

we had transgender police officers in that video. We have gay cops, lesbian cops, and transgender cops all together in the Portland Police Bureau “It Gets Better” video. It was a marker of improvement.

JO: If you could be any public official, anywhere, who would it be, and why?

SA: (Laughs) I’ve never been asked that question! I would say a member of the U.S. Supreme Court; probably still one of the most powerful yet legally secretive bodies in the world, definitely in the United States. Part of their esprit de corps is to be very stone-faced. But I’d like to know what is going on. I find it intriguing. And I’d want to be there when gay marriage is before them, so I could do my best to convince the majority that marriage for all — no kidding, no fooling — is what is called for by the Constitution, regardless whether the framers wrote it out explicitly. Because we’re either all created equal here in America, or we’re not.

JO: Who’s the most impressive person you’ve ever personally met?

SA: Hmmm ... I am spoiled, because I’ve met a lot of impressive people. How do I narrow it down to one? Excluding family?

JO: Yes, public figures.

SA: I’m comparing and contrasting all the people I’ve met. And, no one has impressed me more as a public official than Vera Katz. And to make sure this is an honest answer, I am comparing her to Bill Clinton, comparing her to Barack Obama, comparing her to all the amazing, talented international leaders I’ve had the good fortune to meet. And, I would still say the most amazing public official I’ve ever met is former Portland Mayor Vera Katz, who I had the great honor to work for.

Vera Katz had to overcome, on a personal level, escaping the Holocaust in a family that had previously escaped the Russian Revolution, and then come to live as immigrants in Brooklyn. She came through all that with a passion for public service. For decades she was a volunteer, a neighborhood leader, a volunteer lobbyist for farm workers. And later, when her son was older, she ran for the State Legislature. Here is a woman who by all laws of averages shouldn’t have, couldn’t have, there’s no way she could have possibly become the first woman Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives, or Mayor of the City of Portland. So she is an amazing person who, by the way she’s led her life and the way she’s governed as a public official, is the single the most impressive official I have ever met. And I’ve met some of the best of the world’s best.

JO: Have you met the Dalai Lama?

SA: Yes, I have! What I liked about the Dalai Lama was that ... well, he’s got a great sense of humor. I’m kind of a smartass, and ... you could never say that about the Dalai Lama ... but he’s very ... mirthful (laughter) ... and you don’t expect that. When you meet folks in person after seeing them being portrayed in the media, you notice the difference right away. Public figures have a public image the media have often set up. So when you meet them, sometimes it’s the same, and sometimes it’s just very different. The Dalai Lama is very approachable, very down to earth, with this sort of “twinkle in the eyes” humor.

He was really struck by our Royal Rosarians! He absolutely loved them! The idea that a city would have official greeters, volunteer greeters ... he’d never seen that before, and he just remarked what a wonderful statement a

bout a city that would have official greeters, who are there to do nothing

but make people feel welcome.

JO: What would you tell a young LGBTQ person who said they want to get involved in politics?

SA: Do it, absolutely!

JO: How?

SA: Anything from volunteering with your local political party, or with one of the many great advocacy groups in Portland. You can go online and take free courses in public management and political science, but there’s so much in being a public servant or political activist that you can only learn by getting out there and doing it. So volunteer. Join your neighborhood association. Portland has a great neighborhood and business association network. There are all kinds of opportunities in our city based on how much time you have and what your interests are.

JO: Has anything about your perspective as a gay man particularly added to your ability to serve as mayor?

SA: Absolutely. I have an affinity for the “underdog.” At the same time, because I used to pass as straight, I got to hear what people said behind the scenes about gay people. So, I would say that it’s been very positive in being able to look at a situation and have a built-in awareness of injustice or untapped potentials for greater equality.

Social change isn’t always about injustice. Sometimes it’s that, even in the LGBTQ community, we haven’t always thought about opportunities we could take towards equity. When I was working to help co-found the Portland Q Center, I was struck that there were over 120 LGBTQ community centers around the United States, but nothing here. There was nothing unjust, per se, involved in that. Portland gets high marks for the LGBTQ community being highly integrated. We haven’t relegated ourselves to a “gay neighborhood.” But, the flipside of this is a sense, especially for vulnerable members of our community, of “where do I go?” for help, support, and a feeling of community. Seeing a need like this isn’t about injustice, but seeing an unmet need for equity, which is a perspective any LGBTQ person can relate with, and then act on.

JO: Any advice for Portland’s next mayor?

SA: Yes. I expect the next mayor to be a huge champion of marriage equality. The mayor’s office is an important bully pulpit for keeping injustices visible. Our next mayor will be a straight man, but that doesn’t matter. I still expect him to fight for and very actively promote marriage for all. I guess you could call that advice. Soon-to-be “Citizen Sam” is going to be an advocate to the next mayor to stay strong on this issue.

JO: Are you going to stay a citizen? What’s up next for you?

SA: I’ve got to make a decision on what to do next. My partner is an author so that provides some flexibility for us. Some of the offers I’ve had have been outside Portland, some inside. I’d love to stay in Portland, but I have to make a living. I’m not independently wealthy (laughs). But, I hope to stay in Portland.

JO: Anything else you want to say to Portland’s LGBTQ community?

SA: I’ve been a public servant for about 30 years now. I am very grateful for the support I’ve received from this community during my years in office, and am very proud to be a part of it. §