

## Jenny Cotton Interview Transcript

[00:01] *Ashleigh*: Today is April 19, 2018, and I am here with Jenny Cotton who is staff here at the University of Maryland and she is being interviewed by Ashleigh Coren and we are in the **LGBTQ Equity Center**. So to start off, uh, tell us a bit about yourself.

[00:19] *Jenny*: That's very open-ended.

[00:22] *Ashleigh*: Sorry (laughing)

[00:24] *Jenny*: Um, I don't know (sighing) Um, I grew up in Virginia, in Charlottesville, and I'm not worried (laughing) about that being public. (Sighing) Um, (pausing) I went to William and Mary for undergraduate and then moved back to Charlottesville for a couple of years, and then lived in Portland Oregon for eight years, um, and that was definitely different than living in Virginia. Um, then, um, my (sighing) wife and I and our kids moved back from Portland, um, to the east coast, to Maryland, um three and a half years ago. So.

[01:14] *Ashleigh*: So why the University of Maryland? What, what brought you here?

[01:18] *Jenny*: Um, some of it was geographic (laughing) honestly, which maybe I shouldn't admit. Um, I was ready to go back to graduate school, or to go to graduate school. Um, and I applied to the **library science program** here, um and was accepted. It's also that Maryland is in between where my family still lives and where my wife's family lives, um so, it was convenient in that sense, um because part of it too was that we wanted to be closer to family, um and I didn't do it totally blind, I did look into the University some and their inclusiveness in terms of talking the talk was pretty good and there's only so much you can know before you're in a place, so.

[02:18] *Ashleigh*: So what was your first contact with the LGBTQ community here on campus and what was the nature of that contact?

[02:27] *Jenny*: It depends on if you mean in like a formal sense or individuals, um (pausing) I don't, I, I'm a little hard pressed to answer either way, I'm afraid. Um, not too long after I started going to school in the **iSchool**, I started working in the library in **McKeldin**, um and a number of the people that I worked with there are or were, some of them had moved on since then, openly LGBTQ, um, so that's the first thing that comes to mind, um I don't know beyond that specifically.

[03:33] *Ashleigh*: Okay. Um, in the time that you've been here, sort of, what changes have you witnessed or participated in regards to the LGBT community here at the University of Maryland, if any?

[03:46] *Jenny*: Yeah, um, (pausing) I've noticed at least in terms of, um, you know the kind of email things that I've read and that sort of thing, there tends to be a little bit more of an emphasis on the trans and that side of things, um which I think is great because that is a part of

the community that tends to get overlooked a lot of the time. Um, so I've noticed probably a little bit more emphasis. (Sighing) I don't know that I've noticed huge shifts, but then again, like, it's not, you know, it's sort of three and a half years and not necessarily, not that things can't change in that time, but, that's probably the biggest change that I've noticed.

[04:50] *Ashleigh*: And in terms of support at the University of Maryland, have you been able to identify resources or support groups, organizations here at the university?

[04:59] *Jenny*: Um, well, I did, um, do like the **Rainbow Terrapin Trading-Training**, sorry, **Terrapin Trader** is something else, (laughing). They had a training thing here. I wanted to make sure I was familiar with the resources that were available, um because I work with students among other things, so I could know what there was available for people to, um, I have not personally felt like I had a lot of need to (pausing) seek out support in those terms. Um, I am fortunate and appreciative, I suppose, that I've never run into an issue, um, with any of my coworkers or with my supervisor, um, or you know, farther up the food chain in terms of that. I actually really appreciate that, um, my wife actually was diagnosed with cancer right about (laughing) the time I graduated, yeah, um, so we went through a couple of years worth of, like, me having to be out you know when she had surgery or going through chemo or whatever, um and then I was out for most of this past January when she was in the hospice and she passed away at the end of January and everyone has been very supportive and I never got any kind of push back about whether or not it was a real relationship or anything like that, and I am aware that there are legal protections in place but I have also worked in other situations where maybe there were legal protections in place but maybe some people communicated that, you know, they didn't regard it the same way that they would a different relationship, so.

[07:15] *Ashleigh*: So I'm going to switch gears a little bit. Can you talk a bit more about what it is that you do what you enjoy the most.

[07:26] *Jenny*: (Laughing) Well I work in the library, primarily in **interlibrary loans and reserves**, um (pausing), it's not generally particularly LGBTQ oriented, although one of the things I enjoy about,uh, **ILL** in particular is, um, processing all of the different requests. I find requests for things that I've (laughing) never even heard of, and I'm like 'oh here is an article that somebody is looking for and that actually sounds really interesting and maybe I'll go read that at some point, um, so I enjoy that and learning about all kinds of new things that I wouldn't necessarily have known about if it weren't for that. Um, I also enjoy, uh, in terms of the reserves, I'm the lead for the **top textbooks program** and, for anyone who doesn't know, that's the program where we try to make textbooks for approximately a hundred of the largest courses on cla-, or on campus available for students to check out for four hours at a time, and I appreciate that because I feel like we're providing a worthwhile service. Not every book in that collection circulates a lot but a lot of them do and the idea is to hopefully help some students who are maybe having trouble, like, buying all of their textbooks, making it a little easier for them because they may be able to access one from the library and not have to buy every single one, and they're pricey, so um, I also enjoy the atmosphere at the library and I enjoy, I do some shifts at the desk and getting people's random questions and working with the students.

[09:37] *Ashleigh*: So do you have any experiences with leadership roles here at the university? Have you experienced any leadership roles at the university?

[09:45] *Jenny*: Um, I've done some training, mostly colleagues, um, would (sighing) we revamped a lot of the stuff with the way reserves works, um, and a couple of summers ago we did a whole big series of training things, so I did some of that. I've trained other people individually too, that kind of thing, done some student supervision, like 'It's summer, it's time for projects, here is my project and I'm giving you (laughing) this part of it. Enjoy emailing all of these people" or whatever, so.

[10:27] *Ashleigh*: And you talk a little bit about this, um, but for people who are interested in working at the University of Maryland, particularly those that are LGBTQ, what do you want them to know about campus?

[10:37] *Jenny*: Um, I have generally found it very (sighing) welcoming, but that seems like kind of the wrong word, um, a lot of my experience is just that it is not an issue, um, you know, I've had some people like occasionally make comments about 'your husband' and I'm like, 'well my wife but...' and they're like 'oh!' and you know that's just kind of it and not even everybody makes those assumptions which is nice. Um, it's definitely, I've never felt uncomfortable with that aspect of my identity here.

[11:34] *Ashleigh*: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about regarding your experience? Anything memorable? Anything not so memorable perhaps?

[11:44] *Jenny*: Um, (pausing) one thing that sticks out in my memory is one of the students that used to work at the desk, she has graduated since then. Um, you know, we had desk shifts together and I had made some comment about like, you know, going to visit my in-laws that weekend or something and she said something about 'oh how long have you and your husband been married?' and I said, 'oh well, you know, it's my wife, but we've been married for seven years,' or however long it was at that point, um, and she apologized profusely and I'm like 'it's really, you know, not that big a deal, but I at least hope that maybe going forward that she won't necessarily make that assumption and it didn't bother me but I can imagine it bothering someone else in a different circumstance. I mean, there have been circumstances where that kind of assumption has bothered me, um, this was not at this University fortunately, but one of the times my wife was in the hospital there was a, I think she was a social worker, came by because, you know, they want to talk about plans for after your discharge and, um, she came in and introduced herself and confirmed my wife's name and said 'and who is this' kind of gesturing to me. And my wife said 'well, you know, this is Jenny, she's my wife' and this woman looked at her and said 'she's your wife?' and [she] (inaudible) was like 'yes.' Then she looked at me and goes, 'she's your husband?' (laughing) and I'm like 'no she's my wife' and she's like 'but who's the husband?' I'm like, 'no one... no one! (laughing) that's the point' And I'm like, 'this is 2017 how have you not had some kind of training? Like... you work in a public hospital! How is this... you work in a public hospital in DC, like how is this something that is confusing you?' And

you know, that kind of bothered me. It, um, bothered my wife I think more. We had a couple of experiences like that with that particular hospital and that's a situation where you're vulnerable and somebody being confused or clueless or whatever does not make you feel more comfortable. Like that says, you know, maybe she's not going to deal with our things because we're just too confusing or because she doesn't approve or whatever and that's not, that's not okay. So, I try to be very... like I make a conscious choice to try to be very open with the students that I work with, um, both for the sake of one's themselves maybe LGBTQ and, I mean, when I was in college, there were some faculty and staff who were open but like in high school, nobody, you know, nothing. And it was weird trying to wrap my brain around that identity as a thing that could exist in reality if that makes any sense, um so, I want them to have that example. You know, I'm not saying I'm the poster child for anything (laughing) but I want them to understand that that is a real people sort of thing, um and also for the ones that aren't so that hopefully they don't make the same assumption and are a little more aware going forward, so.

*[16:10] Ashleigh:* Well thank you for taking the time to sit with me this afternoon, Jenny, and thank you for your contribution to the **University Archives**