know, I read a lot of sociology, so I knew a lot about the world. But before the Stonewall riots, I had this sense of, "I don't want to be identified with those queens." Only it turned out that those queens, and the dykes who helped them, changed my life at Stonewall. And I saw them for the first time as the people they were. And I loved them. And that was like, for me, the beginning of community, of a sense of community.

When the AIDS Crisis—in 1980, 1981, and getting worse—the lesbians rushed in to help. Up until then—and again, you all are too young to know—there were two different worlds: One of those worlds was lesbians, and one of them was gay men. And they never met. There were occasional people who had friends on the other side of the wall, but all events were either gay men’s events or lesbians’ events, and there was not even enough attendance at the lesbians’ events because the women didn’t have any money. At least that was the tale during that period. Suddenly, during the AIDS crisis, the lesbians rushed in, helping in every way—people were going to clean guys’ houses, they were buying groceries, they were doing serious caretaking. So, that wall came down. Everybody had been hidden most of the time before then. And this community, all of a sudden, really looked like a community. And it was getting bigger. We saw more and more of each other. And we loved what we saw.

And then when the DOMA cases started, it was unbelievable, because people began to come out, and the more people came out, the more dignity everybody else felt, and hence the more of them came out. I live in a world full of loving and joyous community. People stop me on the street to hug me and thank me. I mean, you can’t beat it for a way to live. So I think that’s the answer. I’m having a love affair with the gay community.