

## **Interview: Michael Sabatino and Robert Voorheis**

**Allee Manning:** I'm here today at the Grinton I. Will Public Library in Yonkers, New York. My name is Allee Manning. I am interviewing two pioneers in the marriage equality movement here in the US, Robert Voorheis—

**Robert Voorheis:** Voorheis

**Allee Manning:** Voorheis, thank you. And Michael Sabatino, helping me conduct this interview is Michael Walsh, librarian two here at Yonkers Public Library. Alright, so Michael and Robert, can you tell me a little bit about your lives here in Westchester today?

**Michael Sabatino:** Today, currently? Hmm, okay, well, I am the former city council majority leader for the city of Yonkers.

**Robert Voorheis:** First openly gay...

**Michael Sabatino:** First openly gay elected official in the city. My current position is the Director of Constituents and Government Affairs for the city of Yonkers, and that's out of the mayor's office. So, as I say, we are here to solve all your problems in my department. I will admit that some of the problems we get are a little bit out-there and not city-related but we try.

**Robert Voorheis:** And I am, by profession, I'm an interior designer, but the last 10 years I have worked both in state and local government. And I retired last year and so I am enjoying retirement.

**Allee Manning:** That's awesome, congratulations.

**Robert Voorheis:** Thank you.

**Allee Manning:** What does that look like during your retirement and your time, your free time – if you have any – here together?

**Robert Voorheis:** Well, It's amazing, I don't know how I got everything done when I worked, because I don't stop. I am constantly on the go and doing things, and enjoying myself. You know, the advantage of retirement is that you can set your own pace, and what you don't get done today, you get done tomorrow. And, I have for the winter, and unnecessarily, I went to Palm Springs for two months, and it was warmer here than it was in Palm Springs, but I still enjoyed being away and just have enjoyed my time in retirement and doing whatever I want.

**Micheal Sabatino:** Needless to say, there is a push for me to retire.

**Robert Voorheis:** No, you're not needed to retire.

**Micheal Sabatino:** Mind you, I'm the older one, he's the younger one.

**Robert Voorheis:** Much younger, but if he doesn't want to retire then that's perfectly fine because I'll do what I wanna do.

**Allee Manning:** That's great, and I know from having met you initially at Mount Zion that you are also active in your religious community here in Westchester. I read about you having done

some work with volunteer organizations here as well in recent years. I'm sure COVID had some impact on that, but I would love to hear a little bit more about that as well.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, I was on the vestry of Zion Church. Well, a little bit of the back history, we were in a Roman Catholic church in the Bronx for well, 30+ years and Robert...

**Robert Voorheis:** As a couple we were 25 years.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, 25 years. I was a lay minister in the church, but the week after we got married, we were met on the church doorstep with my 84-year-old mother present, and we were told that we could no longer sing in the choir because our marriage had gone public. So, I said to the pastor, I said, "Well we aren't asking the church to recognize our marriage, so what? We don't want a scandal."

**Robert Voorheis:** He kicked us out...

**Michael Sabatino:** And he got a scandal! It was in the New York Times, it was on CNN, it was on...

**Robert Voorheis:** It was on the local TV and radio stations, interviews were incessant. And, they had protests outside the church because they didn't want a scandal.

**Michael Sabatino:** So that's how we landed at Zion Episcopal after about a year of getting different invitations from different congregations. We decided to go to Zion in Dobbs Ferry, and we were looking for a Catholic church nearby to bring my mother, but she decided that she was not going to have any part of the Catholic Church anymore, and she became a member of the Episcopal church as well, so that kind of started our determination to keep moving forward for marriage equality. Because we had gotten married in Canada.

**Allee Manning:** Right, yeah. I think actually that's a great point to start segueing into all of the work you've done in your lives, just going back to the very beginning. Can you tell me about your lives around the time that you first met and how you got together some 44-45 years ago?

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah. Well we met...

**Robert Voorheis:** 1978

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, we met at a bar on Veterans Day in 1978. And, we exchanged phone numbers and I guess the rest is history.

**Robert Voorheis:** I had moved to New York because I had met somebody, and I thought we would have a relationship together, and we did move in together, and I realized shortly thereafter that it wasn't going to work. So I was planning on moving out...I was planning on moving out of the state, my best friend lived in California, so I was going west. And, I just went out one night to a bar and there he was.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, I mean, a friend of mine dragged me to the bar. I was not really in the mood to go to a bar because I had just broken up in a relationship, so yeah. Then we met, he called me, and then...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, and that was it.

**Robert Voorheis:** A 25 year engagement.

**Michael Sabatino:** Right, well actually in 1979, December of 1979, which was about a year after we met, we had a commitment ceremony at Washington Square Methodist Church. Which was not a very common thing to do in those days.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** Even some of our gay friends were like, “Well, this is weird.” You know?

**Robert Voorheis:** But, we wanted to have some documentation, some recognition of our relationship, we couldn’t do it in the Catholic Church obviously.

**Michael Sabatino:** And it was illegal to have any marriage or anything.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** Or, a domestic partnership.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, but the Methodist Church for a very brief window at that time was open to and accepting of gay relationships. So we said, let’s go. And we met a gay minister at Washington Square United Methodist, and he said, “If I just drew the typical Catholic pre-cana...” So he pointed us to that. He felt that he didn’t want people to come here to do it just for malarky, he wanted to make sure that they were committed. So, we went through this, met with him a few times, and talked about our lives and our goals, then he agreed to marry us. So, 45 years later he was right.

**Allee Manning:** So, that recognition, and the making it an official commitment ceremony, was that coming from a place relating to your faith or the concerns that every couple has making their commitments?

**Michael Sabatino:** I think it was a little bit of both.

Robert Voorheis: Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** And we – Actually, a part of the ceremony was signing an actual living together contract that we had set up with an attorney, to get it some kind of legal basis. You know, because there were really no other options back in 1978.

**Allee Manning:** Right, yeah, I have heard so many stories about people really suffering terrible consequences –

**Michael Sabatino:** Mhm.

**Allee Manning:** Because of those limitations, and I am sure that you were seeing that yourself at that time –

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, I mean, especially with the AIDS crisis–

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, so many people got thrown out.

**Michael Sabatino:** – booming, and you know same sex partners, families would come in and just take over if things weren't legally documented, or you know joint leases, joint property ownership... I mean nightmare stories. You know, families coming in and just taking everything of the deceased or the opposite.

**Robert Voorheis:** It didn't matter if they were the deceased, the property of the living survivor...

**Michael Sabatino:** The living survivor or his joint owner.

**Robert Voorheis:** It didn't matter who was deceased, they could take everything.

**Michael Sabatino:** You know.

**Robert Voorheis:** Bank accounts, property, possessions, everything.

**Michael Sabatino:** So...

**Robert Voorheis:** It was disgraceful.

**Allee Manning:** True.

**Michael Sabatino:** And, you know, then about, I don't know, probably the mid 80's or the late 80's we went to a seminar that was put on by a gay financial group about the protections of same sex couples and what you could do legally to protect you and what you couldn't do to protect you.

**Robert Voorheis:** I think it was in the late, I think it was in the 90's actually.

**Michael Sabatino:** It could have been. Well, it was a financial...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** How do same sex couples protect their financial...

**Robert Voorheis:** Their assets.

**Michael Sabatino:** Assets.

**Robert Voorheis:** For each other, yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, we learned about some things that we could do, but we quickly realized that, you know, that we couldn't have the protections unless we had full marriage equality. And it was... We went to a gay pride event sometime in that time period and someone handed out a flier about marriage equality in New York, and we followed through on it and we both became very involved in Marriage Equality in New York. Practically one of the original members of that organization.

**Robert Vooheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** And we became very involved, and we started educating straight people, but our own community, because our own community was saying “Well, why do we wanna participate in a heterosexual normal institution?” I mean, you know, but we had to educate them on the fact that, you know, you have 1,138 federal rights, and almost I think...

**Robert Voorheis:** 13...

**Michael Sabatino:** 24 state rights. I mean most people get married, they have no idea what they get when they get married. So we had to educate our community, and even straight people, you know, we would go to a seminar and we would have people in the audience and I would ask, you know, even straight couples, “Can you name me five rights you get when you get married?”

**Robert Voorheis:** Very few.

**Michael Sabatino:** Not many could do that.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, I don’t know if anybody ever...

**Michael Sabatino:** Was able to do that...

**Robert Voorheis:** Was able to get in five rights you get by getting married.

**Allee Manning:** Just something kind of taken for granted...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yes.

**Michael Sabatino:** Taken for granted that just comes with it.

**Robert Voorheis:** It’s just a little piece of paper.

**Michael Sabatino:** And that's how you run into a problem, you don’t know that you have that right. You know?

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. We knew that we didn’t have any protections, anything that would protect us. We could have wills, we could have trusts, it didn’t matter. They could be broken by family members who were angry, and so many people had family’s that wanted nothing to do with this, you know, their queer son or daughter, you know, they wanted to rip everything away from them and that relationship. Which meant they could take everything. So that was the beginning of us being involved and understanding what we needed to achieve.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then women were like, well you know, they were saying it’s a patriarchal institution.

**Robert Voorheis:** And my response to that was, you know, once two women marry, the patriarchy ends. Because there is no patriarch with two women.

**Allee Manning:** Right.

**Robert Voorheis:** So, that is a reason for us to fight, to end the institution as it stands.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, I mean, we started out in 1998, maybe 1999. And, you know, we had all sorts of panel discussions, we had of course religious community fighting against us. What was that name... Maggie...

**Robert Voorheis:** Maggie Gallagher?

**Michael Sabatino:** Maggie Gallagher, who was supposed to be a good Catholic, you know she had an organization that was, you know, fighting against us and the Alliance Defense Fund. All these religious and right wing groups that felt that we shouldn't have the right to marry. We had the Bridge March.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, we started the Bridge March, we walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. Every year we would march across the bridge and carrying rainbow flags and wearing rainbow t-shirts, and marching across the bridge, you know, trying to bridge to equality.

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, we actually landed up using umbrellas.

Robert Voorheis: Yes.

**Michael Sabatino:** Every section had a different color umbrella, so as we were marching...

**Robert Voorheis:** It made a visual image of the rainbow flag going across the bridge. It was really wonderful to be a part of and...

**Robert Voorheis:** That's another thing I wanted to mention, though, that when we were fighting for the marriage rights and talking and giving seminars. So many, so many gay people said, "Well, I don't want to get married." And I said, "Don't tell me you don't want to get married until you can get married. Because if you can't get married it's meaningless. Once you have the right, you can say, "I don't want to get married.""

**Michael Sabatino:** And, you know, so we continued to educate and show up. And we became a part of the Pride Parade, we had a group that marched. We were involved in the New York State Pride Agenda, and then of course we started lobbying our legislatures, making trips to Albany, educating them, telling our story. When we decided to get married, we invited President Clinton, our New York senators, our local government officials...

**Robert Voorheis:** The Bushes were also invited.

**Michael Sabatino:** The Bushes were invited. We never got a response, of course.

**Robert Voorheis:** Our governor was invited, you said senator, our local senator was invited. All these people and not one sent an RSVP that they couldn't make it. How rude.

**Michael Sabatino:** Right.

**Allee Manning:** That's rude.

**Michael Sabatino:** However, shortly thereafter when we met with senator...

**Robert Voorheis:** Lobbying in Albany...

**Michael Sabatino:** ...met with Senator Nick Spano, who's the current mayor's brother. He is the one who got an invitation but I thought it was just like, you know.

**Robert Voorheis:** He didn't think we really wanted him there.

**Allee Manning:** But you did.

**Robert Voorheis:** We did.

**Michael Sabatino:** Of course, we did.

**Robert Voorheis:** And we told him.

**Michael Sabatino:** We told him that, and then we proceeded to explain some of the issues, and I at the time was a part owner of a company in North Carolina, with technologies. And I, as an owner, was trying to insure Robert on our health insurance, and of course in North Carolina that was not possible even though I was an owner. And Nick Spanson said, "Well, that can't be, that's not possible." So he had his chief of staff check on it and sure enough it was true. And that really changed his mind. He was the first, at the time he was a Republican, he was the first Republican senator to come out in support of marriage equality.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, and he credits us...

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah.

**Robert Voorheis:** He credits us for changing his mind.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah.

**Robert Voorheis:** And so, that was a big win for us and gave us encouragement to continue that fight, and we did.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then Robert...

**Robert Voorheis:** Every week I...

**Michael Sabatino:** He was the assistant lobbyist.

**Robert Voorheis:** I became a lobbyist for Marriage Equality New York, and every Monday I drove, in session, I drove up to Albany and knocked on doors of senators and assembly members, and did my bit, chatting with them.

**Allee Manning:** Roughly what years did that span?

**Robert Voorheis:** Well, it was shortly before the win so at that point we were in the 2000's.

**Michael Sabatino:** So the first vote was in 2009, I would say probably from 2005-2009.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** I mean, we didn't ultimately win in 2009

**Robert Voorheis:** I mean, I was still doing it because we didn't win that time so I was still doing it...

**Michael Sabatino:** Until 2011.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Allee Manning:** Mhm.

**Robert Voorheis:** So, I was still going in and knocking on doors, and...

**Michael Sabatino:** Educating them.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Allee Manning:** And that started, then, shortly after your own marriage in 2003. Not a very long honeymoon period before, yeah, maybe none. To go back a little bit, I'd love to hear a bit more about your Niagara Falls marriage in 2003. Which was when you became the first gay couple to have your foreign marriage officially recognized in New York State.

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, us getting married there, well, we got married in Niagara Falls because in June of 2003 Canada made it legal, and my mother was 84 at the time and we said, you know what, we knew things were happening in Massachusetts, but you know what, we don't know how long my mother was gonna live, we wanted her to be part of the ceremony so we decided. I was actually up there...

**Robert Voorheis:** We both were.

**Michael Sabatino:** That was in June.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** When the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, I was up there on a business trip and Robert had joined me. Because we were...

**Robert Voorheis:** But I had just flown back.

**Michael Sabatino:** And he had just flown back and they announced it, so I said, "Well, do you wanna come back, do you wanna get married?" And then we thought about it and we said we better plan because we probably wanna have more people but let's think about it. In October we had decided that we had set it up to go back in October and we had invited family and friends, about 50 close family and friends.

**Robert Voorheis:** So we all flew up to Canada, and we rented vans and we drove across the border. We flew to Buffalo and the drove across the border and into Canada into Niagara Falls and had the big party and got married.

**Allee Manning:** Tell me about the party.



**Michael Sabatino:** Well, we had a...we got married in the Minolta Tower, which overlooks Niagara Falls. And we had a reception in the catering hall in Minolta Tower that overlooks the falls. The actual catering hall was shared with a straight couple from the U.S...

**Robert Voorheis:** Which limited the number of people we could have because we were sharing the space.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, the interesting thing was that it was a military couple from the U.S. and so the interesting thing was that when they went back to the states their marriage was legally recognized. And when we went back to the states, our marriage was not recognized. So in 2006, county executive Andy Spano, no real relation to Michael. I was on the LGBT advisory board for the county, and we advised the county executive to issue an executive order recognizing marriages legally performed in other jurisdictions. So he did that and then three citizens from New Rochelle sued him because he was granting rights to couples that didn't really have legal marriages according to them, and that was funded by the Alliance Defense Fund. Who is now the Alliance Defense League, I think or something, which Chick-fil-A supports.

**Allee Manning:** Gotcha.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, Lambda Legal's defense which is, you know, the organization that fights for legal cases for LGBT issues, approached us when these people filed suit, and asked us if we would be interveners, intervenor plaintiffs, in that case, because being legally married in another jurisdiction, we were impacted—

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** —by their lawsuit and because they were trying to overturn in.

**Robert Voorheis:** Even though we weren't county employees, there were benefits that we were entitled to, mainly (really, the only) benefit was family park pass.

**Michael Sabatino:** Because, county executive Spano could only do it for Westchester employees, you know. So, as far as the full benefits, but we could be recognized as a married couple for other purposes.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, we... Lambda Legal represented us and Kramer Levin, which is a private law firm, did pro bono work, so we had about...

**Robert Voorheis:** And then ACLU, right?

**Michael Sabatino:** ACLU, right, New York ACLU. So there was maybe about a dozen lawyers that were fighting, that were working on our case.

**Robert Voorheis:** Working pro bono, working pro bono.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, we won on the lower court level, the ADF appealed that, it went to the appellate court in Brooklyn, we won on that level, and then it went to New York's

**Robert Voorheis:** High court.

**Michael Sabatino:** High court. So that started in 2006, and in 2009, November of 2009, we got a ruling from New York's high court that New York State had to recognize our marriage. So, our marriage was recognized here in New York, before it was legally legislated two years later.

**Robert Voorheis:** And because of that, we were one of the first couples to have our marriage recognized. There was another couple that was supposed to be interveners as well but they backed out because they were in the process of adoption and they were afraid it would affect their adoption. And understandably, that was important for them and so we became the only two plaintiffs.

**Michael Sabatino:** No, there was another couple in Monroe county.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, that's true.

**Michael Sabatino:** That was part of the case too.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, well, they combined two cases and went before the...

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, they were in a separate case but the court of appeals merged.

**Robert Voorheis:** But the ruling affected our title.

**Michael Sabatino:** The ruling came under us.

**Robert Voorheis:** But, so it was very, it was a very important win because it was the first win for the marriage for same sex couples, even though it was only recognition, many cases it had been tried before that, asking for marriage, and they were denied. So, our recognition was a big plus, that you could now go to a legal jurisdiction and come back to New York, and so we really were the first win for marriage, going toward marriage equality.

**Allee Manning:** How did that victory impact you, how did it feel for you?

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, it was very rewarding, you know. I mean we have some really funny stories, because when we got married it became the big news thing and we got thrown out the church and all that to backtrack a little bit.

**Robert Voorheis:** It became –

**Michael Sabatino:** The immediate frenzy was beyond belief.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, I mean we... it was constant. If 'gay' was mentioned, the local News 12 would come knock on our door, as they were literally down the street from our house and they would say, "Oh, somebody said gay, what do you think?"

**Michael Sabatino:** But it was interesting...

**Robert Voorheis:** But it was rewarding, but it was also... it was overwhelming at times.

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, especially when the first story initially broke, because all the media was trying to reach us for comments. When the story broke about us being thrown out of the church and we had just gotten married, and somehow the reporters had gotten our phone numbers, but my father was listed in the phonebook at the time (you know we, we used phone

books then) as Michael Sabatino, so they called our mother and our mother was innocently giving out our phone numbers.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. She gave out my work number, and she gave out Michael's cell number. And, so I went into work the morning, well, this was after we got married but it was for the recognition before the court.

**Michael Sabatino:** Oh, of course, this was when the story broke, you were working so...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, well...

**Michael Sabatino:** We were getting calls about getting married and then being thrown out of the church and then, you know. So, I was on a business trip and I was in Savannah and we were gonna take...because this was only two weeks after we got married... we were gonna take a few extra days sort of as a honeymoon in Savannah. So, he was gonna meet me down there, but he was getting calls at work.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, my boss at the time, I was working in an interior design firm. I got phone call and it was from some reporter. I had no idea how, at the time we had no idea how they had got the number. So he said, "I understand what happened, you got thrown out of the church and everything," and he wanted to interview me, and if we could set up a time for a live interview on air. So I said, "Yeah, I guess," and so while I am talking with him, in the background my boss comes in and says, "Line two is for you, it's CNN." And so I finished with him, got on that one and he came back and said, "Line one, it's for you, it's CBS." You know, just constantly getting phone call after phone call. It gets to be 12 noon, and I haven't been off the phone all morning, not getting any work done but interview after interview and my boss comes around the corner with a martini in his hand and I said, "Ugh, thank you."

**Allee Manning:** Well, it's great that you got that support at work.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then the next day, when I was flying down I said to him, "Please get the newspapers," because it was all over the newspapers: the New York Post, the Times, the whole thing.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, every newspaper had a story of us and a picture from archival material already, that was already out there. And, I was getting on the plane and I was running late and I couldn't get the papers and I said, "He's going to be so angry and I am too," because I wanted to see what the papers said. So I got on the plane and there were newspapers, so I said "Well, great, I will just grab them off the floor when people throw them away." But then I started noticing people looking at the paper and looking up at me and looking back at the paper. And I thought, "Uh oh." And I sat down next to a gentleman, I was in the window seat...

**Michael Sabatino:** I mean, not that he's not noticeable with his mustache and whatever...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, I had the mustache then as well, but a different configuration but still a big mustache. And I sat down, next to this guy and said, "Ugh, I'm so upset, I was running late and wanted to get the newspaper and I wasn't able to get any." And he said, "Well, I'm finished with this one if you want it." And he was reading the Times at that moment, and so I started looking through the paper, he gave me the Post or something, I don't know what. And, there we were, with a picture of us in it, and so I started looking. "Well, what does the Times have," so I kept looking out the corner of my eye at his paper, and he flipped the page and I said, "Ohhh there we are," to myself. And he looked at that and looked out of the corner of his eye at me and

kept looking back. And then he took the paper, folded it up and stuck it under his chair. I said, "Ugh," because I wanted it. But, I got up to go down the aisle to use the restroom, and he... as I am walking down, again I see people looking at the paper and looking up at me, and I thought, "That's really odd, they all have the newspapers and recognized my face."

**Michael Sabatino:** The days that everybody had newspapers and not reading...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, and not reading their phone, who had cell phones? Very few. But, I looked back over my shoulder and the guy I'm sitting next to, pulls the paper out from underneath and was pointing to my picture, and he had a friend across the aisle and he was going... pointing over his shoulder, and I'm down the aisle, so I just chuckled to myself and used the facilities, came back and sat down. He never did offer me the other paper, but he did leave them, so I went and did what I said, scrounge for newspapers. So, I ended up getting the Post, the Times, and the Daily News, so that was the important papers. We wanted the local papers.

**Michael Sabatino:** So...

**Robert Voorheis:** It was just very funny, and then, when we got to the hotel, we arranged through... what was the organization, the media, the organization with the training...

**Michael Sabatino:** Oh, GLAAD.

**Robert Voorheis:** We had already been through training while fighting for the marriage fight, and so they had said that...

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, we called them because we need to get some pointers on how to handle and how to respond to the media, and they said...

**Robert Voorheis:** They said, if we would allow them, they would funnel...

**Michael Sabatino:** they would screen...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, sorry, if anyone from the media called us, we could say, put them in contact with them, they would screen them, and then tell us.

**Michael Sabatino:** Because we didn't know if we were gonna have negative, you know, publications or stuff like that.

**Robert Voorheis:** So they asked us to be on Michelangelo Signorile's show (now he's on Progressive Radio. And so...

**Michael Sabatino:** So we did an interview with him while we were there...

**Robert Voorheis:** ...In Savannah.

**Michael Sabatino:** In Savannah.

**Robert Voorheis:** But it was just...this was just after the marriage before the court case, so we did backtrack.

**Michael Sabatino:** Right, and then R&N did a very extensive...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** I have it, it's on video tape though. R&N did a very extensive interview with us, when we came back from Savannah. I mean, most of it was supportive, we got letters, we got mass cards congratulating us on our wedding.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** We got offers from different church choirs in the tristate area, "Please come and join us." The Gay Men's Chorus –

**Robert Voorheis:** They asked us to become members.

**Michael Sabatino:** – asked us to become members of Gay Men's Chorus. So, I mean it was kind of... Most of those letters are now in the Smithsonian.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** All of our archive material, and I kept multiple copies, so a lot of the stuff is going to come to this library as well. Newspaper articles, t-shirts, buttons, correspondences surrounding, you know, when we got kicked out of the church. All that stuff was donated to the Smithsonian, and we were in an exhibit for the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, in the American History Museum. So, and now, both of us are jumping ahead, both of us are on the government relations board committee, for the new LGBT museum that will be built behind the New York Historical Society in Manhattan.

**Allee Manning:** Wow.

**Michael Sabatino:** And we have donated copies of what we have donated, most of what we have donated to the Smithsonian, to that museum. So, you know, one of the side stories that's always very important is that after we got married and we were still very involved in marriage equality.

Edie Windsor came to one of our meetings. Now, Edie Windsor was with her partner for 42 years, her partner Thea, who had multiple sclerosis and was declining. So she came to a meeting, and sat next to me, and at the time I was doing a lot of blogging. I was doing... I forget what it was, Marriage Equality News I think, and I was blogging any stories that came in. So she knew me from watching the blog when I introduced myself. And she said, "Oh, you're Michael Sabatino aren't you, I look at your blog all the time." And she was really relaying the fact that she needs to go to Canada to get married, but Thea was really confined to a wheelchair. So we had a friend that was in the marriage equality movement, Brandon Fay, who had started this civil marriage trial to try and equate it with the civil marriage from the black community in the 1800's. And he was arranging bringing people to Canada to get married. So we hooked Edie up with him, and they brought Edie and Thea up by plane and they were married at the airport, you know, several weeks later.

**Robert Voorheis:** And Thea was confined to a motorized wheelchair at that point so they had a whole group of people that were coming up with them, and their jobs were to disassemble this wheelchair to get it on the plane...

**Michael Sabatino:** And then to bring it back...

**Robert Voorheis:** And then to assemble it once they got there. And, you know, they were friends of Edie and Thea, but they had this whole thing worked out so that they would get up there, get her in the wheelchair, get her married, and then have a brief reception, and then they had to get back on the plane and head back.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, now Edie gets married, Thea dies I guess a couple of years later, and the federal government...

**Robert Voorheis:** And the state government.

**Michael Sabatino:** And the state government because now, we aren't even up to my case yet. Says that Edie has to pay 450... what was it...

**Robert Voorheis:** Well, it was a total of...

**Michael Sabatino:** 500,000 dollars, in state taxes, because their marriage was not legally recognized. So according to the state and federal government, they were legal strangers even though they owned property together. So, Edie had to pay state taxes on top of property that she owned, because Thea was a joint owner. It was very complex.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** So...

**Robert Voorheis:** A lot of money.

**Michael Sabatino:** A lot of money.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, ACLU. I don't think Lambda Legal took the case.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, that was a bizarre thing.

**Michael Sabatino:** We had recommended Edie to go to Lambda Legal

**Robert Voorheis:** Because we had in our case.

**Michael Sabatino:** And they didn't think it was the right timing, because they had a feeling that this case would go to the Supreme Court. And they felt that it wasn't really right, but ACLU took it on...

**Robert Voorheis:** The funny thing was that we had gone to Robbie Kaplan, to ask her to take our case, and ours was a state case. And she said, "No, I don't think the timing is right."

**Michael Sabatino:** But then she took...

**Robert Voorheis:** But then Lambda Legal took our case and Robbie took Edie's case and won.

**Michael Sabatino:** So...

**Robert Voorheis:** So, it was just all these crossovers.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, what happened was she gets...You know, she's suing the federal government, I mean, her case wins versus the US. Because she got married in Canada and, you know, she was legally married so, in the eyes of Canada, so what happened was our case had been litigated, while her case was going on, so our case determined that her marriage was legally recognized in the state, now not in the US yet. So our case is part of her Supreme Court case, because we set the precedent, so our case is referenced in there. And then her case ultimately went to the Supreme Court and the part where it said that the U.S. does not have to recognize same sex marriages, that one part of DOMA, was overturned by the Supreme Court. It didn't allow legal marriages to be performed, it just meant anyone legally married in a jurisdiction other than the US, their marriages had to be recognized, and it overturned that. So she won her case and...

**Robert Voorheis:** Well, it was also within the states.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yes, it was also within the states.

**Robert Voorheis:** If you were married within a legal jurisdiction...

**Michael Sabatino:** In the state of Massachusetts or whatever, because by then Massachusetts had performed legal marriages. So, our case is in that Supreme Court case, and then ultimately, Jim Obergefell whose husband had ALS. He sued for full marriage rights, he was one of eight plaintiffs that sued the U.S. to recognize same sex marriages, and that case ultimately is the one that allowed same sex marriages to come to the U.S. legally.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah, and how...

**Michael Sabatino:** We knew Edie very well, we became very good friends.

**Robert Voorheis:** She was such a sweetheart.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, we miss her dearly.

**Robert Voorheis:** We adored her, and it's a mutual feeling, because she adored us too because we helped pave the way for her.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah, so have you met most of your friends and people that you are in community with through your work and advocacy and activism?

**Michael Sabatino:** Yes.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, Cathy Marino-Thomas was co-executive director of Marriage Equality with Robert, and she...

**Robert Voorheis:** I became the citizen lobbyist and was no longer the ED or co-ED.

**Michael Sabatino:** Right.

**Robert Voorheis:** ...and then we formed Marriage Equality USA and I sat on the boards, as did Cathy, and we had an executive director... and independent executive director.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then we had chapters all over the U.S.

**Robert Voorheis:** At one point we had 50,000 people across the country under the Marriage Equality banner and they were fighting in their own states and we record maybe getting them supplies and who to meet and where the position were in that particular state, it was all across the country that we were fighting for marriage equality.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, then that brings us to the New York case we lost in 2009, the legislation I should say. We lost the vote in 2009, so it went to the next session which brought us to 2011 and governor Coumo was forming a Coalition of all the marriage equality organizations and legal teams he was determined to get this passed. So we were sitting in the chamber for the four days of waiting for that vote up in Albany. And, we were staying with a friend, I think probably if you read the book, there is a chapter in there where I had been in sales and was traveling all the time. We have several rings, but the commitment ring.

**Robert Voorheis:** That's the original from 1978.

**Michael Sabatino:** 79.

**Robert Voorheis:** 79, yeah, right.

**Michael Sabatino:** I don't know, one January, it's a very cold day. And I look down and the ring is gone. No idea where this ring went and I call him up did a fall out. And I was getting into the car, you know whatever.

**Robert Voorheis:** And this was an early morning flight, so I went out in the dark with a flashlight and I'm looking through the street and I didn't see the ring anywhere so I just told him it's not here. So we knew it was gone.

**Michael Sabatino:** So fast forward, I don't know, maybe three years later. We are up in Albany and I have my knapsack with me. The jar that has the vitamins in it spills out into my knapsack and I reach in and on my index finger comes up this ring. So whether it's been there for three years, I don't know, whether it fell off when I was going to reach for my tickets, I don't know, My mother had since passed and she sent it from up above, I have no idea. But there is the ring.

**Robert Voorheis:** And there is the ring totally on his finger, and I screamed. We were at his friend's house and I screamed and I said, "We won, I know we won!"

**Michael Sabatino:** Because we were waiting for the vote for the next day...



**Robert Voorheis:** Our friends run down the hall and yell “What’s wrong? What’s wrong? What’s wrong?” And Michael held up his finger, and I said, “That’s his wedding band, we won.”

**Michael Sabatino:** And sure enough, the vote the next day was positive, so I mean it was just one of those weird things, you know?

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. And then, going to Edie’s case, another thing with Edie’s case was, the night before she went before the Supreme Court, she invited us to come over to her hotel and to all have a drink.

**Michael Sabatino:** And this was in Washington.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, so she said, “Let’s all have a drink, I have limited time because I have to get my hair done, blah blah blah blah.” And you know...

**Michael Sabatino:** Mind you, she is 80 something years old...

**Robert Voorheis:** But, looks were important to her, she was always impeccably dressed and always beautiful. But, she wanted to have some time with us. So we went over to the hotel, her nephew was there, and other family members, and Cathy Marino-Thomas, her wife...

**Michael Sabatino:** Her daughter.

**Robert Voorheis:** And her daughter, and the two of us and we were sitting there having a drink or ordering drinks, and the... it’s a big fancy hotel so they bring a bottle over so you see the bottle before they pour a glass. So her nephew, they show the bottle to him...

**Michael Sabatino:** I don’t know if he had ordered it that way...

**Robert Voorheis:** No, he had ordered the glass of red wine.

**Michael Sabatino:** Or was it white wine...

**Robert Voorheis:** I don’t know, I don’t remember. So they showed him the bottle and he said, “Leave it.” And he showed us the bottle. It was Thea’s Vineyard. Thea was Edie’s first wife. And I just said, “We won.”

**Michael Sabatino:** It was like the signs were coming...

**Robert Voorheis:** I knew we had won.

**Michael Sabatino:** So...

**Robert Voorheis:** And he kept the bottle, he paid for the bottle and kept it.

**Allee Manning:** Maybe that will be at the Smithsonian too, right?

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah.

**Allee Manning:** I love those stories, and the wedding ring or the commitment ceremony one.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yea. It was just so amazing. It was gone, he had lost it.

**Michael Sabatino:** Oh, yeah. I had given up that I was ever going to find it.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, and there it was on his finger, it came up on his finger.

**Michael Sabatino:** I mean, it literally came up on my finger. It was like the weirdest thing. I mean, I can't tell you how many times in three years that my hand was in and out of the knapsack, and you know, nothing ever was found or happened.

**Robert Voorheis:** But, there it was.

**Allee Manning:** Because you mentioned it, can I ask about how you have several different rings? I noticed that.

**Michael Sabatino:** So, this is the Canadian wedding ring.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** These were rings that were given to us by a jeweler who was making jewelry for same sex couples, and we were one of four couples that were launching the jewelry line, and we were given these rings for participating.

**Robert Voorheis:** And we had a mock wedding in New York at Saint Marks...

**Michael Sabatino:** Kicking off this jewelry line...

**Robert Voorheis:** But it was a meaningless wedding because it wasn't recognized in the US.

**Michael Sabatino:** What was the name of the jewelry company?

**Robert Voorheis:** Love&Pride

**Michael Sabatino:** Love&Pride

**Robert Voorheis:** So, we have just always worn them since then. And, you know, it's a band with a symbol on it...

**Michael Sabatino:** The two men's symbol.

**Allee Manning:** Nice.

**Robert Voorheis:** And so, we have always just worn the assortment of rings, our friends always joke, "You have a few more fingers, you can get married more."

**Michael Sabatino:** And that was the other thing, when we went around our case and marriage became legal here in New York, people said, "Oh, are you gonna get married here in New York now?" No, because it kind of defeats the purpose of our lawsuit. You know, our marriage is legally recognized so why should we do it again? The lawyer said, "It's only gonna confuse things, there's no reason." And certain states you can get married multiple times, other states you can't. I think New York is one where you can't get married multiple times.

**Robert Voorheis:** No, New York, we thought New York couldn't but even though you were marrying the same person it was considered bigamy. But there are states where you can only have one marriage license.

**Michael Sabatino:** Right.

**Robert Voorheis:** And Canada's that way too, because if you were divorced you had to prove that you were divorced before you could marry again in Canada. But, for us we thought about it, but our lawyer said, "No, your case proved that you don't need a US marriage license, so don't."

**Michael Sabatino:** Didn't make any sense.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah.

**Michael Sabatino:** I didn't want to have to go through another ceremony after we had done the domestic partnership...

**Robert Voorheis:** We still had the 50th to go.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then the renewing of the vows.

**Allee Manning:** Was that the plan for 50?

**Michael Sabatino:** I would assume.

**Allee Manning:** Cool.

**Robert Voorheis:** I think 50 years is... that's a lot.

**Michael Sabatino:** It's only five years away.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah. Well, I'm glad that you got to have the ceremony that you wanted. Your mother has come up quite a few times, you mentioned her as being one of the reasons you wanted to have that ceremony when you did. Can you tell me a bit more about your family life and your close family community, is that how you ended up here in Yonkers from the city?

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, I was born and raised in the Bronx. I am an only child and, you know, I went to all Catholic Schools growing up. I worked at Revlon Healthcare In Tuckahoe New York. I'm actually a medical technologist by profession, I worked in a hospital. I taught at Elizabeth Seton College, a two year program for medical laboratory technicians. And then I went into pharmaceutical research. I used to do all the blood work on animal models that were having new drugs tested, you know, rats and mice and rabbits and stuff like that. And then I went into sales, for most of my career I sold robotic laboratory instruments. But, since I worked up here in Tuckahoe, we were looking to buy our first home, so we bought a co-op apartment In the building that we actually moved back into last year. So that's what brought us up to Yonkers. And, you know, my family was pretty supportive, my mother was always supportive, my father had a little trouble with it for a while but then he soon was fine. He used to talk to Robert more than he would talk to me.

**Robert Voorheis:** After we met, for three years, you know, we would go to his mom and dad's almost every Sunday for Sunday dinners. And for three years, the four of us sat at this table, and his dad would talk to Michael and to Michael's mom, Ray, and would barely recognize that I was there. And then all of a sudden after those three years, he would talk to me, to Ray, and barely talk to Michael. And whenever a decision was needed to be made, he said, "Well you better talk to Robert." You know, always wanted to make sure that we were covered, and it was so funny to realize all of a sudden that, even though we were already used to it, that that dynamic has all changed.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then my dad eventually got blind from glaucoma, and had Alzheimers and you know, when we had those Sunday dinners he would say, who are those 2 guys that come over here all the time, what's their names? And, you know...

**Robert Voorheis:** It was kind of heart wrenching.

**Michael Sabatino:** But, Robert's story is even more interesting than mine, so.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah, you're not from this area at all.

**Robert Voorheis:** No, not at all. I grew up in Alabama, and from the age of five I knew I was different, but I didn't know what that difference was. But, I knew there was something different about me, and it wasn't until 1969, TIME did a report on Stonewall, and I read that report, and

realized, that's who I was. I had no idea until then, but that is what made me realize, and accept who I was. And, it was not easy coming out in the south, Evangelical south. But, I did and I had gone through the whole premonitions of getting engaged to a woman, and we were having a relationship and...

**Michael Sabatino:** At 17, that was late for...

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, but then I realized that I was gay, I was trying to hide it and trying to, you know, be straight. And I... religion has always played a part of my life, I wouldn't say always important but it was a part of my life. And my uncle was a minister, who actually also lived not far from us, he is the one I learnt my religious teachings from. And so I prayed...I prayed that the gay would go away. That's what I wanted, for it to go away, so I was normal. And then all of the sudden I realized, I am normal, and accepting that is what made the gay go away, because I am who I am, I am who God made me. So, that stigma, that I was different, went away.

**Michael Sabatino:** And then you got the hell out of there.

**Robert Voorheis:** Then I realized, yes, I had to leave the south because there was no place for a gay boy to be.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah, I mean looking back now, is your life what you thought it would be back then?

**Robert Voorheis:** Nothing, nothing like I thought it would be. I have gone back to visit my family, actually this past summer, and realized, my life would be so very different had I not discovered who I was and accepted who I was and moved away. And I am so grateful for those changes in my life and for the ability for me to move on and to become who I became.

**Michael Sabatino:** And I had some struggles, I was...I was in...I had a lot of depression and anxiety, I was hospitalized twice as a teenager, and I was suicidal. You know, I was in a Catholic school, you know, all that guilt stuff. I came out very late, after high school in my 20's but I had a real, real difficult struggle. And, you know, once I accepted who I was, then things started to change. I mean, I never had any intention of getting into public life, you know, that was not my career. Wish I had gotten into it earlier but we would not have succeeded because times were different. But, you know, even here in Yonkers they said that a gay candidate would never win, an openly gay candidate would never win. But I'm sure we have had gay...

**Robert Voorheis:** Of course we have.

**Michael Sabatino:** ...elected officials, but not openly. But, there were people out there in my own party against me winning that city counsel. But as I say, I won, they lost.

**Allee Manning:** But they kind of won because now you get to serve them.

**Michael Sabatino:** Totally, yeah. It's been a positive experience.

**Robert Voorheis:** Totally positive, I mean everything about it has been positive.

**Michael Sabatino:** It's made a change in the city, you know, the mayor has an LGBT advisory board he was Liaison, I'm now Liaison.

**Robert Voorheis:** I'm on the founders of Yonkers Pride. So, it has all been a positive experience.

**Michael Sabatino:** You know, I mean...

**Robert Voorheis:** The library is supportive of Yonkers Pride and everything.

**Michael Sabatino:** Union people and stuff kind of embraced us, it was like...

**Robert Voorheis:** Well, at Michael's first inauguration which was the mayor's first inauguration, we debated whether we were gonna get up and dance together because, you know, Michael said, "I am just starting to win over these very conservative electives and union members. I don't know what kind of message that would make them uncomfortable or whatever." So I said, "Well, I will be disappointed if we don't dance," because I love to dance. "But, I understand." And the music is playing and everyone is up and dancing, and he comes over and he says, "Come on." So we got up and danced, and pretty soon, firemen were dancing with us. It was just, it was so much fun. You know, they embraced it, and embraced us as, you know, at that point we were together 35 years, something like that and it was just like...

**Michael Sabatino:** And the mayor often tells a story, you know, the mayor had changed parties and became a democrat and was supportive of marriage equality because we met with him many times. And his father was having a fit. His father was the county clerk at one point, and he's like, "I'm not gonna vote for you if you vote for that marriage thing again, blah blah blah." You know. "They have them on TV with those two guys kissin and blah blah blah."

**Robert Sabatino:** The two guys were us.

**Michael Sabatino:** But the mayor tells a story all the time. So now, fast forward now we go to a lot of these rubber chicken dinners, with all the events and the dancing and before you know it we, I'm always respectful to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Spano, so at one point...

**Robert Voorheis:** We always say hello.

**Michael Sabatino:** And Mr. Spano says, "Are you two gonna dance tonight?" "Well, I hope you two are gonna dance tonight..." He says, "My father learnt to love you guys and you totally changed his attitude about this."

**Allee Manning:** That's incredible

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah. "So my father loves you guys." But, you know, just to prove you gotta show it as a person.

**Robert Voorheis:** It's so much harder to discriminate against somebody if you know somebody. And I think that's what us being out there, whether we wanted to be out there or not, and at the beginning it really was distressing and overwhelming. But, because we were out there, it gave people the strength to be who they were and gave the people who were opposing us, helped them to realize that we are just regular guys.

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, you know, when I was running for office there were all these people saying, well, I have a gay agenda. A gay agenda: taxes, lights, funding, budget. You know, I used to say, "Well, what do you think I am going to do? Fill potholes with rainbows?" And some people said, "Well, you know that might be nice." You know, what's this gay agenda stuff, you know?

**Robert Voorheis:** On a local level, there is no gay agenda.

**Michael Sabatino:** Really, there is nothing we can oppose.

**Robert Voorheis:** But, what it did do is make a sea change of difference.

**Michael Sabatino:** We rated 100% on the Human Rights Campaign for the last 8 or 9 years.

**Robert Voorheis:** I think as a gay friendly city.

**Michael Sabatino:** A gay friendly city. We were originally rated as a near 70%, now we are at like a 100%.

**Robert Voorheis:** And, because every year they would come out, they would raise the bar, and the mayor would meet that bar.

**Michael Sabatino:** I would go and say this is what we have to change in the personnel laws, and he's all like okay, let's get this done, let's get that done.

**Allee Manning:** So, looking forward ahead next generation, younger people continuing to make positive changes and make sure this progress keeps up. What advice do you have to give?

**Michael Sabatino:** They have to learn their history.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yes.

**Michael Sabatino:** They have to learn their history. The biggest fear I have is the young people have no clue as to how they got their rights, and given the climate that we are in right now, a lot of these rights are being overturned.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. When we started Yonkers Pride, I went to one of our events and I was talking about our rights and everything. And I said, “We have to be vigilant, we have to constantly talk to our politicians, because we could lose our marriage rights.” And one of the guys said, “Oh that will never happen.” And Roe V. Wade was overturned, and that’s something that would never happen.

**Michael Sabatino:** Some of these younger people don’t even know Stonewall.

**Robert Voorheis:** No, they don’t. “What’s Stonewall?” I actually went during the marriage equality struggle... We would go door to door in neighborhoods. I took a college student with me and we knocked on door to door and talked about Marriage Equality to democrats but total strangers, trying to sway them to make sure they were in support of it. And I was talking to this young woman and this college student and I expressed to her that I grew up in segregated schools in Alabama and she said, “Really? I had read about it but I didn't really believe that it existed.” This is not gay history, this is Black history. And she, a college educated woman, didn't believe it really happened. And that was frightening to me. And the same thing for gay people not believing. I mean, I love to see young gay couples walking down the street holding hands, it means so much to me to see that. But, I want them to know, how they got that right to walk down the street.

**Allee Manning:** Woah, I'm getting emotional.

**Michael Sabatino:** It always gets a little emotional.

**Robert Voorheis:** But that's what I want them to understand is that they can hold their hands because of the fight that we went through.

**Michael Sabatino:** And, you know, some of the people that shoulders we stand on.

**Robert Voorheis:** We would not be where we were if it wasn’t for the Civil Rights movement, and Black history, because we learned from them, and we couldn’t be where we are.

**Michael Sabatino:** And now because of all the stuff, “don’t say gay,” I mean...

**Robert Voorheis:** It’s disgraceful.

**Michael Sabatino:** I mean, the banning of books, and all that, you know.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. And that’s one thing I wanted to bring back to this is that I knew I was gay at five, but I didn’t know what gay was. And they said, “Oh, well we can’t mention that gay at that age, it’s too young.” It is not too young. You don’t have to talk about it overtly, and there is nothing sexual involved, because there was nothing sexual at age five for me, I just knew I was different, but if I had known that it was just a normal way of living, the angst and anxiety and the grief and the self loathing, that I went through would not have happened. And that is why it is very important to teach children at a young age to accept everybody.



**Allee Manning:** Well, I don't have any more questions.

**Michael Sabatino:** I think we have pretty much covered it.

**Allee Manning:** Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we haven't gotten to yet?

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, there was one thing that we used to volunteer at Center Lane, which is the LGBT youth support organization in Westchester. We used to have a location here in Yonkers as well, but with COVID...

**Robert Voorheis:** Everything changed with COVID.

**Michael Sabatino:** Everything changed so, they are actually doing stuff online now, and they are bringing people from outside New York, and people are on Zoom so. But still, it misses a lot without being in person. But we acted as mentors, which is another thing that we did.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah. And one of the things that one of the kids said at one of these meetings. This was after we were in the marriage rights struggle, and they were aware, because we talked about it to the kids and when we won one of the kids said, "Well, I always knew I wanted to marry another boy one day, and now I know I can."

**Allee Manning:** That's really beautiful. Well, I'd be remiss to not thank you, not just for this interview but for all that you've done. You know, when I think about whose shoulders I stand on, it's you.

**Michael Sabatino:** And all we wanted to do was get married.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, we didn't set out to be role models and game changers, we just wanted to fight for our rights.

**Allee Manning:** I think that's what's so important about LGBTQ history and educating people, realizing these aren't folk tales, folk heroes, these are real people, everyday people. And in this case one is living right there in your community, you know, throwing Yonkers Pride, that may be where you're at, in celebrating, but you really ought to know who's behind this, so thank you so deeply for the work that you have done. I am so grateful.

**Michael Sabatino:** Yeah, you know, we just hope that the generations behind us learn their history.

**Robert Voorheis:** Yeah, I'm really concerned about what's going on in the states, now they are passing anti-drag queen laws, and drag queens have been here since Shakespeare, and probably before. And now all of a sudden, you can't dress in drag, you can't earn a living, that's what

they're telling people, this is how they earn living and now they can't do it, it's against the law. It's disgraceful.

**Allee Manning:** Yeah. Well, I know you two aren't done fighting,

**Michael Sabatino:** Well, we will be fighting until the day we die, I'm sure.

**Robert Voorheis:** But, it's funny the impact we have made, we don't really realize what we have done. I have had people come up to me, you know, one day I was in the parking lot of the grocery store and this woman walked up to me with her hands out like this, and I go, "Oh, what does she want?" And she goes, "Oh, I just need to hug you, I wanna thank you." I had no idea who she was, and after that, I was so moved because I get emotional at everything. I went back to the car and texted Michael and sent... Now I'm sitting here crying. I couldn't believe that she would do that. We've had people do it at the fourth of July parade.

**Michael Sabatino:** We were in Miami and some guy recognized us and asked, are you Robert and Michael? And we used to joke with News12, because News12 used to call us all the time, and I said, "You know, we are not the only gay couple here in Westchester." "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but everybody knows you and everybody knows your story and they wanna see the next chapter."

**Robert Voorheis:** And we had Halloween, and I was giving out candy, and this twelve year old year opened the door and she said, "Oh my god that's the News12 guy!" She didn't remember why I was on News12, she didn't remember why I was on News12 but she recognized me.

**Allee Manning:** Well, small county, right.

**Michael Sabatino:** And we're glad, I'm glad we sensed to save all the newspaper clippings. And all the memorabilia. And that's why we donated, you know, god forbid someone comes into the house, sees a pile of newspapers and just throws it away. We know what we did but we're still in the process of putting it together, another set for the library here. I think I have one more left but... Then of course we have the book that we're a part of and the documentary that was fun, the documentary. You know, interesting enough we are meeting the director tonight, she is coming in from Texas for another reason. They put out this call for couples and for why they were going to the march on Washington. This was the March on Washington in...The last March on Washington. So we put our names in, and we got chosen as one of the five families as to be part of the movie, because we got thrown out of the church and we had our case that we can see here because we got bit from the library so you know that was exciting because they did a whole story on the church and our case.

**Allee Manning:** You have a really important story to tell. I'm glad you're telling it.

**Robert Voorheis:** And I'll just add, it was never planned, it just happened. But we are glad it happened. It had to be somebody and it just happens to be us.

**Allee Manning:** That's a very humble way to approach this. Alright. That's all, thank you.