

00:02
I'm Tamara Sheffield. I am currently a Salisbury City Council member.
00:06
I didn't grow up in Salisbury, but no place has ever felt more like home to me.
00:11
I always lived in the South. I'm originally from Tennessee. I grew up in a time where
00:16
you saw women doing things but they necessarily weren't your leaders. Once I learned more about
00:21
Salisbury I realized we had such a strong fabric of female leaders that have come through here.
00:27
I'd say that kind of motivated me to maybe pay more attention to my role as a female leader.
00:34
As I got older I moved to Salisbury. You start identifying what you think you can share with
00:41
people and what you can't. I identify as gay and so uh having a daunting task of overcoming
00:49
female in the South, throw gay in the mix and it's not always something that you maybe tell
00:56
your story about. It's very easy to hide in plain sight versus like people of color
01:01
so it is a different perspective sometime where you can kind of hide behind that.
01:06
Started I guess being an activist, 11 or 12 years ago decided it was time. You know it's
01:14
as cliché as it can be but that whole saying "if not me, who?" because uh if not you somebody's
01:20
gonna have to do it for you and at some point in time you have to decide it's your turn.
01:25
So, started with a small group of friends and and started Salisbury Pride. So, the first LGBTQ+
01:33
organization in the city and somehow through all that we had our first Salisbury Gay Pride
01:39
Festival in Downtown Salisbury in 2010. And no, the pavement didn't jump up and swallow us whole.
01:48
It made people feel welcome. I think it did a lot to help show the diversity of the city. You know,
01:55
it was great to see families there and it had its challenges that first year.
02:00
We're about to have our tenth one. So most organizations don't stay around for a decade.
02:05
Somewhere along that path of getting more involved with the city,
02:09
I began to look toward public office. That was a terrifying endeavor. Maybe not from the female
02:17
perspective but maybe from the gay perspective. We had had, like I said before, a long history of
02:22
strong female leaders that started with Margaret Klutz. Then it's just followed suit by several
02:28
other strong female leaders after that and there's no way you can hide in plain sight on
02:34
this. When it's out there people know who you are. People know who you love. So you had to make that
02:39
decision as a family. A lot of people sometimes think, now that doesn't really happen. But yeah
02:43
it does. I had to worry about you know, well you know, was I going to get physically harmed,
02:49
verbally attacked? What, was my family, was my wife and my dog's gonna get poisoned? Was my
02:54
house going to get set on fire? I, we, really had to sit down and talk about what is the personal
03:00
impact of this endeavor? Is it worth doing it? I mean, we decided that the risk was worth it.
03:06
I felt like I could represent a voice that needed to be at that table for the city.
03:10
So 2015 I got dangerously close. I missed office for like 124 votes I think. Um but my commitment
03:18
to my family commitment and the commitment to people who supported me was I would do this twice.
03:24
so I ran again in 2017 and it was successful. I got fortunate enough to be elected as a member of
03:31
Salisbury City Council. With that came a lot of publicity. I don't know what the word was
03:37

but I was the first openly candidate elected in this county. Now openly is the key word there.
03:43
People are like, what does that mean? Well, I was out when I ran. I had people run before.
03:49
It was their choice to tell you. But making that choice, as a candidate I had to run out.
03:54
So that got some, to me, unnecessary attention because that wasn't what the job's about. It's
04:00
just about being able to have that voice at the table. We have our first African-American
04:06
Mayor. You have your first gay person. You have your first Jewish person. You have, for the first
04:11
time, three females were on a board of five. So that particular swearing-in ceremony was
04:18
historic in a way but had nothing to do with the job. A little bit but, I guess it does
04:23
have to do with the job because you should have the perspective of the people that live here.
04:28
During this was a huge push in the country for people to be able to have marriage equality.
04:36
That was very very important. We were doing work here at home.
04:41
But how do you reach out past that? So in this random series of events,
04:47
I entered a national wedding contest called "My Big Gay Illegal Wedding."
04:53
We were allowed to pay taxes but we weren't allowed to have the same rights and benefits. So
04:59
we entered this contest at a time when marriage was not legal in the country or North Carolina.
05:05
We won that. We got legally married in New York and then in that following October, North Carolina
05:13
passed marriage equality and shortly- on June 26 the following year- marriage equality for
05:19
the country was passed. So it's funny when you think about all the work you did for something
05:23
but then I read last week that we had somebody introduce a bill in our state Senate to try to
05:28
null and void that national law. Having a seat at the table and always having to
05:34
be a leader regardless of what that is. There's someone who always wants to
05:40
take it away or and it's you know, it's not pie we're not going to run out of it.
05:46
Equal rights are equal rights and just because I got them didn't mean you lost yours. And how you
05:51
pick those battles and who you do represent. Because every time I talk to a young kid
05:56
at Pride or wherever, campus meetings- I've been fortunate to do campus meetings
06:01
-you know if you're 16 and it's taken you 10 years and you've known. And it's taken you 10 years just
06:06
tell somebody. You tell your parents and you know they have a hard time at first. Well, be patient.
06:12
Because they need a coming out time too. You took 10 years to figure it out. Give them a breather
06:19
to figure it out and hopefully they'll get it. They love you,
06:23
Um, some don't. But give them that time. Give them the same respect to come out,
06:30
and by the way, you never quit coming out. It's always something you have to
06:34
do. Every new employer. Every new person you meet. Every time you do an interview.
06:40
You always have to keep coming out. But once you do it gets easier and people need to know that.
06:46
People are just like everybody else. Everybody's got a story. I guess that's MY story.
06:55
Here's My sStory is funded in part by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation. To share your story,
07:01
please contact Rowan-Cabarrus Community College by emailing heresmystory@rccc.edu

