

# **ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.**

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources

## Matthew Shepard Story Oral History- Romaine Patterson

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- Subject: Romaine Patterson
- Occupation: Sirius XM Radio Host
- Interviewer: Mark Junge
- Place of Interview: Telephone

The following interview is part of a Wyoming oral history series titled “The Matthew Shepard Story.” It is produced by Sue Castaneda for the Wyoming State Archives. The interviewer is Wyoming Historian Mark Junge. The entire project is funded by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. No portion of this interview or transcript may be reprinted without permission of the Wyoming State Archives. In this segment, we interview Romaine Patterson.

Patterson: This is Romaine Patterson. I am currently the host of Derek and Romaine on Sirius XM radio. I also was a very good friend of Matthew Shepard’s.

Junge: Thank you. Okay, when were you born? When and where?



Matthew Shepard – Romaine Patterson

Patterson: I was born, oh man you're going to age me already, I was born in 1978 in Sheridan, Wyoming and I spent pretty much my entire young life in Ranchester which is about thirteen miles outside of Sheridan.

Junge: Where you born at Memorial Hospital?

Patterson: I was.

Junge: Ahh ha. My son, Dan who is a film maker was born there too.

Patterson: Oh, interesting...very cool.

Junge: Yeah, in fact he's up for an academy award.

Patterson: Oh, shut up! That's awesome. (Laughter)

Junge: Yeah, I just thought I'd get that out of the way because I am just bursting with pride.

Patterson: I can't say I blame you for that. I would be as well.

Junge: Anyway, I wanted you to do several things if you wouldn't mind, Romaine...

Patterson: Sure

Junge: and that is let's talk about your life in Ranchester. Our family lived in Sheridan for two years when I taught at the community college.

Patterson: Okay.

Junge: Sheridan Community College, so I know a little bit about Tongue River High, a little bit about Ranchester, Dayton and that whole Dayton-Kane area. Can you talk about your life in Ranchester?

Patterson: Yeah, absolutely. My family...my mother and my father were both staples in the Tongue River community. My mother ran the Tongue River Branch Library for twenty-three years. My father was the shop teacher at Tongue River High School and Junior High for about twenty-five years. He was a teacher there. Every one of my



siblings, which are many...I am the youngest of eight children. We all graduated from Tongue River High School. So, my family lived in that community for a very long time. Obviously, when I came around and was raised there, my father used to build a lot of the homes in Ranchester, Wyoming during the summer. So we had...I actually grew up on the intersection of Betty and Carl Street, literally named after my mother and my father because my father built a good portion of the houses on those actual streets.

Junge: How did the family get there?

Patterson: My father grew up out East in Pennsylvania where his family was from. My mother was in Colorado. They met because my father was in the Air Force and fate happened to bring them together. My father took a job out in...I want to say Boise many, many years ago and that took them to Wyoming. My father was an avid hunter and fisherman and truly loved the outdoors and so Wyoming just seemed like a good fit. My poor mother, she got dragged out there kind of kicking and screaming but ultimately ended up loving it as well.

Junge: Yeah, I can imagine. It's beautiful country. Now where does this frog lady thing come in?

Patterson: Well, ever since I was a little kid I always had a thing for frogs. I can't really explain it other than it's just something I always loved. And I was always very much a tomboy growing up so...my father always said that he wanted eight strapping sons. And in the end, he had five sons and then he had me and a couple of girly girls for daughters. But I just always was the kid in the local ditch trying to catch a snake, trying to catch a frog, trying to catch a minnow. I just loved it. And so, as a kid my



father would help me find frogs or we'd go find frog eggs and I'd raise tadpoles.

Every summer it seemed like there was some little critter I had rescued out of a ditch that I thought I was going to make my pet. So, all the kids called me the frog lady because they knew that I had a frog somewhere about.

Junge: (laughter) And you thought this was perfectly natural?

Patterson: Oh yeah, of course I mean when you grow up in Wyoming there is a certain sense of freedom that comes with being a child there. You know, because our community was so tight knit, you could play until eleven or twelve at night in the neighborhood and your parents never really worried, so the idea of you down in the local ditch trying to hunt for frogs or whatever, it just kind of came naturally with growing up there. So yeah, of course it seemed natural to me.

Junge: Well, you talked about playing with Barbies too.

Patterson: Not very fondly. I was not really a girly girl type but you know, with Barbies I was more inclined to chop off their heads and throw them out the window.

Junge: There were eight kids, right?

Patterson: Yep, eight of us.

Junge: Okay, four of the children were gay.

Patterson: Yes.

Junge: Okay, how do you account for that? I mean, have you ever thought much about that?

Patterson: I have. You know, it's one of those situations where in society I think a lot of people like to say that gay kids are the product of families that have problems. There is some kind of abuse and things like that and you know, I think my family is the perfect epitome of the most wonderful family environment you could ask for. Heterosexual



parents who were married as virgins who loved each other for forty some years, literally loved each other until the day my father died. And, you know, they were the most wonderful parents you could ask for. So for me, when you look at a situation where you have four out of eight kids who are gay, I think it is such a perfect example of genetics and such a perfect case for that. Every one of us came out at different stages in our lives, but we all just knew that we were gay. And, once we were able to kind of figure it out in our own time, in our own frame, there was never any question about that. It took my parents a little bit of time to kind of get their heads around that. But I think as time went on, and they got to know each of their gay children...my parents, while they struggled with having gay children, they ultimately became really wonderful supporters of their gay children which is really nice to see when you're growing up in Wyoming.

Junge: Now, who's still alive? Your dad is gone, I know that.

Patterson: Yeah, my mother passed away last year, unfortunately. I feel like I'm a little bit of an orphan these days. But, you know it's all good.

Junge: Well, in 1990...being raised in the '80's and '90's like you were, it must have been tough on them. I mean, we've made a lot of progress since then.

Patterson: Yeah, I think the biggest challenge for my parents when I came out was, at the time, one of my older brothers who was gay had been diagnosed with AIDS. And, he was very, very ill for most of my high school years.

Junge: Michael?

Patterson: Yeah, my brother Michael. And for them, they were really struggling with this concept that if you're gay, it means you could get AIDS because that's kind of what



people believed at that time. That you were going to get AIDS and you were going to die. And that was very scary for my parents. So much of my young life was spent with them kind of dealing with their grief. And also dealing with their fear of what being gay meant for their children. Not to mention all of the other crazy ideas that society had.

Junge: On the other side of the picture though, is this event you describe in your life when you were nineteen when you went to Pride Fest in Denver. That's more of a positive thing. I mean, sure times were tough when parents had to raise gay children at that particular time. Your parents did a great job of it, but on the other hand here was something that you discovered when you were nineteen and you were thrilled.

Patterson: Right. Yeah, I mean actually I think it was even earlier than nineteen. I think it was closer to like fourteen or fifteen when I went to my first pride event. It all came about because my brother had been diagnosed and I wanted to spend time with him before he died. I begged my parents, I mean literally begged them to let me spend the summer with him in Denver so I could get to know him before he died because he was so much older than I was. And so they reluctantly agreed. And I was exposed to my first gay pride event. I didn't know in that moment how life changing it would be for me, and how eye opening it would be. But yeah, it certainly was one of those moments that really transformed where my life would go.

Junge: Can we talk a little bit about Angel Action?

Romaine: Sure.

Junge: Okay, it was founded in '99

Romaine: Yep.



Junge: Can you describe the origin of it? I mean, can you talk about your interaction with Jim Osborn?

Patterson: Yeah. The way Angel Action came to be, it's not a short story so I'll try to make it as brief as I can and really get it all in there, but when I attended the memorial service for Matthew in Casper, it was the first time I ever saw Fred Phelps. And I was so appalled by his sheer audacity to be there and to spread the message that he was spreading, and I was standing outside the church with a very good friend of mine and I remember doing everything I could to try to distract her from looking at that group of people. I would stand between us, I would drop my umbrella, and the whole time I just thought, "This guy is such a dick" and I really disliked him a lot. So after everything went crazy with Matthew and the media was insane, Jim Osborn and I reconnected. We had known when I was in high school through the speech and forensics teams that I was on. We reconnected when I found out he had known Matthew in Laramie and that he was doing all of this speaking and stuff in Laramie and I was doing something very similar in Colorado. And we reconnected and were talking about it and he called me one day to vent as we often did and he said, "You know, Fred Phelps is coming to Laramie again". Well actually, it was really for the first time. And I said, "Oh great, just what we need at the hearing for Russell Henderson". So we were discussing the situation and how appalling it was and how pissed off we were and I said, "You know, someone should really do something about him" because I never...for me I never understood how he could go...Fred Phelps...he go to all of these funerals and he could do all of these protests and no one ever did anything. Like, that just didn't make any sense to me. I get that he has every right to



be there from a First Amendment point of view. But I never understood why no one ever did something to show what he is really all about. Which is this core value of hatred and it never made sense to me that no one ever stood up and said this guy is the devil and he's a bad guy and this isn't how it is and it didn't make sense to me that no one did that and I just couldn't fathom why no one ever did anything. So Jim and I were talking about that and in that conversation, this idea was born and the idea essentially was why not use his ammunition against him? You know, he's all about quoting God and God's hatred and God's wrath and that's not what I learned growing up. I was raised catholic, I never learned about God's hate. I only learned about God's love. And we started talking about how God delivered messages to mankind and it was always in the form of an angel. So as the conversation progressed, we came up with this concept of using the image of an angel to cover up this image of hate. And when the conversation was over, we were like "Oh my God, this is the most brilliant idea! You know, we could do this and this and this..." and we had really a kind of solid idea and we understood the power that the media would play in putting something like this together. But we were so exhausted at that point, we were doing literally hundreds of interviews that week a media outlets from around the world, and there was a very big demand on our time and we were still grieving Matthew's death. It was really a challenging time for us and I was like, "someone else has to do this" and I literally told Jim, "Go for it, it's all yours. I can't do this." And so, we ended the conversation and I went to work. I was working two jobs at that time. I was at my second job where I was scanning comic books for an online auctioning company and I was bored out of my mind. I was just sitting there, I was





bored out of my mind and I like to call this moment my swift kick in the ass from Matthew because I literally sat there and I felt like a shiver go down my spine and before I knew it, my mind was just reeling and I was thinking about all of the things I would have to do to do angels. And I couldn't stop, it was like my mind was on overdrive and I couldn't stop thinking about it. I started taking notes frantically and the second I got off work and I got home I called Jim and I said, "Okay, here's what you need to do." And I gave him a laundry list of items of all of the things I needed him to put together in Laramie and I would meet him in Laramie and I would bring all of these angels and I would get all of these people, and do all of this stuff. And to just trust me, I'd get it done.

Junge: Sure.

Patterson: And he's like, "Oh, okay..." (laughter).

Junge: On page 203 of your book, can I read you this quote?

Patterson: Sure.

Junge: On page 203 of your book, you say "And as the whole world was watching, I wish my mother could have been there with me in Jim's living room among those people with all of their nervousness and fear. The reason for doing the angels was as clear as it ever would be, because it was the right thing to do. They understood as I understood that so often people are faced with the opportunity to do the right thing and for whatever reason, don't. This was our chance to take that opportunity and we all felt terrific about it."

Patterson: Yeah.



Junge: I think that is so neat because it was like in a way...for you it was a pivotal decision, wasn't it?

Patterson: Mm-hmm, without question. I talk about my mom specifically because when I told her what I wanted to do, she got mad at me. She told me I was crazy...in a moment of anger she told me, "Why don't you just go out and paint a bulls eye on you and ask them to kill you too?" It was one of those moments of fear that my mom felt. She was scared for me. At the time, I was a naïve kid. I didn't understand why she was scared. I mean, yeah, my friend had just been killed and it was this horrible thing but it didn't even enter my mind. Like, that didn't even enter my mind when this opportunity presented itself. I knew that this was the right thing to do with every fiber of my being. I didn't know what would come out of it, I didn't know that this would be that moment that was the complete pivotal moment in my life but I knew that I had a responsibility that day to do this. And I'm so glad I listened to myself in that moment.

Junge: Yeah, I am too...I am too. Can you describe those encounters...those actual encounters with Fred Phelps? What were there, four of them? The funeral, the Henderson trial, McKinney trial...

Patterson: Actually in Laramie there were...it was kind of broken up into two things. The first one was at...well the first one was at the funeral where I first ran into Fred for the first time. We didn't really have a reaction or response to him at that point. The next time we saw him was for the trial of Russell Henderson...or what we thought was the start and then it ended up being the whole thing. What he did that day was said he was going to go to the courthouse and then from the courthouse when things were



kind of done, he was going to go to the University of Wyoming. So our goal was to follow him wherever he went and to protect whoever came in contact with him from his vileness. So the first time we did it, for Russell Henderson, it was the day after Easter and I remember we drove down to Laramie on Easter Sunday. There are so many really weird and inappropriate things about it. There were twelve of us that were there as angels that first time. And nobody knew we were coming. The only people who knew were the sheriff's office in Wyoming, in Laramie and then a small documentary crew that was following us around. And that was it. Nobody else knew who we were, what we were doing, they didn't even know we were coming. And I remember that morning, when we were walking down the streets of Laramie in these crazy angel costumes, trying not to get our wings knocked off by trucks and cars and signs. It was a very cold morning, as early April would be in Wyoming, and it was very quiet as it often is in Wyoming and there was a gentle breeze blowing and when we came around the corner at the courthouse, it was one of those moments that you could hear Fred screaming at everyone and all of the media was circled around him and they were all catching their moment and all of a sudden, this group walks around the corner. And it was kind of like a parting of the seas, it was really quite a phenomenal moment. And people were like, "What is going on? Who are these people? Why are they dressed up like angels?" We just walked in, we didn't say anything, we simply walked in and we surrounded the bullpen that they had Fred Phelps in and everyone just stood there in stunned silence for a long time. Until finally, I broke away from the group and I explained to the media who we were and what we were doing. Then we all went back to our peaceful stance and it was one of



those moments in life when it was so serene and so moving on so many levels. You had this over whelming emotion that was going through your heart and your mind during the whole thing, and yet there was this tremendous amount of pride that we all felt. It was just one of those moments in life that you really...it's almost hard to describe how intense and wonderful it was. But it is certainly something that I'd cherish my whole life.

Junge: You said in your book too that the moment I closed my eyes while my father poured Michael's ashes into the hole he had dug by the creek, I felt life in that moment. That was a similar moment for you.

Patterson: Mm-hmm. Yeah, absolutely...absolutely...

Junge: You said, "I understood who I was as a human being and the kind of person I wanted to be in the world."

Patterson: I was a very young person at this time. These are the years between nineteen and twenty one and they really did become the cornerstone of who I would be. And in a lot of ways while these situations were very trying for a young person to encounter, I am so grateful that these things did happen because it really did establish who I wanted to be in life. And for me that is someone who is not afraid to stand up when you see that opportunity, who's not afraid to instill that in the future generation and Matthew's passing while completely, totally and utterly upsetting and frustrating and didn't make a lot of sense in way really does now for me. And for me, it meant an opportunity to help other generations and other people learn what we learned in that short period of time. It's a real unique gift.

Junge: Are you going to be talking to your daughter about that?



Patterson: Yeah, without question. I mean, my daughter is four now and I really do look forward to the stage in her life where she's able to really understand some of the concepts of what I experienced and what I went through. But I've been doing this for years, not just with my own child but with other people's children. I mean, I've spent the last thirteen years now talking to various schools throughout the country. Every year I go to several speaking engagements and for me, it's such a great experience to be able to talk to future generations and really help them develop their own thoughts and opinions on things and to encourage them to find their voice in the world and not to be afraid to use it because I think...you know, for me anyway a lot of people were trying to stifle my voice and always telling me, "Oh you can't do this or you can't do that...oh, don't say anything because you might get in trouble." And I think that no, parents and adults...they don't always know what's best. If that was true, my mom wouldn't have had me be an angel. She would have had me hiding away in a closet, pretending like I wasn't gay so that I would be safe. And the reality was that by standing up and by standing out there for the world to see, it changed people. It changed their perception, it changed the way they thought about gay people, it changed the way they thought about young people, and it gave people courage so that when the opportunity came for them to do the same thing they could.

Junge: Yeah, that's beautiful. Can we go back for a second, to Phelps?

Patterson: Sure.

Junge: What was Phelps' technique?

Patterson: Well his technique is, he gets in his little bullpen and then he draws people in by screaming at them...see he says some horrible, offensive thing to them. They look



like a dyke or they smell like a dyke, or he'll tell you something really horrible and he gets them all enraged. And then he just yells at them and he gets them all furious and crazy and he's been so successful with this that often times people have decked him and they get violent and they get full of rage and hatred which is exactly what he is about. And, you know what was great about the angels was that it completely cut him off. For the first time ever, he couldn't yell at them, he couldn't scream in their faces and get them all crazy and just you know, breed this hatred. And that's what made the brilliance of the angels was it really took away all of his power in one, fell swoop.

Junge: So then he sues when somebody attacks him.

Patterson: Yes, he does...he sues and then he uses that money to fund future protests and future craziness. And the interesting thing about Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church is how they've changed over the years. What they learned from Matthew and that case was if you go to something really controversial, like the death of a young, gay student who has captivated the world's attention and you protest there, you are going to get a much bigger audience. And he loves publicity, they love to get their name and their message out there, so that's why you now see them today, protesting at the funerals of soldiers who have fallen in the war because that's a way to get a lot of attention, to get their message out there. They don't even really care...I don't think they care about gay people anymore -- they just want to spread hate. And they're going to do that in any means necessary and they're going to do it in the most public way that they can which is why it is so important for people to stand up and say, "This isn't going to happen here."

Junge: Have you tried to understand what's in his core? What makes him do these things?



Patterson: I think he's the devil. (Laughter) And I'm not even kidding, I mean I've met Fred in protest situations and I've also met him in non-protest situations but I just think that he's a really angry human being. I think that he...I don't know that he has happiness in his life. I honestly...I feel like he's someone who's void of happiness.

Junge: So it's not just gay issues, he's not just preaching against gays he's preaching against a lot of things.

Patterson: Oh yeah, now he hates America...he hates other nations...he hates everything. He pretty much hates...anything he can hate, he will hate.

Junge: Do you think he's gay?

Patterson: Uh, do I think that he's...God I hope not. You know, I think it is interesting...my friend is here, he's pointing out...you know, Fred Phelps was a civil rights attorney at one point and this is something that he kind of built his career on and then for him to turn on other people's civil rights in this manner I think is really disheartening and sad. But I just think he's an unhappy person, I don't think he has any love in his heart which makes me really feel bad for him, actually. And you know, as crazy as he is and as crazy as the Westboro Baptist Church is, they are without question one of the best allies that the gay community can have. People always think I'm crazy when I say that, but you know...we'll use Wyoming as a perfect example. In a community where people may be on the fence or may be a little bit more conservative when it comes to gay issues, when they see someone like Fred Phelps roll into town and act all crazy and act all insane and throw all of this hatred around, they don't want to be associated with that. They see that guy and say, "Well I'm not like him because he's crazy." And then they find themselves a little bit more in line with the normalcy of



the gay people who are like, “I don’t know why he’s picking on us.” So in a way he does a lot of good for the gay community and I think the gay community has learned that and has really utilized that to their advantage.

Junge: Yeah, that’s great. You mention in your book, you said that you feared that someone would shoot Phelps and you said this was, after all Wyoming.

Patterson: Yeah.

Junge: What did you mean by that?

Patterson: Well, I mean if you were there in front of that courthouse it was scary. I mean, there’s no other way to say it. There were literally snipers on the rooftops of the surrounding buildings...it was not just my fear it was a fear of many people. And I said that I was afraid that someone might shoot him because he does get this rage boiling in people and he really gets people heated up and let’s face it...people in Wyoming carry around guns. A lot of people in Wyoming have guns and sometimes they are hotheads, so I could totally see someone pulling out a gun and shooting him.

Junge: Was there any further history of Angel Action after the whole Matthew Shepard thing died down?

Patterson: What is interesting about what has happened with Angel Action is that people in various communities around the world have embraced this action as their own which just swells my heart with pride, so whether it’s the Ku Klux Klan or their own anti-gay whoever, these different communities are utilizing the angels as a peaceful way to protest within their own communities when they see something like that happening. And, not only are Angel Actions happening but because someone had the courage...or in this case a group of people had the courage to stand up against Fred





Phelps, young people in particular, and show that they didn't have to take it there was something...there was a way to react to this kind of hatred that was positive. So, what I have found is that when let's say when they protested the funeral of a fallen soldier communities come together and they embrace in this show of strength that says, "You know what? Not our community...not here. You're not welcome. This is not what we are about." And there is such a strength that has come about because people are learning that you know what...we can do something. And the start of that was Angel Action.

Junge: So the angels are still in action?

Patterson: Oh yes (laughter)...quite in action. You know, there's a website that's donated to them, there's lots of different people that are putting together Angel Action in Atlanta, they have a very active Angel Action group that gets together and does stuff. And what I love about it is, you don't need me to be an angel. If you feel that motivation to stand up against the injustice in your community by all means, take it, steal it, run with it...as long as good is being done, I'm happy.

Junge: And it all started there in Jim Osborn's room?

Patterson: Pretty much.

Junge: Well just for fun, what do you think would have happened if the wind had come up that morning?

Patterson: Well, it's hard to say. We might've had some angels topple over. Those wings were quite the obstacle there but we had a lot of fun creating them...more fun that I should dare admit. They were built pretty sturdy...after all a big dyke put them together so you know they weren't going to fall apart.



Matthew Shepard – Romaine Patterson

Junge: Well, maybe Matt intervened too. (Laughter)

Patterson: I think maybe a little bit.

Junge: I want to ask you some questions about GLBTQ issues I guess.

Patterson: Sure...okay.

Junge: Okay and they keep adding letters to these...

Patterson: I call it the Gay BLT. And you just keep adding letters... (laughter) I don't know what half of them mean anymore.

Junge: You know, Wyoming's got the nickname the Equality State. We've got...that's our motto and we've got these sayings like "We like to live and let live." I wonder how you look at clichés like that?

Patterson: Well, I think Wyoming is a state that has come a long way and still has a long way to go, but they're certainly not alone in our country. You know, I think that when the people of Wyoming realize how many gay peers they have and I think that it's about those who live in Wyoming who are in LGBTQ and any other of the alphabet, I think it's important for us to come out and share our stories with our peers so that they realize that our lives are not so different and that we share a lot of similar interests if we are living in the same state, we must like something about it, maybe it's those cold winters who knows...or the never ending wind. So I think it's important that Wyoming learns how many people there are LGBTQ. I look at my own high school and I was the first openly gay student in the history of my high school. That being said, all of my older gay brothers went to that high school, all of their gay friends who we found out about years later, went to that high school and lots of other people. Even in my own...in the years I was in school there was another lesbian that I know



of right off the top of my head who came out years later. And we were there, we were always there, we will always be there and I think you know, a lot of gay people leave Wyoming because they're afraid of how they'll be perceived. And I think rather than leave, we need to stay and to share our lives with the people around us.

Junge: Good statement. There's been a lot of discussion in all of the interviews I've done and I think I've done seventeen, eighteen of these interviews with various people judges, lawyers, and so forth and I like to find out what people think about the need for a hate crime law. Now some people say this was just a robbery gone wrong, this was not a hate crime and they fought, not violently but strenuously disagree that this was a hate crime. What's your opinion?

Patterson: Well, I mean I've been lucky enough to talk with a lot of the investigators in the case and there's no question that it was a hate crime. And there's no question that Matthew was targeted because he was gay and that his being gay contributed to his death. And I feel like for people to try to re-write history is a real disservice. I think that we need to own what happened as a state, I think that we need to acknowledge and I think that we need to make a commitment to try to educate our young people so that things like this don't happen. We are living in a society right now where we have a real bullying issue and it's almost an epidemic that happening in our country with our young people and rather than ignore the history that has been taught to us, we need to embrace it and we need to really learn from it. And I feel like, you know a lot of people can try to re-write history because it makes them feel better or sleep better at night but that's not the way to change it from ever happening again. And if you



bury your head in the sand and you try to pretend that is wasn't what it was, that's exactly what you're doing. You're setting yourself up for it to happen again.

Junge: Do you think that we need the hate crimes law here in this state? Or, I guess nationally we do have something like that.

Patterson: Yeah, I think the national legislation was really important from the financial point of view, in terms of helping to investigate these crimes. Obviously whenever you have a state initiative or a city initiative that tries to really maintain equal rights and protections to its citizens, I think it sends an important statement. I think it says we're a community that cares about our citizens, all of them equally, so I think there is an importance from that standpoint. I think in terms of the actual legislation, I think the national legislation was a really great victory and I'm so incredibly proud of the friends I have in Laramie and in Wyoming who helped to make that happen because I really think that it took the work of a lot of people. But I think there is something to be said about having state and local legislation that protects the citizens.

Junge: Well, I think Cathy Connolly, a legislator from Albany County...you probably know Cathy...

Patterson: Yep.

Junge: Yeah, she's been trying to get that in to the state legislature and last year it failed again, but you know it wasn't by all that much.

Patterson: Yeah, I think people are becoming educated and I think they're starting to realize this isn't about a group of people asking for special rights or that is looking for something above and beyond. It's about finding equal protections under the law and more and



more people are starting to understand that and recognize that and it's only a matter of time before Wyoming gets to that place too.

Junge: Well in 2008, Matthew Shepard...it was the tenth anniversary of his death. Was the whole issue still very relevant at that time or had you sensed maybe that the issue, as an issue had calmed down.

Patterson: Well, for me it is very relevant. Part of the reason why I say that is because in the ten plus years since his death, I've had the opportunity to speak at hundreds of schools, thousands of schools across the country are continuing to do the Laramie Project. And I think that shows like the Laramie Project have really allowed for this story to be told...the good, the bad, the ugly...that's the great thing about the Laramie Project is it really covers all the bases and when you see young kids performing a play who weren't even born when Matthew died, you really understand the relevance of that story and of what happened. And you also understand that so much more good can be done because of that story. For me, the way that I marked the ten year anniversary was I created a special for my channel, OutQ, here at Sirius XM that was about the legacy of Matthew Shepard. What is it? And in my opinion, it is the Laramie Project because this is what keeps that legacy alive. It is what tells that story. It is how future generations will learn who Matthew was, and will understand what happened. And so I definitely think there is relevance and until hate crimes of this nature no longer happen there will always be relevance.

Junge: Okay. Can you...in just reading a little bit about gay liberation movement as a movement and...I don't know how you'd call it but I go back to that Stonewall Inn event in 1969 in New York. You know about that?



Matthew Shepard – Romaine Patterson

Patterson: Oh, of course.

Junge: All right, so you look at the Stonewall Inn event in New York and you look at the AIDS epidemic, and you look at Matthew Shepard...what's his significance? What's Matthew's significance when you look at that whole gay liberation movement?

Patterson: Well, I think part of the significance of Matthew is...it was the first time the masses understood the crimes committed against the gay community. Prior to that, gay people were not really talked about openly in the media. There was kind of a firestorm of things happening around the time Matthew died, Ellen had just come out...you know people were starting to talk about gay people in a more positive fashion, a little bit of controversy in there, but in a more positive fashion and then this crime happened. And this was following James Birch Junior's hate crime, so hate crimes was kind of in the fore front of people's minds and Matthew allowed people to see what a gay person looked like and feel sympathy in a way because of his appearance and the family he came from and it almost allowed people to care a little bit about a gay person even if they didn't know him and then to be appalled by what happened. His death started a dialogue that had never happened in the history of our country that I think was a really valuable dialogue. For gay people it really stressed the importance of being out. So many gay people came out after they heard about Matthew Shepard because they wanted to make sure their community knew that they were there and they weren't afraid. So you saw this huge change in the straight community because for the first time ever they were really talking about gay issues in a way they never had. And then you have the gay community who was like I'm not going to live my life in fear, I'm not going to be the next Matthew Shepard. I'm



going to tell you who I am and damn it, you need to listen. So you saw those two things happening at the same time. It was pretty remarkable point in gay history.

Junge: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's great. I wanted to know what you thought was the significance of the case was and the nation history because I think you're living in a very, very critical time and I think that was a very critical event at a critical time.

Patterson: Without question and I think you know, now and maybe because this is the stage of life I'm in but now there is an even different discussion within the gay community that's happening and is about our families and the legal protections of the law when we have a family, our right to get married, our right to protect our families and even having a child. I have experienced that first hand, I experience it every year when I go to do my taxes and you know, so the story is just progressing for the gay community and how we fight for these rights.

Junge: Yeah, I sort of sense that too when I read the paper and I try to watch the news hour at night and I catch NPR of course. So it looks to me like things are switching from a sexuality issue, although everybody's involved in sexuality in one way or the other but it seems like it's evolving from strictly a sexuality thing to a thing that's social, it's legal and you know, like you say what does it take for two gay people to live and be able to raise kids?

Patterson: I think people are starting to realize it's not just about the gay people and the sex they have because when you've been in a long relationship as a gay couple, your sex life starts to fade off just the way it does with straight couples. Trust me; it's not as sexual as you think.

Junge: What do you think the most critical issue is facing...let's call it GLBTQs?



Patterson: Boy, that's a hard one because there are so many of them right now that I think really are on the fore front. I think for me, personally, while I was not a huge fan of the gays going for gay marriage because I felt like they had their priorities out of order at first, I do understand the importance of it. I think that it is, right now, obviously the big thing that the gays are looking for. For me, it's not such much about getting married in the eyes of God, or any of that crap, for me it's very much about finances, about protecting my family, ensuring that if something happens to me that my family is going to inherit what they should and not lose things to the government or to other family members who are greedy. It really is about very simple, legal matters that until you are a gay person and you go to file your taxes that you realize, oh wait my wife and I can't file joint taxes for the federal government because the federal government won't let us and oh yeah, because of that I am now paying thousands more than my heterosexual brother who is also married. When you start to look at the itty, bitty little details like that you start to really realize the inequalities that we are facing.

Junge: Well, why do you say they went off the track with the marriage issue?

Patterson: I mean, when they started fighting for gay marriage there were still so many states that had laws just banning gay sex. Ultimately that was overturned and so forth, but I say sometimes you've got to overturn some of these laws that are in the way, the little obstacles and they went for the big enchilada. So I thought, yeah priorities are a little screwy here but I think in the end, maybe I was wrong. Maybe they went for the right thing because I think ultimately when that battle is won, that's going to be a huge, huge accomplishment and then we're still going to have a lot of battles. It's not like





gay marriage and everything just gets better, there's still going to be a lot of work to be done.

Junge: The State of Washington is going through that turmoil right now.

Patterson: Sure, yeah.

Junge: What do you think is going to happen?

Patterson: Ultimately, I think Washington will get gay marriage. I think you're going to see more and more of these little battles by the states until ultimately it's going to become a federal issue. And it's going to have to be dealt with on a federal level. So, each one of these little state victories is a victory but ultimately the big one is going to be the federal recognition and until then it's a challenge.

Junge: You know, this book you wrote I really loved it...*The Whole World is Watching*. I just thought it's a great story. I think you and Patrick Hinds did a good job on editing and how you told that story, it's a page turner. Page burner...

Patterson: I've heard that...

Junge: Yeah, yeah and I wondered...did you keep...your memory of certain situations and certain moments in your life...it's seems so exact. Did you keep a journal or did you depend on memory?

Patterson: I depended mostly on memory and then, sometimes we've have to go back and figure out the exact dates on things. Sometimes I'd remember a situation but I wouldn't remember exactly when it happened so we did have to do a little research to get all the dates and everything accurate but it was quite the process.

Junge: Do you want to write more books?



Patterson: Yeah, ultimately I would like to write more books. The big question is, what am I going to write? You know, my life has changed a lot since the time I lived in Wyoming. The radio show has changed my life a lot. On the radio show, I am also considered a...we call me a “sexpert.” I spend a lot of time and attention focusing on sexuality and people’s sex lives and helping them. I also...I would love to write a book about what it means to be a lesbian mom. There are certain things that you just don’t have resources for...when I got pregnant and knew I was going to have a child, there were no real books to explain...for my partner to use as a resource for what it’s like to be the non-biological mom, what does that mean? I would like to write some materials from my experience that might help other people who’ve gone through similar situations and who knows...maybe my co-host and I will write a show book. Who knows? But there will be book writing in the future, without question.

Junge: You could do a sequel. You could do a sequel to this and show how your life has changed since that time.

Patterson: Yeah, I think that I’d like to get a few more years under my belt before that happens but without question I do think that a sequel will happen. My life is far from over and...people laughed at me when I wrote *The Whole World was Watching*, they were like, “You’re too young to write an autobiography.” But I was like, oh my God, I’ve lived so much life so you know, I think definitely...my life is far from over and there’s more adventure ahead.

Junge: No, I don’t think it was too early to write that book.

Patterson: I don’t either.



Junge: Not at all, but I've been told that myself and I've written a few books. You're Sirius job, you talked about your interview with the fellow who hired you and you said, "I thought for a second about how slutty I'd been since I'd moved to New York..."

Patterson: (Laughter) Yeah.

Junge: "...I stifled a chuckle, when I said you have no idea how right I am for this job."

Patterson: That's true. When I was in school for recording engineering I finally got an opportunity to really grieve what had happened in my young life. It was the first opportunity for me to kind of fall apart and rebuild myself. When I came to New York I spent a lot of time getting to know the new me. That included a lot of slutty behavior, which was fun...I mean I look back on those years and they were some of the best years of my life after living in such a heavy, dark period dealing with all of this activism, really kind of a sad topic and to be able to come to New York, the greatest city in the world to live and be really free was a really wonderful feeling so when they told me I was going to be doing a sex and relationship show on Sirius, I was like oh, you have no idea how good I am going to be at this. (Laughter)

Junge: You self-describe your radio persona...you say "I'm a fallen angel, filthy, uncensored and kinky."

Patterson: Yep. I mean, it's calmed down a little bit over the years as I've grown older and matured and become a mother, but in the early days I wanted to establish myself as something other than what people knew and I really wanted to embrace other aspects of my personality so I took things I was interested in and I really played them up. And I'm not afraid to be foul mouthed, I'm not afraid to be raunchy, I'm not afraid to talk about my personal life in ways people would probably be very shy to do but, you



know I live my life very openly and I found that by doing that and by sharing that, that people grow and people learn. A lot of straight people call in and they're like, "I had no idea this is what a lesbian was like, you're lives are interested and so much like mine." I just want people to embrace themselves for who they are and not be afraid to express that.

Junge: I think that's what they call a public service.

Patterson: Well, it's me.

Junge: What is your...now I don't catch the show because...I don't know what I'm listening to but I don't catch Sirius...one of our cars has it, but I don't catch it very much.

What is your interview style? Do you try to get people to sort of emote, like a Barbara Walters isn't happy until she get somebody to cry...or are you...

Patterson: No, God no. My interview style has actually changed a lot over the years. For a long time, it was really all about me...bringing people in to my conversation and I've actually spent probably the last year and a half studying Howard Stern, which I never thought I'd listen to Howard Stern. But I recently started and I've really been paying attention to how he interviews people and I think he has a really incredible interview style in which he gets someone on and he kind of boosts their ego and tells them a lot of really positive things about themselves and then starts to probing them with questions. And then when they don't want to answer those questions, he backs away from those questions and he probes them, gives them some more ego boosters and he comes right back to it until he gets to the real root of what he wants to know and I think it's such an interesting style of interviewing that I've tried to utilize it a little bit



more in my interviews and I've found that my interviews are a lot better now...after utilizing his method because I think it's a really, really smart method.

Junge: I think you can always learn from other people like that...Charlie Rose, and Bill Moyers and, what's her name on...the afternoon NPR show...Fresh Air, Terry Gross.

Patterson: Yeah. I mean...you know, I'm a relative baby in the world of radio, almost going on to ten years now and I still have a lot to learn. I really...I have found a medium that really suits my personality...I never thought I'd do radio, I always thought I'd be a rock star, but this so fits who I am and it gives me an opportunity to really utilize the one skill I've spent my whole life honing which is my voice.

Junge: Yes, you're very (unintelligible). But, I've got some serious questions now.

Patterson: Yes.

Junge: The total effect...what do you think the total effect of Matthew Shepard has been on your life?

Patterson: Oh man, um...I don't think there's any aspect of my life that hasn't been impacted by what happened to Matthew. Boy, I guess the total effect for me has been for teaching me...teaching me to embrace this responsibility that I have in the world. I very much feel a responsibility to give to others and sometimes that is in a very physical way by doing things in my community or whatever that may be. Sometimes it's in an emotional way by fielding the calls from our listening audience and offering them support when I can, but for me I have a responsibility to make the world a better place and so much of that came from my final conversation with Matthew where he told me his goal in life to change the world for the better and I laughed at him for thinking he could change the world. And I very quickly learned how wrong I was and I've



realized in my life that I also have that ability, I also have that power and I have seen that power really come together in amazing ways. And it is not a responsibility I take lightly, it's one I take very seriously in my life and will continue for as long as I live whether that's educating new generations of young people and helping them understand these issues, whether that's raising my child, whether that's embracing my community on the radio show and trying to help educate people that way. That is the biggest impact on my life.

Junge: And it gives you satisfaction to help people.

Patterson: Without question.

Junge: How does the...you know after this event, you take the reader in your book, Romaine, through this tribulation. You take the reader with you and it is really an emotional impact that your words have. I'm thinking, how does the human mind, looking back on this event, how does the human mind soothe itself? How does the human mind get itself well?

Patterson: Well, that was a hard journey for me. It didn't happen over night, and there's certainly moments where the mind did not do well at all and I think that you kind of learn that through the book. But I guess for me now, the way it soothes me is that when I see a young person who has learned about Matthew, whether through their school or from reading "The Laramie Project" or whatever it is, who has learned about it and wants to change the world and wants to have that impact. When you see it in their eyes, this hope that exists because they learned about it, it heals you. It's something that is so powerful and I love it so much because I get to see it. I get to see



this hope reflected back to me, that is very healing...it almost makes it all make sense.

Junge: Mm-hmm. It took you a while, didn't it?

Patterson: Oh, it took me years...quite literally years. Even quite recently as a couple of years ago, I struggled with that balance. How do you balance out this tremendous responsibility you feel and your day to day life? How do you...there's kind of a separation but there's also this thing that continues to hold it together. That balance is hard, and so even now I struggle with that at times.

Junge: Does the show give you a feeling of escape from that sometimes?

Patterson: Oh, without question. The show, we really don't talk about Matthew a lot on the show not that I don't want to or that it doesn't come up from time to time. Part of the reason we don't talk about Matthew is because the show is a light show, it's a lot of fun. Matthew is a very sad topic when you think about it, so we don't talk about him a lot and in a way I am so glad that we don't because it gives me that opportunity to be myself, and to break away from this role that I played, this Matthew Shepard role, this good friend of Matthew's and it allows me to take all of the stuff that I learned from that and apply it in new ways that are just a lit bit lighter, not so heavy.

Junge: Yeah. Well, are you proud to be from Wyoming?

Patterson: Oh, without question. I wear a Wyoming hoodie all of the time, in fact I'm not wearing one today but I usually am. My mom used to buy me, she used to go to the Bighorn Mountain T-shirt shop in Sheridan, Wyoming and she used to get me these hoodies that have the Wyoming emblem on them and I wear them all the time.

Junge: You don't wear your black jacket anymore?



Matthew Shepard – Romaine Patterson

Patterson: Well, sometimes I do. But I do,...I wear a Wyoming hoodie almost everyday and I like to say I'm just a girl from Wyoming because at the end of day, it doesn't matter how far you stray or how far you go, the part of me that is Wyoming is just there, it's in the root of who I am, it's you know...I carry with me everywhere. I'm not ashamed to be from Wyoming, I think growing up in Wyoming was a really wonderful experience and hopefully one day I'll get back there.

Junge: Okay. I have a few more, do we have time?

Patterson: Sure, a couple more.

Junge: I see you as not only a Wyoming pioneer in what you've done with Angel Action and what you've done with your book and all of your activism since Matthew's death, but I see you as important to the gay liberation movement. How do you see your own role, your own self in what I would call a "historical movement?"

Patterson: It's funny you use the word pioneer because I remember the first time I sat down with my high school principal and I was mad at some people for calling me a lesbian in class, he said "Romaine, we're going to be pioneers because I've never had to deal with this topic before so we're going to learn together" because he didn't know how in the hell to handle it. I think that that really did kind of set up a good chunk of my experience in life. I don't know that I see myself as a pioneer, I really do see myself as a person who when presented with the opportunity to do the right thing, does and you know...I guess I'll continue to do that and hopefully I will instill that in as many people as I possibly can. But you know I like having this role and there are many people who came out after Matthew's death who claimed to be friends of Matthew who went to the media and talked to the media and many who have faded away.





They're not there now because they were there for all of the wrong reasons. People ask me were you just in it for the fame? Were you just in it because you wanted to see your name in all of the papers? I could care less about that, for me it was about helping people understand what happened and how can we make the world a better place because of it. It's why I do it still.

Junge: Did you ever think what you'd be like or where you'd be in this life if you'd been born twenty years earlier? I know I have.

Patterson: Yeah, I think I would have been much like my brother, Michael. He and I are very similar. He was about twenty years older than I am. I think I would have been a lot like him...still would have had these core values of who I am, I think I would have lived a harder life. I don't think that it would have changed how I've lived my life but it would have been more challenging without question. I would have faced more adversity but I'm not someone who's afraid of adversity, I never have been and I never will be. It would have been more challenging but I would have done it anyway.

Junge: We haven't said anything at all about Matthew, and I know throughout your book you have stories about him but what's your best story or best memory about Matthew?

Patterson: I think what I appreciated the most about Matthew and I think really emphasizes the most about who he was, when I worked at the coffee shop there was this guy, and we called him "Crazy Man Ellies" (sp) because he was a little bit mental and he was an older man and he was a little eccentric and he used to come into the coffee shop everyday and he would get his coffee in his eccentric OCD way and he would go sit outside and chain smoke thirteen packs of cigarettes and I'm not even exaggerating and he would drink his coffee and no one would talk to him. He lived a very lonely



existence and people made fun of him and whenever Matthew came in, he got his coffee and he went and sat and talked with Ellies for a little while. And to me what was always interesting was Matthew new saw a weird, old guy that was eccentric. Matthew was a potential friend. And I think it's why when he met Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney that he was so open to talking to them. Matthew never was people for what their exterior may show, he always saw someone as a potential friend. And I think that spoke volumes about his character, and who he was. He did so many things like that that always surprised me whether it was taking a homeless man to lunch or something like that. He just had this huge heart that really cared about people and he lived that every single day.

Junge: Beautiful. How do you suppose Judy takes this now? Here's this huge hurt, she was the mother, she gave birth to this young man and when people say you're doing a great job...how does she feel? She is constantly reminded of his death.

Patterson: I think she feels very much like I do. I think when you live in the center of this, you kind of do this weird, little thing, at least I did, where I have Matt, who is a friend of mine and there is this Matt whose memories I cherish from a personal perspective you know, the silly little things we did together, the places we went and the memories that we have. And then there's Matthew Shepard, and Matthew Shepard is everything that happened after his death, it is the public persona, the public thing that Matthew became after his death. I think that she does what I do, I think she cherishes those moments of Matt and she really holds those in a safe place in her that she doesn't necessarily share with everybody and then she does the work because the work is important. And like me, she understands the value of that because she has seen the



results. I think she takes pride in what she's been able to do in his memory. You just do what needs to be done because it's what you do. She's been phenomenal at it.

Junge: I think you and her are both very, very strong women. It just seems to me like every time she has to suffer an interview, and I say suffer because it seems to me it must be like Groundhog Day where you do the same thing over and over and this scar gets opened up again. The wound gets opened.

Patterson: I think she does a great job at handling it.

Junge: Yeah. Well, all right well listen, I have a number of other questions. What's it like to have someone act out your life?

Patterson: Oh, it's silly. You know, I don't even think about it anymore. The first time I saw it, I was like, "Oh my God, that's so weird!" But now I just think it's a great way for...it's a learning tool and I love that.

Junge: Okay, you're still Catholic, aren't you?

Patterson: Oh, I was raised that way, yep...once a catholic, kind of always. I don't go as often as my mother would have liked, but...

Junge: Listen, I wonder where you're going to be. You're not getting tired of what you're doing are you?

Patterson: Oh no, I'll be doing this a long time.

Junge: Okay. Well, listen Romaine I know that you spent more than an hour with me and I really appreciate this, and...

Patterson: No problem.

Junge: I'm just very appreciative.

Patterson: Not a problem, Mark and if you need something in the future, just let me know.



