THE LARAMIE PROJECT:
TEN YEARS LATER

WRITTEN BY:
Moisés Kaufman, Leigh Fondakowski, Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris
and Stephen Belber
NOTE:
The following recap of events is not to be read as part of the play.

If your reading is receiving our broadcast live from New York, we will give this background information in our opening speeches at Alice Tully Hall.

If your reading is not receiving the broadcast live from New York, we recommend that the person introducing your reading say these words as part of their opening remarks.

Another option is that you put this recap in the program. Some institutions are not having programs for their events, but that is an option for those who are.

THE FACTS:

On October 6, 1998, a gay University of Wyoming student, Matthew Shepard, left the Fireside Bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. The following day he was discovered at the edge of town. He was tied to a fence, brutally beaten, and close to death.

By the following day, Matthew’s attack and the town of Laramie had become the focus of an international news story. On October 12, 1998 Matthew Shepard died at Poudre Valley Hospital in Ft. Collins, Colorado.

Five weeks later, the members of Tectonic Theater Project went to Laramie and conducted interviews with the people of the town. Over the course of the next year they wrote the play The Laramie Project edited from those interviews.
CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

Narrator
Greg Pierotti: Member, Tectonic Theatre Project
Beth Loffreda: Professor, University of Wyoming, author of the book “Losing Matt Shepard”
Moises Kaufman: Artistic Director, Tectonic Theatre Project
Leigh Fondakowski: Member, Tectonic Theatre Project
Andy Paris: Member, Tectonic Theatre Project
Matt Michelson: Former owner of the Fireside Bar
Marge Murray: Mother of police officer Reggie Fluty
Jeffrey Lockwood: Laramie resident
Jedediah Shultz: Laramie native, character in the original play. University theater student now living in NYC pursuing an acting career
Rebecca Hilliker: Theatre professor, University of Wyoming
Zackie Salmon: Laramie resident and advocate for domestic partner benefits on campus
Cowboy at health clinic
Shoppers at a strip mall in Laramie
Rental car agent in Laramie
Stephen Belber: Member, Tectonic Theatre Project
Reggie Fluty: Police officer who found Matthew Shepard at the fence
Jonas Slonaker: Openly gay Laramie resident
Deb Thomsen: Editor of the Daily Laramie Boomerang, local Laramie newspaper
Governor Freudenthal: Governor of Wyoming
Dave O'Malley: Retired Laramie police officer, lead investigator on the Matthew Shepard case for Laramie Police Department
Catherine Connelly: Professor, University of Wyoming
Rob DeBree: Albany County Sheriff’s department, investigator on the Matthew Shepard case
Jim Osborne: Friend of Matthew Shepard, Laramie resident
Dennis Shepard: Father of Matthew Shepard
Jerry Parkinson: Dean of the Law School, University of Wyoming, advocate for domestic partner benefits.
University official
Father Roger: Catholic priest at the Catholic Newman Center in Laramie at the time of Matthew Shepard's murder
Lucy Thompson: Grandmother of convicted murderer, Russell Henderson
Gene Pratt: Russell Henderson’s Mormon home teacher
Current students at University of Wyoming campus
Jan Lundhurst: Laramie resident
Glen Silber: Producer, 20/20
Romaine Patterson: Friend of Matthew Shepard, gay activist
John Dorst: Professor, University of Wyoming, folklorist and Laramie resident
George: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party
Ben: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party
Jim: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party
Susan Swapp: Laramie resident
Russell Henderson: Convicted murderer of Matthew Shepard
Clerk in Wyoming legislature
Peterson: Republican Representative in Wyoming legislature
Chairman Childers: Conservative Representative in Wyoming legislature
Other representatives of Wyoming legislature
Jon Peacock: Matthew Shepard’s former academic advisor
Aaron McKinney: Convicted murderer of Matthew Shepard
Judy Shepard: Mother of Matthew Shepard
ACT 1

MOMENT: THE LIGHT THIS FALL

NARRATOR
On September 12th, 2008, the members of Tectonic Theater Project returned to Laramie, Wyoming, ten years after the murder of Matthew Shepard and conducted interviews with the people of the town. This play, an epilogue to The Laramie Project, is edited from those interviews as well as journal entries by members of the company and other found text.

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
My first interview was with Beth Loffreda, a University of Wyoming professor. We met Beth on our very first trip ten years ago. At the start of the interview, through two large windows behind her, I could see the wide, blue Wyoming sky.

BETH LOFFREDA
I am thinking about the anniversary a lot. 10 years have passed…that’s a long time.

(pause)

The light this fall is much like the light that fall and we’ve been having days that remind me of that first fall that I was here … and so there’s something about the elemental reality here that feels intensely like that first September and October when all of this happened. That was 1998.

(pause)

(pointing out her window) You can see the prairie and the foothills from some offices here on campus. You can look out the window and you can see a little patch of the foothills, you know, past Walmart, where Matthew died.

So what happened here still feels very present to me.

My gut reaction is that Laramie is a somewhat better place to be than it was ten years ago, but I don’t know how to tell the story of the past ten years without having to think about, both what we’ve done, but also what we haven’t done.
MOMENT: GOOD ENERGY

NARRATOR
Journal entries: Members of the company. Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
September 12. On our way to Laramie again. Setting out to interview the same Laramie residents we interviewed a decade earlier.

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
Ten years have gone by, wondering who is still here and what has changed? Also thinking about interviewing the perpetrators Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson.

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
Arriving into town off Highway 80, I am surprised by how much the town has grown. There is an explosion of new development on the east side. At least three brand new hotels and several strip malls. Walmart has been replaced by Super WalMart.

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
The Fireside Bar where Matthew Shepard met his assailants has been sold and renamed. It’s now called JJ’s. I talked to the former owner, Matt Mickelson:

MATT MICKELSON
How has Laramie changed? These days in Wyoming with the coal bed methane boom and—the energy industry—like Dick Cheney sold half our state to Halliburton. But people don’t seem to mind.

MARGE
Yeah, they’re drillin’ all over now.

NARRATOR
Marge Murray

MARGE MURRAY
They are and they should. And we have so much coal that it’s unreal. No matter where you go, you poke a hole in the ground and you’ll find some coal. And it’s good energy.

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
The position Wyoming is in right now economically, there’s plenty of money.

NARRATOR
Laramie resident Jeffrey Lockwood

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
We’ve been having a big energy boom and they’re talking about it being a 30-year boom.

JEDEOAH SCHULTZ
The entire shape of Laramie has changed

NARRATOR
Laramie native Jedediah Schultz

JEDEOAH SCHULTZ
We have a Chilis now. Laramie has a lot more of those kinds of—like little modern mini mall things. The University is booming with money so they just build, build, build and they’ve got a huge Hilton and a Holiday Inn and a Convention Center.

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
Things are going really well and the coffers are filling. Now, some of these communities that they’re drilling in are just getting hammered in terms of the environment – the goose that’s laying the golden egg is crapping all over you but it’s still producing golden eggs.

REBECCA HILLIKER
On the surface things have changed here,

NARRATOR
Rebecca Hilliker, theater dept, University of Wyoming

REBECCA HILLIKER
just look around you at the physical growth. But whether or not we have changed the underlying culture of Wyoming at all, I don’t know.

ZACKIE SALMON
Laramie in general, I don’t think has changed a damn bit. I really don’t.
Zackie Salmon, Laramie resident

ZACKIE SALMON
I think the people who were outraged by Matthew Shepard’s murder are still outraged. I think that hardcore Wyoming faction who said: “That little faggot got what he deserved,” they’re still right here and they’re still teaching their children the same thing.
MOMENT: 2ND AND GARFIELD

NARRATOR
JOURNAL ENTRY: Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
We’re all settled at the Hilton Hotel. Much bigger than the Best Western where we stayed last time. Everyone heads out to conduct interviews.

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
It’s a football weekend just like it was the first time we were here. The hotels are full. The Wyoming icon everywhere – a cowboy on a bucking horse — the town is painted brown and gold.

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
One of the first things we do is walk around the town conducting informal interviews. Moisés and I (MOISES AND ANDY STAND) are waiting out a storm under the awning of the Laramie Health Clinic on 2nd and Garfield. A cowboy steps out of the clinic for a smoke.

ANDY PARIS: Good afternoon

COWBOY: How ya doin’

ANDY PARIS: Just waitin’ out the rain under here.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN: We’re here from New York with a theater company.

(Pause. COWBOY doesn’t answer.)

MOISÉS KAUFMAN: We’re here finding out how Laramie has changed since the Matthew Shepard murder.

(Pause. COWBOY doesn’t answer.)

MOISÉS KAUFMAN: Can we ask you a couple of questions?

(Pause.)

COWBOY: No.
ANDY PARIS: And he goes back inside.

(MAN SITS)

ANDY looks at MOISÉS.

ANDY PARIS: (Beat) That went well.

(MOISÉS AND ANDY SIT)
MOMENT: STRIP MALL

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti (GREG STANDS)

GREG PIEROTTI
At the strip mall on Third and Bradley, I see two guys standing outside the Safeway. And I ask what they remember about the Matthew Shepard story.

GUY 1
I've only been here four months. The only thing I know about it is I remember it from the news when it happened. He took me out where it happened.

GUY 2
Yeah, I just brought him out to the area there, out by Walmart.

GREG PIEROTTI
You showed him the fence?

GUY 2
Well, you know, just to that area out there. They took the fence down.

GREG PIEROTTI
(taken aback) They took it down?

GUY 2
Oh yeah.

GREG PIEROTTI
Really?

GUY 2
Definitely. It's gone. For a while now.

GREG PIEROTTI
Why did they take it down?

GUY 2
The owners didn't want people coming on their property. They got "no trespassing" signs all over the place out there.

GREG PIEROTTI
So, why'd you bring him out there then?

GUY 2
Because that's what we're famous for. (ALL SIT)
MOMENT: THIRD AND CUSTER

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber (STANDS)

STEPHEN BELBER
The moment I hit town as I’m picking up my rental car at Third and Custer, the rental agent (RENTAL AGENT STANDS) asks me what brings me to town so I tell him.

RENTAL CAR AGENT
Well, I wish you luck with your project, but I do think it’s time to let the boy go. Now if you ask me, I think it was robbery and that his lifestyle was just an excuse. His lifestyle’s beside the point. It makes no difference to me.

STEPHEN BELBER
Do you think it made a difference to his killers?

RENTAL CAR AGENT
No, I don’t. No. I think they set out to rob him found out about his lifestyle and then in the trial used it as an excuse…

STEPHEN BELBER
(surprised) I’m not sure I understand. Are you saying that it wasn’t a hate crime?

RENTAL CAR AGENT
Well, I just think people have agendas and they keep coming here pushing their agendas and they’re keeping that boy stuck. I think it’s time to let the boy go. I think it’s time to let go and let the young man get on with his life—or with his death—course, I believe in an afterlife.

Excuse me but I have to attend to this gentleman.

You enjoy your stay in Laramie. (BOTH SIT)
MOMENT: REGGIE AND MARGE

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
Driving out to meet again with Reggie Fluty, the officer who found Matthew at the fence. Reggie’s house sits on 12 acres of land just outside of town. I am struck by the vastness of the sky and the prairie out here.

REGGIE FLUTY
I’m amazed it’s ten years. Such a whirlwind—Every time there’s an anniversary of his death, talk comes back up. And it makes people stand up and own what they think.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
We also speak with her Mom, Marge Murray.

MARGE MURRAY
Reggie’s so busy with the horses.

REGGIE FLUTY
I am.

MARGE MURRAY
Ask her what she named her horses!

REGGIE FLUTY
I have three. Boogeyman, Reno, and Mad Marge.

MARGE MURRAY
She named a horse after me.

REGGIE FLUTY
I told her, “I am riding a horse that reminds me of you on a bad day.”

MARGE MURRAY
(Smiling) The brat…and she still has her lamas—

REGGIE FLUTY
And we have a couple of new colts.

MARGE MURRAY
But you asked how our lives have changed? Biggest change would be Reggie’s not working on the force now. Her horses are her work. After Shepard, it was hell for her. When she found Matthew he was alive and she tried to save him, but
she wasn’t able to. And then the gloves broke and she was exposed to the HIV. And she had to take that medicine. For a month, she was eatin’ crackers, drinkin’ 7 UP.

REGGIE FLUTY
Anybody would have done the exact same thing out there by the fence.

MARGE MURRAY
And after the main crisis was over, I wanted to support Reggie because every time there was a high profile case, like girls getting raped or babies dying… they only knew one phone number: Reggie’s.

REGGIE FLUTY
I did those kinds of cases for so long that I got exhausted. Those can burn you out pretty fast.

MARGE MURRAY
So it finally got to her. And she said, “I’m gonna retire.”

REGGIE FLUTY
I had to learn how to sleep again and how to be a normal citizen again. Not live in code yellow like everywhere you go somebody’s ready to sucker punch you. But as far as Laramie is concerned, I do think people’s views have changed.

MARGE MURRAY
Definitely.

REGGIE FLUTY
I think we were so embarrassed the first time that we don’t want that to happen again. And sometimes you know, you gotta just as a community, get the snot slugged out of you before you wake up and grow up, you know?

I’ve heard some people say that it’s time to move on. I ask them, “Where do you want to move on to, you know?” I just hope the community remembers, truly how ugly hate is. We just gotta be bigger than that, you know? We just gotta take responsibility for ourselves, and what we think and what we say and what we do.
MOMENT: SAFE POCKET

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
I also get a chance to catch up with openly gay Laramie resident Jonas Slonaker.

JONAS SLONAKER
After Matt was killed I was really thinking that I was gonna leave Laramie, but I went to the vigil for Matthew Shepard at the Unitarian Church, and I met Bill there, he came up and talked to me afterward, we started dating, and I decided to stay. (big smile) We have been together ever since—ten years. One of the reasons I love it here in Laramie is the land. I talked to you about that the very first interview we had. There’s so much land. And so much space. (beat) But for me the big change from then to now is that I am completely out now. But I am in a safe pocket and the safe pocket is the university. I’m in student affairs and that’s a really safe place to be, I mean everybody there knows about Bill. Now if I were in Ag? Agriculture? It would be different. Or you know if I worked at the cement factory here in Laramie, it’s a different world. But I mean, finding your safe pockets is what we do as gay people not just here in Laramie but wherever we live.
MOMENT: BOOMERANG #1 – DEB THOMSEN

NARRATOR
Company member Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
We’ve been here for a number of days now. With the anniversary of Matthew’s death approaching, I call Deb Thomsen, the editor of the local newspaper.

DEB
Laramie Boomerang.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Hi, may I please speak with Deb.

DEB
Speaking.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Deb, this is Moisés Kaufman, how are you?

DEB
(Pause) (Hesitates) Hi, I'm fine thanks.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Good. So do you have a moment to talk?

DEB
No problem.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
So tell me, as editor of the main paper here in Laramie, how have the people been thinking about the anniversary?

DEB THOMSEN
Actually, we’re doing a short series. I’m doing the intro piece and one of the other reporters has been talking with people just to get their perspective now.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
And besides the series, what kinds of events are planned for the anniversary of Matthew’s murder?

DEB THOMSEN
Well, I have to say…events…in Laramie? That would be more something that is organized on campus. But to be quite honest with you, we’re long past this…You know, we’re trying to put this behind us, and keep going. I would have to say
that most people in the community, they’re aware of what’s happened here, but they really are moving on from this. You have brutality and you deal with it, and you move on.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Mm hmm?

DEB THOMSEN
I do think that it brought forth a different awareness…and I hesitate to speak on behalf of the community, but I don’t believe that the catalyst was homosexuality.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
What do you mean?

DEB THOMSEN
I really believe they wanted money. And Matthew didn’t have what they thought and it just escalated to an anger that was totally out of control. There was so much speculation about drug use. I just don’t think it was about his sexuality.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
(surprised) So you don't think it was a hate crime?

DEB THOMSEN
I think everything is a hate crime. You have to have some kind of hatred in you to do that to another human being. As far as where that hatred comes from, I really couldn’t tell you…but we’re moving on from this.
MOMENT: MEASURING CHANGE #1

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
I drive up to Cheyenne, the state capitol, to speak with Wyoming Governor, Dave Freudenthal.

(To Governor) Governor, one of the things we are hearing in Laramie is some people now saying that this wasn’t a hate crime.

GOVERNOR FREUDENTHAL
I haven’t heard that. I don’t know where you are hearing that. It may be that there are people who want to dismiss it. I don’t share that view. It happened here. And we have to own that. When people think about Matthew Shepard’s murder, it’s not a particularly proud moment in the state’s history or the community’s history.

And I would say that there’s a change in general in the state with regard to more thoughtful discussion. If you just say the words “Matthew Shepard” it registers with people. At least people in my generation. I can tell you that it has a different feel about how we talk about things.

How do you measure change is the thing I’m stuck with.

I mean, the events surrounding the death of Matthew Shepard changed us – it clearly did. How you measure that change, I’m not quite sure.

DAVE O’MALLEY
(answering the Governor, enthusiastically) Well, we now have the AIDS Walk here in Laramie, it’s in its 6th year, ok?

NARRATOR
Dave O’Malley, retired Laramie police officer

DAVE O’MALLEY
And it’s grown. Last year we raised around 22,000 dollars. And 5,000 dollars at drag queen bingo alone! I mean we had the drag queens at the Cowboy Bar. Jim and Jason and Travis and they put on just a great production you know. Yeah, at the Cowboy Bar!

CATHY CONNOLLY
On campus the biggest difference would be the symposium for social justice.

NARRATOR
Catherine Connolly, university professor
CATHERINE CONNOLLY
The name changed to the Shepard Symposium for Social Justice several years ago, and not only is it a university conference but kids from all over Wyoming are coming to the Shepard Symposium. Great big yellow school buses of kids coming in to hear these speakers talk about justice and social change. And you get thousands of people from the town participating, and for this town, that’s a lot of people. So, I’m giving you the good.

ROB DEBREE
Overall there’s just more acceptance.

NARRATOR
Rob Debree, Albany county Sheriff's department

ROB DEBREE
You don’t hear the epithets that go along with it, such as gays being you know, the bad words that were usually associated with them. I really don’t.

JIM OSBORNE
Before Matt’s murder, nobody talked much about gay and lesbian people or issues in Wyoming.

NARRATOR
Jim Osborne, friend of Matthew Shepard

JIM OSBORNE
Now, there’s a Rainbow Resource center on campus, we have more gender and sexuality classes. I am openly gay. And I’ve heard from a lot of folks in Laramie over the years who say to me things like:

FRIEND
Jim, my grandmother watched a news story and she called me and she said:

GRANDMA
You know what, honey I just wanted you to know it doesn’t matter to me if you’re gay.

FRIEND
But grandma, I’m straight.

GRANDMA
Well, but if you were.

FRIEND
Well, thank you grandma.
JIM OSBORNE
Or folks who come to me and say:

MOM
I’m worried. How can I let my kids know that it’s okay with me, you know? My husband makes...comments. What if my five-year old son happens to grow up to be gay? I don't want him to be afraid his father’s going to hate him. How can I make a difference to my husband and to my kids?

JIM OSBORNE
So we don’t have a hate crimes law on the books, but the conversations that go on in our locker rooms, in the hallways at schools, on the playgrounds, in our living rooms and places of worship. That to me is progress.
MOMENT: BENCH DEDICATION

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
This afternoon, I spoke to Beth Loffreda about what the university is doing to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s death.

BETH LOFFREDA
The university held a ceremony dedicating a memorial bench in the name of Matthew Shepard.

GREG PIEROTTI
Can you tell me a little bit about that day?

BETH LOFFREDA
(STANDS) It was a Saturday morning it was chilly and then, in that way that happens here in Laramie as if a switch has been flipped, all at once blazingly warm.

The bench is tucked into the corner of a small elevated plaza outside our Arts and Sciences building. There was podium beside it. Dennis Shepard spoke. When he got up to speak, you could see that his nose was scratched and bruised.

NARRATOR
This is an excerpt from remarks made by Dennis Shepard that morning:

DENNIS SHEPARD
(Soberly)

(STANDS) Good morning. As you can see, I had a little accident. I broke my nose doing work around the house. My son Matt and I had a competition when he was alive. We each had broken our noses twice, one of us would pull ahead of the other for a while and then the other would tie it back up again. (long pause) When Matt was lying in the hospital, unconscious, and soon to die from the brutal beating he’d sustained, one of his many injuries was a broken nose. It was Matt’s third, one more than me. Now I have restored the tie.

We want to thank you all for attending this morning. We hope people enjoy the bench. There is a plaque here which reads, Matthew Wayne Shepard December first 1976 to October 12, 1998. Beloved son, brother, and friend.

He continues to make a difference. Peace be with him and all who sit here.
Thank you very much. (SITS)

Pause.

ZACKIE SALMON (STANDS)
Matthew’s legacy --- his main legacy is right here at the University of Wyoming.

NARRATOR
Zackie Salmon

ZACKIE SALMON
And yet...we’ve worked, worked, worked, worked, worked to try and get domestic partner benefits here on campus. And we still don’t have that. I have been with my partner Anne for twenty years and she doesn’t get any of my benefits. This is not the 1950’s anymore. It’s time for Laramie to come into the 21st century.

BETH LOFFREDA
If there was gonna be a place that I would have expected change to happen more quickly...it would be right here at the university.

ZACKIE SALMON
Those of us who have been fighting for this, we call ourselves the “gang of four” – and that’s Beth Loffreda, Cathy Connolly, myself, and Jerry Parkinson, Dean of the law school

(THE ACTORS STAND AS THEIR NAMES ARE SPOKEN, BETH HAS BEEN STANDING THIS WHOLE SCENE LISTENING TO DENNIS SHEPARD, SO ZACKIE CAN INITIALIZE HER WITH A GESTURE)

JERRY PARKINSON
We were all optimistic after last year with the Domestic Partner Initiative. We brought in a consultant to tell us how to get domestic partner benefits and we came up with a plan.

CATHY CONNOLLY
And at the start of the semester, we thought we were gonna have this implemented.

JERRY PARKINSON
But just when it’s about to come to a vote, they tell us:

UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL
(STANDS)
There’s gonna be a couple of trustees who are totally opposed to this on moral grounds. And we don’t agree with their views but just give us some time to talk to those folks about the business necessity.
JERRY PARKINSON
It’s been ten years. There are so many people out there around the country who
don’t know anything about Laramie. But they really believe in their hearts, that
the university of Wyoming would be the last place in the country to adopt same
sex partner benefits. And at the rate we’re goin’…we are gonna be the last.

(ALL SIT, EXCEPT BETH WHO REMAINS STANDING)

BETH LOFFREDA
A lot of us who work here at the university and a lot of administrators can look out
our windows and can see the place where Matthew Shepard died, where he was
slaughtered, I just think if that’s not enough to get you off the blocks to REALLY
make some active significant changes on your campus…I don’t know what it
takes.

(BETH SITS)
MOMENT: FATHER ROGER

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
Today I spoke to Father Roger who hosted the vigil for Matthew at the Catholic Newman Center in Laramie ten years ago. He is no longer in Laramie. I spoke to him by phone.

FATHER ROGER
I left Laramie in 2002. I took a sabbatical and then I was placed in Kansas City.

GREG PIEROTTI
And where did you go on sabbatical?

FATHER ROGER
To Menlo Park, the Vatican II institute. A great place. If you ever get ordained as a priest, Greg, go there for your sabbatical.

GREG PIEROTTI
Beat. I just completely lost my train of thought. Beat. Oh yeah, and how have you personally been changed by this, Father?

FATHER ROGER
I'm much more courageous now than I was before Matthew. Matter of fact, I wouldn't be saying to you some of the things I am saying today if it wasn't for Matthew Shepard. I talk about sexual identity a lot more. I don't talk about it every Sunday, but I do talk about it whenever the scriptures enable it to happen.

GREG PIEROTTI
Do you miss Laramie?

FATHER ROGER
Oh my, yes, I miss Laramie. I'll always miss Laramie. We went through so much together. And I think that the community in Laramie did so well.

GREG PIEROTTI
So, Father, one of the things we want to do this time is interview Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. I know you've been in touch with Aaron, you've counseled him…do you think we should try to interview him?

FATHER ROGER
Should you try? I hope you do. And let me tell you why. Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson are products of our society. They are our brothers also. I don't say this in any way at all to excuse him; if you hear that, you are
misunderstanding me. But to understand does not mean to agree with. To understand does not mean to be permissive. But to understand also isn’t the kind of thing that you decide in your office. To understand Aaron, you have to visit him.

GREG PIEROTTI
I’ll send Aaron a letter today asking if he would be willing to meet with me.

FATHER ROGER
Yes Greg, I think you MUST do that. I think you must.
MOMENT: LUCY THOMPSON

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
In trying to find a way to talk to the perpetrators, I meet again with Gene Pratt, who was Russell Henderson’s Mormon Home Teacher. Russell was excommunicated from the Mormon church after the murder, but Mr. Pratt remained close to the family. I ask him how Russell is doing ten years later.

GENE PRATT
We hear of cases all the time of people who came to their senses because of some tragedy in their life, and it turns them around, and it can happen. And I think that has happened in his case. But you shouldn’t just take my word; you should go see for yourself.

STEPHEN BELBER
Mr. Pratt then did something he hadn’t been willing to do ten years earlier,

GENE PRATT
I'll call Lucy, Russell’s grandmother, and set up a chance for you to meet. But it'll be up to Lucy.

STEPHEN BELBER
A few days later, Leigh and I sit down with Lucy in her home.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
She was much older and frailer than the woman we’d seen read a statement at Russell’s sentencing 10 years earlier.

STEPHEN BELBER
On her wall there were pencil sketchings of Jesus – finely drawn, intimately detailed.

LUCY THOMPSON
Russell did those drawings. Aren’t they something? I tried to mail him some pencils and some sketchbooks. But he can't have art supplies where he’s at now in Virginia. When he was in Rawlins he could. He got his GED in Rawlins too and he went to take college classes, chose his courses, got his books sent and was all excited, and then they said, “All right, it’s time for you to be transferred.” That happened to him twice. So he never did get to do that.

STEPHEN BELBER
Miss Thompson, we would very much like to interview Russell. Do you think he would talk to us?
LUCY THOMPSON
(PAUSE) I don’t know. You can try writing to him. And I’ll tell him that we talked today, he calls me pretty regularly. But it will be up to him.
MOMENT: NEXT GENERATION

(Acting Note: These students should not be played dumb or for laughs. They should be played as regular college kids who have not been given information about this one issue)

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
This morning, Greg and I (GREG AND LEIGH STAND) decide to hit the university, where Matthew Shepard was once a student, to talk with the next generation about how they see things now.

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
I see a young couple getting into their car. (BOY AND GIRL STAND) Can I ask you: did you happen to attend the Bench dedication for Matthew Shepard?

BOY
Excuse me.

GIRL
For who?

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
For Matthew Shepard. Do you remember him or what happened to him?

BOY
I don’t know anything about him.

GREG PIEROTTI
You never heard anything?

BOY
I heard the name that’s about it.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
How about you?

GIRL
I heard he was homosexual and he got murdered. He got put somewhere like on a post somewhere (she points vaguely toward the campus) and he got murdered.
GREG PIEROTTI
And how long have you been at the university?

GIRL
Two years.

LEIGH
And what about you?

BOY
Yeah, two years.

(ALL SIT)
There was a generation or two generations of students who came to this university believing that the story of Matthew Shepard was relevant. That this was part of their history and they wanted to know more about it. That was the sense that I had in the past. And they were aware that they were in the same rooms, walking the same little paths that both Matthew and the perpetrators walked. But now, new students don’t come to the university either knowing or caring or thinking it’s relevant to their lives....

Because here is what else is going on with Matthew Shepard.

There was a 20/20 episode that came out in 2004—seven years after Matthew was killed—and the implication of that program was that it wasn’t a hate crime, but a robbery or drug deal gone bad. And people here in Laramie at that time were pretty wounded given the inaccuracies.

When 20/20 called me for an interview

I asked them “What exactly are you all doing?” And they said it was an objective, what's-going-on-seven-years-after type of a thing. Well I just got kind of a strange feeling...

They did talk to Dave O'Malley...

...but as far as I was concerned they set Dave up.
DAVE O’MALLEY

They came to our house and the producer Glenn Silber and Elizabeth Vargas, and my wife Jen and I, sat at THAT table (he points to his living room table). And I asked them, “Is there any specific focus that you are directing this piece to?” “No no no no don’t worry about that.” And Elizabeth Vargas went in our bathroom and changed clothes and we set up and did the interview. And shortly into it, it popped straight to the methamphetamine thing.

20/20 NARRATOR (STANDS)
Nov. 26, 2004 — This is 20/20.

The story garnered national attention when the attack was characterized as a hate crime. But Shepard's killers, in their first interview since their convictions, tell "20/20's" Elizabeth Vargas that money and drugs motivated their actions that night, not hatred of gays. (SITS)

DAVE O’MALLEY

It angered me more than anything the things they DIDN’T say—the things they left out. I mean how do you come in and a) lie to me but b) put a piece together that’s based solely on meth heads from the Buckhorn Bar and two convicted murderers. And I’m just goin' “Holy Crap!”

JAN LUNDHURST
It was very shocking to me to see that.

NARRATOR
Laramie resident Jan Lundhurst

JAN LUNDHURST
They were interviewing the murderers after they’d been in prison for many years, and I thought, well, yeah, you can change your story however you want to now. They completely changed what they had said in their confessions.

DAVE O’MALLEY
(Holding up the email) After they left I found a hard copy of an email from Glen Silber to Elizabeth Vargas, and I can give you a copy of it, it said,

GLEN SILBER
“Although Dave is a highly skilled investigator and was the key to solving the crime quickly, he fell into the hate crimes motivation early and our piece will ultimately discredit that flawed theory.”
DAVE O’MALLEY
And I read that and I went these assho—excuse me… I-- get a little angry. These guys sit in my house… and lie to me. And Silber drives all the way back to Colorado and our phone rings and he says,

GLENN SILBER
“Uhh…Did we leave anything there?”

DAVE O’MALLEY
And I said, “Yeah and my wife has already scanned it and sent it to Judy Shepard, and she sent it to her attorney in D.C. and you can come back and get it if you want to.” And he drove all the way back from Denver and—I-I- I’m not a violent individual but I really did want to choke him. (Beat)

And we used to watch 20/20 every week…(SITS)

JIM OSBORNE
Some folks here in Laramie want to find any excuse as to why this happened.

NARRATOR
Jim Osborne, friend of Matthew Shepard

JIM OSBORNE
They want to write this murder off. And a big part of how people do that is 20/20. You had a major, respected news source who came up with this set of stories that said, “Okay, it wasn’t really about the fact that he was gay, it was really about this.”

DAVE O’MALLEY
PBS did a nice rebuttal they went point by point through the entire thing pointing out the false statements, the leading questions, the quotes taken out of context…but how many people watch PBS and how many people watch 20/20?

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
(frustrated) There are things straight from the trial,

NARRATOR
Catherine Connolly

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
the reality of the actual confession, everything that happened in the trial gave us the truth…and we thought because it was the truth and the truth played out here – that the truth would prevail. But the reality is, that over time, that 20/20 piece has made a tremendous negative impact on how Matthew Shepard’s murder is perceived. And this is — this is personal—there’s a perception and belief now
that it was a drug deal gone bad and that’s all. So you asked me how I felt? I go catatonic after things like this. This is our history.
MOMENT: SMARTER THAN THAT

BETH LOFFREDA
There are things about that night that we're never going to know, because Matt's not around to tell us.

NARRATOR
Beth Loffreda, university professor

BETH LOFFREDA
And Henderson and McKinney changed their stories so many times that I wonder if they even remember any longer exactly what happened. But this idea that you can say, "Oh, it was a robbery" or "Oh it was drugs" and therefore there was no element of hatred or bias... I mean we are smarter than that. You know. The idea that one cancels out the other just strikes me as silly. We are smarter than that.
MOMENT: ROMAINE PATTERSON

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
Romaine Patterson was a friend of Matthew Shepard. Ten years ago, she organized "ANGEL ACTION" where Laramie residents dressed as angels to protest anti-gay demonstrators led by the Rev. Fred Phelps of Westborough Baptist Church.

Romaine is living in New Jersey now with her partner Iris and their three-year old daughter. We spoke to her by phone.

ROMAINE PATTERSON
The biggest personal change with me is that I’ve really come to understand the power that my voice carries. In “The Laramie Project” I said that I wanted to be an activist and I went to work for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and there I got a sense of what it was like to work for a national activist organization. Now I lecture at schools and colleges. And I am forever in shock and awe when I go to a high school today and I see kids who were mere children when Matthew died and there is this kind of hope – these kids have the determination to make sure this doesn’t happen again.

It’s ten years later, and we know that these crimes continue to happen, and they are as horrific as what happened to Matthew, but these kids really want to create change and they feel like they really can. So it may not be the adults that are necessarily the ones who are benefiting from Matthew’s story, but I think it is these younger generations. So by talking about Matthew, good things happen, good change is happening.
MOMENT: BOOMERANG #2 – “OUR VIEW”

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
Over the course of our stay in Laramie, there had been a couple of articles
printed in the Laramie Boomerang about the upcoming anniversary of Matthew’s
death. These were the articles that the editor Deb Thomsen had mentioned to
Moisés. This morning, I got a call from Jonas Slonaker. And he said,

JONAS SLONAKER
Did you see the paper today? You’ve got to read the editorial. You’re not going to
believe it, it’s called: “Our View. Laramie is a community not a ‘project.’”

NARRATOR
An excerpt from an editorial written in the Laramie Boomerang, Sunday, October
12, 2008: the anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s death.

BOOMERANG EDITOR (STANDS)
The recent news story in The Boomerang looking back to the brutal murder of
Matthew Shepard 10 years ago has drawn a wide range of reactions from this
community. The biggest reaction has come from those who don’t understand why
this anniversary qualifies as news.

Some callers have requested that their paper delivery be held during the week
that the series of stories was being published. Others have accepted that the
local newspaper had to do a story about the anniversary given the national
notoriety but wished that the coverage could have been less detailed and
displayed more discreetly.

JONAS SLONAKER
Can you believe that?

BOOMERANG EDITOR
A far smaller number of messages have come from people who wanted much
more exhaustive reporting.

Direct observation and discussion with the wide range of local residents tells us
that Laramie is like most communities but more tolerant than most. That doesn’t
mean there aren’t prejudiced or bigoted people here. There are. But those
people don’t define Laramie, and it is infuriating for those of us who consider this
our home to be labeled because of the actions of a few questionable characters.

That label is particularly galling in this case because the crime in question has
been portrayed in the national media as a homophobic attack and as a hate
crime because Matthew Shepard was homosexual. But no one can know that motivation except for the two men who committed the crime.

JONAS SLONAKER
Andy, they had a trial and it was established as a hate crime. That’s why they had a trial. That’s what a trial is for so that we can learn these things!

BOOMERANG EDITOR
Police records certainly seem to indicate that this was a robbery that went very bad.

JONAS SLONAKER
What police records are they referring to? A robbery? I tie you up and smash your head in because I want to rob you? It’s absurd! And this is Laramie’s main newspaper.

BOOMERANG EDITOR
But those who wanted to label Laramie as a bigoted town in the Wild West didn’t let the facts get in the way of their stories. So who then is guilty of intolerance and perpetuating stereotypes? (SITS)

JONAS SLONAKER
(Angry)
A robbery gone bad over drugs, I mean, what? It’s just crazy. And that’s denial. That’s some kind of massive denial.

When I saw this I was so furious and so insane I wanted to leave Laramie.

ANDY PARIS
Jonas wrote a letter to the editor.

JONAS SLONAKER (STANDS)
“Many citizens of Laramie want to move on but denial isn’t the best way to accomplish that. There is no disgrace for Laramie in acknowledging that part or all of the motivation in the murder of Matthew Shepard was homophobia. NO, the crime certainly does not define Laramie. How we react to the crime, how we talk about it, and if we do or don’t do anything to prevent this from happening again does define Laramie.” (SITS)
MOMENT: VISIBILE MARKERS

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
I spend the afternoon with Matt Mickelson, former owner of the Fireside Bar. The fence has been taken down. The Fireside has been renamed. It seems like all the visible markers of Matthew Shepard’s murder are gone.

MATT MICKELSON
Yeah, I had to sell the Fireside, I did eight hundred and some thousand dollars in sales that year that Matt was killed. The next year I did forty three thousand, crushed me, shit. I put it up for sale like two weeks later.

STEPHEN BELBER
And then I asked Mickelson about the BOOMERANG editorial:

MATT MICKELSON
I tried to tell people—it was such a big media sensationalism hate crime hate crime hate crime—it’s not—that wasn’t the issue. The issue was methamphetamines. They’d been up for three days, those two guys had been up for three days doin’ dope. And that’s why they beat him and robbed him.

NARRATOR
Jim Osborne, friend of Matthew Shepard

JIM OSBORNE
One of my friends a couple months back said to me,

FRIEND
I know what really happened, I’ve talked with people, I know what really happened.

JIM OSBORNE
And I looked at her and I said, “You were eight when Matt was killed. How in the hell do you know what really happened. You were eight and not living in this town. But somehow you know?”

DAVE O’MALLEY
You know when I started realizing what a hate crime does to a community?

NARRATOR
Dave O’Malley, lead investigator on the case
DAVE O’MALLEY
Gay kids were moving out of town after this happened, you know? I mean people get killed in liquor store robberies all the time, I don't think twice about going in and buying a 6-pack of beer. But these gay kids were dropping out of school—not just kids—gay adults too—and leaving Laramie because of what happened to Matt and that fear—I started realizing that's—terroristic. And that's what a hate crime does to a community.
MOMENT: BOOMERANG #3 – THE STORY WE’VE TOLD OURSELVES

JONAS SLONAKER
I waited all week for the Laramie Boomerang to print my letter.

NARRATOR
Jonas Slonaker

JONAS SLONAKER
And it finally got to the next Sunday and it never appeared. And there was a letter from a guy lamenting the fact that not enough people are coming to the football games and I was like well jeez there’s plenty of room for my letter (fighting tears) they just didn’t do it. And I said to my partner Bill, we’re in this little world where everything’s OK like in our neighborhood and in our jobs, but there’s all these people around us that are thinkin’ this shit. And, I had to go out to the prairie, I drove out and screamed until my throat hurt. I just had to get it out of me. It really broke my spirit when they refused to print my letter. What am I gonna do with this? You know, what AM I gonna do with this?

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
Laramie had this moment.

NARRATOR
Jeffrey Lockwood

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
There was a moment of self-reflection, but it was just too frightening. The Matthew Shepard murder flies in the face of who we are, the story we’ve told ourselves, and so you’ve either got to radically adjust your story or you’ve got to throw out the data. And so far what we’ve done is throw out the data.
MOMENT: SHAME

NARRATOR
Company member Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
We met again with Reggie Fluty, the officer who found Matthew at the fence.

REGGIE FLUTY
Yeah, I’ve heard about people who say it wasn’t a hate crime. Nobody says that to me. And if they do, it gets shut down so fast. I won’t discuss it. It’s not an option, it’s bullshit and I’m not wasting my time or theirs.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Why do you think people say this?

REGGIE FLUTY
Shame is a funny thing. It makes you really look at yourself hard, you know? And when you have that kind of thing happen in your town, and it hurts a whole community, where you think, “Yeah, that can happen here.” And it’s hard when you’re very ashamed of yourself to stand up and say, “Yeah we screwed up.” Instead we start making excuses, and pointing the blame at somebody else or others – we do that as individuals, we do it as a community, we do it as a nation. And that’s what I think we’ve done.
MOMENT: POTLUCK

GREG PIEROTTI
We spoke to John Dorst, a folklorist at the University of Wyoming. We asked him why he thinks the rumors in Laramie are so prevalent.

JOHN DORST
My kids are both away at college now—and the first moment they identify themselves and where they’re from, it’s “Oh Laramie, Wyoming? Isn’t that where Matthew Shepard was killed?” and then they need to explain that to people or distance themselves or disavow their place. As if their home, their town, has been tainted in some way.

GREG PIEROTTI
So as a folklorist, what is you take on this?

(STANDS) As a folklorist, I can tell you that there’s a desire for communities to own and control their history. And when that gets taken away, a “reaction formation” occurs. You start with more formed things, the facts of the case or the court proceedings. And the folkloric process is one of winnowing and reduction, the paring away of detail until frequently the actual events—something you might call a story—dissipate. And that’s what folklorists call the genre of rumor.

But can I ask you—what kinds of versions have you heard?

GREG PIEROTTI
Well, Leigh and I were invited to a potluck last night where we talked to several people.

GEORGE
I heard it was a drug deal gone bad. I don’t think it was a hate crime. Laramie is not that kind of a community. The Eastern media had an idea of who we are but that’s not who we are. It could have happened anywhere.

GREG PIEROTTI
I think that’s true. One of the responses we often get to the play when people see it is “This could be my town. Laramie is just like my town.”

GEORGE
That’s it. That’s right.

GREG PIEROTTI
But does that mean that there is no homophobia in Laramie, or does it mean that there is also homophobia in other towns?

GEORGE
Laramie is not a homophobic community. There might be individuals who are, but we are not a homophobic community.

JOHN DORST
In some ways it’s more acceptable to say yes we do have drug problems in a place like Laramie. It’s something you can fix. Hatreds and especially homophobic hostilities seem less controllable.

BEN
I still haven’t decided either way, but to say this was a hate crime is not taking the context of the situation into consideration.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
What do you mean?

BEN
That these guys were not virtuous. They were in an environment where drugs and promiscuity prevail and nothing good is going to come from a situation like that. Matthew Shepard missed the signs. Those two guys must have been giving off signs that they were not to be trusted, but he missed them.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
How do you know this?

BEN
I’ve heard from friends, people I know, people I’ve hung out with who have told me that they were tweaking.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
But the cops determined they were not tweaking, not on drugs.

BEN
Well, the guys I’m talking about, I would believe them over the cops. I don’t trust authority figures in general, and I don’t trust the Laramie Police.

JOHN DORST
That kind of insider knowledge. That’s another way that people claim control over their stories. You know we’re the insiders we know what really happened.

JIM
Those three guys were a train wreck just waiting to happen. I also heard there was something sexual there too.

GREG PIEROTTI
I am just curious, how do you know? You say these things with such confidence, like you know they are facts, and I am not saying it’s untrue, but there was a trial with a lot of evidence given that negated a lot of what you are saying.
JIM
Oh. Well, I hadn’t heard that. I guess maybe a little bit of fact and fiction that mixes together and that’s how you get an urban myth. It’s an urban myth.

JOHN DORST
People will back away very quickly if they’re putting forward a rumor type thing and you question it further. When you do push back, you are violating the “convention of rumor.” People inevitably back away. The convention is that you DON’T contend it. That’s one of the reasons that it can circulate as sort of this vague, “I don’t know where I heard this.” It’s just sort of in the air. It’s just around. That’s the nature of rumor.

This is definitely the issue – maybe the core issue here in Laramie – the desire for control over memory or over history.

BETH LOFFREDA
Of course it’s getting retold.

NARRATOR
Beth Loffreda, university professor

BETH LOFFREDA
Not just here, but nationally. I mean, a Congresswoman from North Carolina just claimed that it was a hoax. So I find it enraging, this idea that it’s ok to enmesh us in these dishonesties. Where does that stop? It inflicts real damage to the world we live in, when we all agree to lie, so that we don't have to feel sympathy for someone that so many people feel it’s more proper to be disgusted by. I just think it’s awful.

SUSAN SWAPP
But still it would be wrong to think that the whole community believes that it wasn’t a hate crime.

NARRATOR
Susan Swapp, Laramie resident

SUSAN SWAPP
That would be an unfair characterization of Laramie. I don’t believe that. That’s the kind of thing that people say, “Oh, Laramie believes that it was a robbery or drug deal gone bad.” That makes me really angry. And it’s not true. I don’t believe that.
MOMENT: THE INVESTIGATING OFFICERS

(Acting Note: Debree and O’Malley should not be played as defensive here. They are confident in the facts and should display all the authority of their offices.)

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
We decided after hearing so many rumors that we wanted to sit down with the investigating officers on the case, Dave O’Malley and Rob DeBree. (ACTORS STAND AS THEIR NAMES ARE SPOKEN)

(To DeBree and O’Malley) We hear people say that McKinney and Henderson didn’t target Matthew Shepard because he was gay. What do you think about that?

DAVE O’MALLEY
Their own statement was, they went into a bathroom, they hatched the plan to pretend that they were gay, to try to befriend Matt, get him isolated. Ok.

ROB DEBREE
Henderson went into great detail as to how they planned it… They knew he was gay, that one of them would pretend to be gay in hopes of luring him out. You’re definitely focusing on an individual because you assume he is gay.

ANDY PARIS
The other thing we keep hearing is that this was a robbery gone bad. That Henderson and McKinney only wanted money. As if that’s the only factor involved.

ROB DEBREE
That’s the beginning, and granted robbery was a part of it, but it went way beyond that. I mean his wallet would have most likely been given to him at 30th and Grand, which is right up here on the corner, and that would have been the end of the robbery.

DAVE O’MALLEY
So beyond that, something has a profound twist to it.

ROB DEBREE
Robbery would have taken seconds. They went beyond that, dragging him out, they’re beating him in the truck, dragging him over to a fence, tying him, and then they beat him viciously. I mean this goes way beyond the wallet.
DAVE O’MALLEY
And McKinney’s own statement is “I only had to hit him one time to get his wallet.” But then why drive this young man out of the city limits and tie him to a fence and hit him in the head and face 19 to 21 times with the butt end of a great big gun.

ANDY PARIS
How else would you answer these rumors?

ROB DEBREE
A lot of people never got to see the crime scene except for law enforcement. The attack point – it was a true battle. They tie him, they beat him viciously. In fact his watch is located almost thirty feet away from him. You could see the marks of blood spatterings in a wide variety of different areas.

The crime scene probably went from this wall to about there (points). So about twenty yards. We found blood spatter all over. And at one time, Henderson made the statement that Matthew tried to run. And broke free, and was trying to run, but of course didn’t get very far.

ANDY PARIS
Several people have said that McKinney and Henderson were involved with drugs that night.

ROB DEBREE
We’ve proven that there was no drugs on board with McKinney and Henderson….just NONE. We had blood samples from both of them that night because they both ended up in the hospital. Even through their own statements the last time they did the meth was…two to three weeks prior.

(Frustrated) I was under the assumption that was a pretty well proved thing at the trial.

ANDY PARIS
Is there anything else you want to say about this?

ROB DEBREE
Look, I wish people had seen…When McKinney was in a detention facility he had no problem telling everybody he had killed the faggot…he was his own little hero. In the detention facility. In fact, the day of his sentencing, when he went back over there, he was smiling. He had just said, supposedly, that he felt so bad for the family, for what he had done, but he goes over in the detention facility and he’s smiling to the other prisoners. So…I don’t care what McKinney tries to come up with now, or Henderson. I really don’t care. I have been in law enforcement going on my 27th year…I don’t know how many times I’ve addressed it and
whether people want to accept it or not, I don’t know what we need to do to get people to understand.

(O’MALLEY AND DEBREE SIT)

NARRATOR
Catherine Connolly
CATHERINE CONNOLLY
We in Laramie need to understand our history and our place in history; it's important for us to do that, and we will do that. We MUST do that.

FATHER ROGER
There are people who still wonder why this murder taught the public so much.

NARRATOR
Father Roger

FATHER ROGER
I think Matthew's legacy is alerting people to how sinful so much of our society's attitude is toward people who are different. Matthew sort of jabs the conscience of our society. And says, "Are you a bigot? Are you prejudiced? Are you biased?"

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
After speaking to Russell Henderson’s grandmother, I wrote to him and asked if I could meet with him in prison. Today I received his response.

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Dear Mr. Belber,

I got your letter and I've considered your proposal to talk with me and I've decided that I will do it.

As you know, I've been reluctant to talk to anyone. But I think if there is something I might say that will help someone else to understand or to maybe help them not make the same mistakes I did, then it will be worth it.

I must admit that I'm not the best with words so I don't know how much I will be able to help but I will tell you that I will be honest with you.

I'm not sure if you will have to fill out a visiting form or if you will be able to get in without it, but if not I will call you. Just let me know.

I haven't read or seen the play but maybe once you finish this new part of it you could send me a copy of it.

Respectfully,
Russell
STEPHEN BELBER
As I stand there reading his letter, I think about Father Roger’s words from ten years earlier:

FATHER ROGER
I think our most important teachers must be Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney. They have to be our teachers. How did you learn? What did we as a society do to teach you that.

STEPHEN BELBER
And so I book myself a plane ticket to Virginia to go talk to one of the men who killed Matthew Shepard.

END OF ACT 1.
ACT 2

MOMENT: RUSSELL HENDERSON

(STAGING NOTE: IN OUR STAGING, WE HAVE STEPHEN BELBER AND RUSSELL HENDERSON SITTING ON TWO CHAIRS FACING EACH OTHER IN FRONT OF THE MUSIC STANDS.)

(Acting note: Be careful not to take on a brooding quality when playing Russell. The scene should play briskly.)

NARRATOR
Russell Henderson was the first of the two perpetrators to go to trial in Laramie. He was convicted of murder and kidnapping and is serving two consecutive life terms in prison.

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
The folks at the prison’s visitor entrance pat me down, lock up my valuables and stamp my hand. And then I'm ushered though an outdoor corridor, into a vestibule, where doors shut behind me, before another pair opens before me. And then I enter into the visitor’s room where I see Russell, sitting at the table with the low partition. He has no attitude, no show. Just a balding, 30 year-old man in a green jumpsuit.

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Me and Aaron worked together at the roofing company for about 3 months before that night. We hung out a fair amount. I was working at the Conoco and the roofing place at the same time.

STEPHEN BELBER
Had you ever gotten into drugs?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Not really. I’ve never been on like a drug binge.

STEPHEN BELBER
One of the things people keep saying about that night, with Matthew, is that you guys were on the back end of a two-week meth binge.

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I wasn’t. The last time I’d done any drugs was on my birthday, which was two weeks before that night. And I’d only done a little bit. I don’t know about Aaron.
STEPHEN BELBER
And had you ever robbed people before?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Never. I mean, I was one of those guys who was brought up with values, but I actually believed them. I believed the values, I was raised not to hurt people, and I agreed.

STEPHEN BELBER
So why’d you go along with Aaron that night?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
At first I told Aaron I didn’t want to. I kept saying no. But he kept wanting to, so finally I just, I went along.

STEPHEN BELBER
Why?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I guess I’m more of a follower. And he’s a leader. So I just went along.

STEPHEN BELBER
OK, but when you did rob Matthew, why did you take him to the fence? I mean, you had his wallet in the truck, no?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
We were just gonna rob him and leave him out there, so that he’d be stuck out there.

STEPHEN BELBER
Can you tell me what happened when you got out to the fence?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Aaron told me to tie him to the fence. But I didn’t actually tie him. I just wrapped the rope around his hands. Because, you know, I figured… I wanted him to be able to leave.

STEPHEN BELBER
And so, when Aaron started hitting him over and over--?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I just wanted it to stop. I wanted to hide. Make it go away. So I just did what I always did. I hid. Tried to escape. Pretend like it’s not happening. Instead of being more…strong. I didn’t think I could stop him. That’s why I went back to the truck.
STEPHEN BELBER
Well one story I’ve always heard is that you tried to stop him from beating Matthew.
RUSSELL HENDERSON
(a nod) Let’s just say I tried to stop him but I didn’t try enough. You know what I mean? I didn’t...It’s mostly just, you know, shame. That I didn’t do more.

STEPHEN BELBER
What do you wish you’d have done differently?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I wish I’d have stopped him.

I made the wrong choice to go along with it from the beginning; I made the wrong choice to tie him up, I made the wrong choice not to get help. I’ve thought a lot about it, about every single thing I did; and I just wish I could…change what I did.

STEPHEN BELBER
Your grandmother told me you’d taken a victim empathy course?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Yeah. And what they have you do is actually draft a letter to your victim. Which I did; and I chose Matthew’s family, because even though Matthew was my victim, so was his family. And a part of that is that you write about a time in your life when you were a victim.

STEPHEN BELBER
What did you write about for when you were a victim?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
About when my Mom was killed. Which was, obviously, different circumstances, and a different level of attention, but, you know, we both lost family members, in violent crimes...you know, my mom was killed in Laramie, she was raped, and then the guy just left her on the side of the road. She tried to make it back to town, but she froze to death...writing about that really...helped me, it made me understand the pain I had caused to Matt and to Matt’s parents and family.

STEPHEN BELBER
Is that the letter you tried to send to Judy Shepard?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
It...prepared me for what I wrote her.

STEPHEN BELBER
And did you ever hear back from her?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I don’t even know if she read it.
STEPHEN BELBER
What do you say to people who say you’re just saying you’re sorry now because you want your sentence reduced?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I don’t know. I can’t really do anything about that. For a long time all I thought about and what I was sorry for was the whole world hating me. But now, all I would want to say to you is that I’m sorry for what I did to Matt’s family. That’s what I would want to say.

I still have trouble about what I did, what I didn’t do, and how I’m going to deal with that for the rest of my life. I still wake up, I’m still trying to figure it out; why I did what I did.

STEPHEN BELBER
As you think about your future, do you, you know, do you have hope?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
Hope?

STEPHEN BELBER
Yeah.

RUSSELL HENDERSON
For what?

STEPHEN BELBER
I dunno. To get out?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
No. I don’t have hope for that. Mostly no. I try to just accept it.

STEPHEN BELBER
Are you at all religious?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
I mean, I grew up as a Mormon, and my grandmother still is, she’s really involved with the church, but after this all happened. I got excommunicated. And so I’ve had trouble sort of dealing with that.

STEPHEN BELBER
So what went wrong, Russell?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
The only explanation I can offer is I was young and I thought I was strong and I could handle whatever the world could throw at me, and when this happened I
realized that none of this was true. I was weak and scared and all I did was hide from it. Everyday I play out in my mind what I could have done or what I should have done but none of it matters because I didn’t do it.

STEPHEN BELBER
How’s your relationship with Aaron these days?

RUSSELL HENDERSON
We’re cordial. You know; we’re sort of attached forever by this thing, so... He has his friends, I have mine, but we see each other everyday. We’re cordial. ... I mean, he’s a character, you know? He’s the one people are gonna want to hear.
MOMENT: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
There was certainly the hope and the desire that something like this would never happen again

NARRATOR
Catherine Connolly

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
but then you just constantly see the stats of hate crime violence; violence towards gays in this country is going up, not down.

And we still don't have any kind of hate crimes legislation on a state level. Or on the Federal level.

But one shouldn’t be naïve – we certainly know from any kind of social movement that we still have racism, we still have sexism, those haven't gone away.

There’s a whole lot more that needs to be done so that’s why I’m running for a house seat in the Wyoming legislature. The goal this term is to get enough democrats to override more than two-thirds Republican majority.

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
On November 4, 2008, Catherine Connolly won that house seat, becoming the first openly gay member of the Wyoming Legislature.
MOMENT: LANGUAGE OF DELAY

NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
Six months later, we traveled back to Laramie to conduct more interviews. The economy finally caught up with Wyoming. The week we were there, the university announced it had to cut $18 million dollars from its budget at the request of the governor. The front page of the BOOMERANG announced: 45 people lost their jobs at the university.

Days later, the domestic partner benefits finally came to a vote at the university.

NARRATOR
From a University of Wyoming press release:

NARRATOR (STANDS)
At a special closed-door meeting of the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees May 30, the board approved funding for domestic partnership benefits.

ZACKIE SALMON
Woo hoo! Even in the middle of the Wyoming prairie change has occurred!

NARRATOR
Zackie Salmon

ZACKIE SALMON
It only took ten years! BUT IT PASSED!

BETH LOFFREDA
It’s good news.

NARRATOR
Beth Loffreda

BETH LOFFREDA
The vote was 6-5 so we feel lucky it came out ok. But...there is this language of delay in the plan:

NARRATOR
The board’s vote directs that the system be implemented only when UW President Tom Buchanan determines it is fiscally feasible to do so. UW recently announced sweeping budget cuts. (SITS)
BETH LOFFREDA
That language of delay just makes me crazy. As if nobody's getting hurt or burdened while we just wait a little longer. The spectacular dishonesty of people in power who enjoy all of the benefits, right, that they are denying to other people.
MOMENT: DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE ACT (DOMA)

NARRATOR
Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
We met up with Cathy Connolly again a few months after her term as a representative began to ask her how it was going.

CATHY CONNOLLY
Well, I went through freshman training and I'm a freshman. And one of my first orders of business was a Defense of Marriage Bill introduced in the house – a Constitutional Amendment; it was one of those. Like Proposition 8 in California.

Our bill was called:

CLERK (STANDS)
House Joint Bill Resolution 17: A joint resolution proposing to amend the Wyoming Constitution specifying that a marriage between a man and a woman shall be the only legal union that shall be valid or recognized in Wyoming.

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
Bills first must be heard and passed out of a committee before they are debated on the house floor. I testified in that committee against the bill. I came out in that committee. I brought in my son’s birth certificate. My son’s birth certificate has two women on it, recognized by the State of New York. And I said (she holds her son’s birth certificate) "Look, we're recognized as a family unit, and we came here and raised our son and Wyoming didn’t fall apart because of it.”

But the resolution had enough support to make it out of committee, and therefore it made it to the floor of the House.

The bill was introduced by a Republican, Peterson. So he spoke first.

PETERSON [STANDS]
Mr. Chairman. There are many reasons why the institution of marriage between a man and a woman benefits society. More than 30 years of studies have shown that kids raised by two married biological parents are more successful and better behaved in school, more likely to attend and graduate College, less likely to live in poverty, less likely to drink or do drugs, less likely to commit crimes, less likely to be physically abusive.

Now I can’t stand here and say that because there is a marriage between a man and a woman everything is hunky dory with society that’s not the case. But this research has shown that children that have daily access to the daily
complimentary ways that mothers and fathers present, studies have shown that that has a definite significant impact, and since I have three children, seven grandchildren, that is definitely the way. (CONTINUES STANDING)

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
And he went on for probably ten minutes...and in the Wyoming Legislature, we have a desk mate—and my desk mate, she finally leans over to me and says,

DESK MATE
You don’t have to hear this. You don’t have to.

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
And I just got up and walked out. And one of my colleagues who is incredibly conservative, I walked by him and he said to me,

CONSERVATIVE COLLEAGUE (note: this was said very gently)
I’m sorry. This will be over soon.

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
So I went back to my seat.

PETerson
Mr. Chairman since the beginning of civilization, in every known society, governments have recognized a marriage between a man and a woman because it provides the next generation outstanding citizens and is the only means of melding two sexes into a stronger and more complete whole.

I exert the body to move forward and pass this resolution I will relinquish the floor and stand for questions. (SITS)

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
So that happened. We needed 21 votes to strike it down. We had only 19 Democrats and three or four of them didn’t want to do it given their districts. So, we’re gonna lose. We’re gonna lose. Then another conservative, Chairman Childers spoke.

CHILDERS (STANDS)
Ladies and gentlemen I too have been married 46 years. I have 3 lovely children and I’m very proud of them. Two are sons with two granddaughters and another one on the way. My third daughter, lives in Montana. (Long Pause) She’s gay. She has a significant other. They aren’t married because Montana’s law doesn’t allow it. But folks to my dying breath there’s not anybody in this country could say that she is a terrible person, or a something person that needs to be—have their rights restricted. She lives a quiet life with her significant other. Most people would never know she’s gay, and quite frankly until she graduated from College my wife and I didn’t know it. Her freshman year, very first semester, we had a
counselor say she better come home. And why? Well we had no idea. But she came home because the counselor was very concerned about what was happening to her. And quite frankly I think there was a possibility of suicide. She has grown from that point to a very stable person, and productive and does things for society quite well. She represents a health care faction for the physical therapy association—travels all over the nation. Smart? Oh Lord she’s smart. Good person. But what we’re doing with this Constitutional Amendment, should she have lived here, is to deny her civil rights. You know folks I grew up in the South. The town that I grew up in was segregated… Now you think about a gay person in red-neck country, I can say that cause in Northeast Texas that’s red-neck country. And the prejudice against the gay and lesbian community is there I’ll guarantee ya. And that hate in their eyes or the fear in the gay person’s eyes is there. Do we want a society in this State to do that? Do we want to deny the rights of a gay and lesbian person? I don’t think so. Ladies and Gentleman this bill is wrong. And I suggest you vote against it. (SITS)

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
It was incredibly moving. But at this point we have counts of where we think this was going. So it was gonna pass. We had probably 10 or 15 undecided. And then one last Republican stood up. A very powerful man in Wyoming politics, maybe running for Governor in the next election, he got up and he said:

REPUBLICAN MAN
(STANDS) We are the State of Matthew Shepard and the State of Brokeback Mountain, but we’re also the State of Esther Hobart Morris, first female Justice of the Peace in the United States, and Nellie Taylor Ross, first woman to serve as a governor of any US state—and—if we let Resolution 17 out of this body—our state will be ripped apart at the seams quite frankly. It will divide families, divide churches, divide neighbors, divide friends, and will cause a political havoc that this state hasn’t seen in decades. (SITS)

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
And in the end…the bill failed—Resolution 17, our Defense of Marriage Bill, failed—it failed by 35-25. It failed. It didn’t pass. And it was Republicans. It was Republicans that defeated it. It was amazing. It was amazing to see.
MOMENT: MEASURING CHANGE #2

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
We had a chance to talk again with Jon Peacock, Matthew Shepard’s former academic advisor.

JON PEACOCK
I think it does a great disservice to the power of this story to only measure change by whether there’s been some definitive or quantifiable change: like a law passed, or something like that I just think that’s too thin of a measure. There has been so much qualitative and transformational change.

BETH LOFFREDA
I think the example of Laramie cops like Dave O’Malley and Rob DeBree.

NARRATOR
Beth Loffreda

BETH LOFFREDA
These guys are committed to gay and lesbian people and their protection.

ROB DEBREE
I believe that gay people in Laramie are aware of what resources are available to them to get assistance in the sheriff’s office and the police department. Uh, we're set and we're ready.

BETH LOFFREDA
Certainly before Matt died, the cops weren’t gonna be the people that a young gay person would have called if they were getting harassed, They would have assumed that the cops would have just continued the harassment. So, I think that those changes are something to recognize about Laramie. You won’t find that anywhere in a statute or in a public monument to Matt, but I do think that those changes are really meaningful.

DAVE O’MALLEY
You know, quite frankly before all of this happened, that’s how I believed, pretty homophobic.

NARRATOR
Dave O’Malley, retired Laramie police officer

DAVE O’MALLEY
And as a result of what happened to Matt, I was thrust into the situation where I had to interact with the gay community. And from where I was then to (teary) where my mind lays and my heart lays now, is 180 degrees. What I learned real quickly is that what I had been doing over my whole life is precluding a really fine group of individuals from friendship. Why does it take a young man like Matt getting killed for me to start losing my ignorance? You know? Because that’s what it took.

JIM OSBORNE
I don’t think any of us here in Laramie want to believe hate is growing in our own backyard.

NARRATOR
Jim Osborne, friend of Matthew Shepard

JIM OSBORNE
And all of us here understand that Laramie isn’t different, we really are any town we really are every town America, and that bigotry and hatred are present everywhere.

DAVE O’MALLEY
After this happened, Debree and I went to Washington seven or eight times with Judy Shepard to advocate for the federal hate crimes bill. What’s been the most difficult part for me to comprehend is that the legislation would have passed in 1999 under Clinton if “sexual orientation” wasn’t included. It would have passed the next time but “gender identity” was the hang-up. And Bush of course was threatening his veto if you put that language in there. And so here it is, three administrations later, and the legislation’s still is not a reality.

ROB DEBREE
(Passionate) Until the day that the government decides to take a handle on this, and make it a law, that’s the only way we’re gonna start to get this thing to break. And we have to start from the top.

DAVE O’MALLEY
In 1998 it was called The Hate Crimes Prevention Act. In 2007, it was re-named The Matthew Shepard Act.

NARRATOR
At the time of this reading, The Matthew Shepard Act has yet to become law.
MOMENT: REMORSE

NARRATOR
Company member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI (STANDS)
Aaron McKinney is in state penitentiary in Virginia. I sent Aaron a letter asking if he would meet with me. I never heard back so I called Father Roger again to see if he could help.

FATHER ROGER
Well, I will send him a letter too. And, Greg, ask Aaron about his remorse. Those of us who have done things in our lives that are really significant in their gravity, we are going to alter our remorse throughout the course of our lives. Sometimes that remorsefulness gets chinked one way, and then it gets bent a different way and then hopefully, by the time we die, we have it in the correct perspective. I think Aaron is not finished finalizing his experience of remorse. And remorse is something we ALL need to think about. So you ask him about that. And, Greg, do him justice.

GREG PIEROTTI
Father, how do I do Aaron McKinney justice?

FATHER ROGER
(Surprised) You get to know him, Greg. Let him teach you what it’s like to be Aaron McKinney, OK? Now, I will write him today for you.
MOMENT: AARON MCKINNEY

(STAGING NOTE: WE USED THE SAME TWO CHAIRS FROM THE RUSSELL/STEPHEN SCENE HERE)

(Acting Note: Please do not play Aaron as a sinister or brooding character. Aaron is a “regular guy” and the tension between what he says and his matter-of-fact disposition is chilling.)

GREG PIEROTTI
Aaron never replied to Father Roger’s letter. But I put in a request to visit with Aaron anyway, and the prison approved it. I went ahead and booked a flight. I went through all the paper work and questions and metal detectors and pat downs. As I headed into the prison, I still didn’t know if he was going to see me. But as I passed through the last sally port to the visiting room, there he was, in the very first seat. He had very bright green eyes and a lot of tattoos on his arms. One on his right forearm said: “Trust No One.” He gave my hand a firm shake over the low metal partition.

When the guard leaves, Aaron says:

AARON MCKINNEY
That’s it. You can’t reach over the partition again.

GREG PIEROTTI
Oh, OK. Thank you so much for seeing me, Aaron.

AARON MCKINNEY
I threw your letter out, I thought you were the media. And there was no way I was gonna talk to you. I hate the fuckin media. But when I got the letter from Father Roger that you were friends of him I thought – OK yeah. I’ll see you. Father Roger is a good guy, he is definitely family.

GREG PIEROTTI
Yeah, I love Father Roger.

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah. A big smile and the wind blowing back his face, that’s my picture of Father Roger.

GREG PIEROTTI
Those are amazing tattoos you have.

AARON MCKINNEY
Thanks. Yeah. A couple a guys in here do real good work. Home made ink, hook a guitar string up to a battery. But it’s not allowed, so you gotta have
someone watching for the guards and you always gotta stop when they come so it takes forever. I’m working on a full shirt. (Gesturing to his whole torso)

GREG PIEROTTI
Wow. That’s cool. So, uh, you know we wrote a play and that you are a character in it, right?

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah, I heard about it. I heard about it, but I never saw it. I don’t know what I say in it.

GREG PIEROTTI
Well, it’s all your words. We used your actual words from when Rob Debree interviewed you. That was all we had of yours. What was in the trial transcripts.

AARON MCKINNEY
(apparently genuinely surprised) The trial transcripts?

GREG PIEROTTI
Because when we were interviewing people we couldn’t actually speak to you.

AARON MCKINNEY
OK.

GREG PIEROTTI
And we are checking back with the characters ten years later. So that’s why I am here. Just to see how it has been for you the last ten years.

AARON MCKINNEY
OK.

GREG PIEROTTI
So what’s it been like in prison for you all this time?

AARON MCKINNEY
Well, you know, it depends on where we are. They’ve moved me and Russ like five times. We are always together. I don’t know why. So depending on the place, sometimes it’s great, and other places not so great. This place isn’t too good. It’s freezing. (pointing to his thin green jump suit) This and a real thin blanket is all you get no sweater or anything even for outside and in the winter. It’s fucking freezing. And they’re pretty strict here. They keep us in our cells here all but one hour a day.

GREG PIEROTTI
So what do you do for 23 hours a day in your cell?
AARON MCKINNEY
Nothin’ much. Work out, sleep, watch TV. I don’t read much. I read a couple of books. I read Ice Man, did you ever read that?

GREG PIEROTTI
No.

AARON MCKINNEY
It’s great, man. It’s about this hit man for the mob. And then I read a couple of books about the Nazis. They were pretty informative. I’m pretty interested in that.

GREG PIEROTTI
OK. And what about the other places you have been?

AARON MCKINNEY
Well Wyoming was shit. Nevada was kind of scary. A lot of gangs. Got moved to Texas twice. Texas was a dream, man. It was pretty free. I wish I could get put back in Texas.

GREG PIEROTTI
Is there any chance that you will?

AARON MCKINNEY
No telling. I think they’re gonna send us back to Wyoming next. That’ll suck.

GREG PIEROTTI
And is there any chance as far as your lawyers are concerned that you will get out of prison altogether.

AARON MCKINNEY
Man, I’m never getting outta here. You kiddin’? Too much publicity. I am like the poster child for hate crime murders. Shit, for years, after anything happened to a gay person they thrown my picture up there too. I’m never gettin’ out. And you gotta resign yourself to it or you go crazy. So you just try to enjoy yourself. Russ might get out. Shit, he should get out. He doesn’t belong in here.

GREG PIEROTTI
Do you see much of him in here?

AARON MCKINNEY
Every day. He is a good friend. I’d give my life for Russ. He didn’t do anything. I told him, I would do anything in my power to get him out of here.

GREG PIEROTTI
So he didn’t do anything that night?
AARON MCKINNEY
Nothing.

GREG PIEROTTI
Can you talk more about what did happen that night?

AARON MCKINNEY
Well, I have a pretty bad memory of the whole thing.

GREG PIEROTTI
So what do you remember, Aaron?

AARON MCKINNEY
We definitely picked him up to rob him. I was dealing at the time, and I had just got this beautiful gun. Almost brand new Smith and Wesson three fifty seven magnum with a 10 inch barrel. Fucking huge beautiful gun. So we went to The Fireside and I was definitely in the mind set to rob.

GREG PIEROTTI
So you were looking for someone to rob?

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah.

GREG PIEROTTI
So why Matt?

AARON MCKINNEY
Well, he was overly friendly. And he was obviously gay. That played a part in the part of his weakness. His frailty. And he was dressed nice. Looked like he had money. I think he was drinkin' Heineken. Some expensive beer. And it looked like he had a bunch a money in his wallet. It only ended up being about thirty dollars. But so, when he asked us for a ride, I said definitely, man. It was gonna be easy.

GREG PIEROTTI
OK. So it started as a robbery. But you said you picked Matt because he was gay and you've said many times that you don't like gay people.

AARON MCKINNEY
I don't.

GREG PIEROTTI
So it sounds like his being gay did have something to do with it.
AARON MCKINNEY
It’s a possibility. The night I did it, I did have hatred for homosexuals. That mightta’ played a small part.

GREG PIEROTTI
So you’re telling me hatred toward gays played a part.

AARON MCKINNEY
It might have played a small part, yeah.

GREG PIEROTTI
But it seems like more than a small part to me. In your initial interview with Rob Debree, you said he slid his hand like he was going to grab your balls and that was why you started hitting him.

AARON MCKINNEY
I said that?

GREG PIEROTTI
In your interview.

AARON MCKINNEY
Then it might have happened. I barely remember that interview at all. That’s what I said?

GREG PIEROTTI
That’s definitely what you said.

AARON MCKINNEY
Maybe that happened. Like I said, I barely remember anything.

GREG PIEROTTI
What do you remember? You got him in the truck…

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah, so we got him in the truck and we’re drivin’. I had the gun back behind the seat. and I reached back, grabbed it, stuck him in his face you know like “rob time.” I even poked him in the eye with it. You want to be aggressive when you’re robbing folks, so they believe you’ll follow through.

GREG PIEROTTI
(Somewhat speechless) And that must have been … Well, so you made him give you his wallet.
AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah, I made him give me his wallet. I do remember one thing that was eerie. He didn't seem scared at all. He was just looking at me. Even when I was hitting him in the truck (he bangs his fist into the center of his forehead), he just kept staring at me.

GREG PIEROTTI
But you were doing some pretty scary things, Aaron. You stuck a huge 357 magnum in his face. You poked him in the eye with it, hit him in the head with it. Couldn't he have just been in shock?

AARON MCKINNEY
I never thought a that. Yeah maybe. He was complying with my demands. But even when I tied him up to the fence, it was odd too. He really didn't seem to be scared.

GREG PIEROTTI
So what happened next?

AARON MCKINNEY
I took the gun by the barrel, so I was holding it like a bat. And I just beat him in the head with it.

GREG PIEROTTI
OK.

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah. Then he made a real weird noise and slumped over – you know like they say people make a noise when they give up the ghost.

GREG PIEROTTI
But he didn't give up the ghost. He held on for 6 more days.

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah.

GREG PIEROTTI
OK. So I just want to go back a minute.

You said you tied him up?

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah, to the fence

GREG PIEROTTI
OK, in Russ’s statement he said that he tied Matt to the fence.
AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah?

GREG PIEROTTI
Yeah.

AARON MCKINNEY
(pause) Well, I don’t know. If Russell says he did something then he did it. Russ is a man of his word. But I don’t remember him tying him. I know I tied him.

GREG PIEROTTI
And so what about the hate crime issue.

AARON MCKINNEY
I don’t like gay people, it’s true. But as long as they stay outta my way, we don’t have any problems. I have no problem with them. I mean there’s guys in here that do that. Nobody really jumps you cause you’re gay. They got their group that all hang out together and do stuff and nobody bothers them.

GREG PIEROTTI
Oh really?

AARON MCKINNEY
Yeah. People know what I stand for in here, and they don’t bother me. You have to stick up for yourself no matter who you are. But if you do, no, it’s not really a big deal. (beat) Unless you’re a sex predator. They get problems here from everyone. They’re like the lowest rung. They get beat up, people steal their shit. But a regular gay guy. Yeah they just keep to their own group, and it’s no big thing.

GREG PIEROTTI
OK. So, let me ask you, you know, in Russell’s statement when he plead guilty he told the court he was sorry and felt he deserved to pay the price for what he did. But in your trial you never made much of a statement and so I’m wondering

AARON MCKINNEY
Do I have remorse?

GREG PIEROTTI
Yes, yeah.

AARON MCKINNEY
You mean do I have remorse? Yeah I got remorse. But probably not the way people want me to. My dad taught me I should stand tall and be a man. I got remorse that I didn’t live the way my dad taught me to live. That I wasn’t the man my dad wanted me to be. As far as Matt is concerned, I don’t have any remorse.
I heard that Matt was a sex predator, and that he preyed on younger guys and had sex with ‘em. So when I heard that I was relieved. People might say I am just trying to justify myself, maybe so. As far as I’m concerned, doin’ what he was doin,’ Matt Shepard needed killin’.

GREG PIEROTTI
(pause) Ok. You know those rumors about Matthew Shepard are not true, Aaron.

AARON MCKINNEY
That’s not what I heard.

GREG PIEROTTI
(pause) OK. So, you have no remorse at all.

AARON MCKINNEY
Actually, I do feel bad for Matt’s Dad. That must be hard to lose your son.

GREG PIEROTTI
And what about his mom?

AARON MCKINNEY
For her too, yeah. I feel bad. Still she never shuts up about it, and it’s been like ten years, man.

GREG PIEROTTI
Well, Aaron, you brutally murdered her son.

AARON MCKINNEY
(conceding) Yeah, I know.

GREG PIEROTTI
(pause) And what about yourself. The ways you lived before you murdered Matt. You have no regret. There is nothing you would change in any way?

AARON MCKINNEY
Hell yeah. All sorts of ways. I was a fucker as a kid. A real fucker. Lied to my dad a lot. I hate that. (getting glassy eyed). I fuckin’ hate that. He is the greatest dad ever. All the trouble, the drugs. If I could change it I would. I’d go to high school. Graduate.

GREG PIEROTTI
And what if Father Roger were here with us. Could you look him in the eye and honestly tell him you don’t feel remorse for Matt?

AARON MCKINNEY
I’d have to. I would never wanna have to do that. You know how I feel about Father Roger. But I couldn’t look him in the eye and not… I’d have to tell the truth. I do have remorse, but like I said, for all the wrong reasons. For my dad. For ending up in here. For getting Russ stuck in here.

GREG PIEROTTI
But you think those are the wrong reasons?

AARON MCKINNEY
If I could go back and not be the one who killed him I would. ... But I am better off in here, myself. I’m doin’ way better in here than I ever was out there. I met guys in here with a real sense of honor. Out there, people’ll stab you in the back for a nickel bag. Besides, I am a criminal. I should be around criminals. I always was drawn that way. Shit, I remember crawling through people’s doggie doors when I was eight years old to steal their shit. I don’t know why, but I was always like this. Nature trumps nurture.

Like my brother’s not like me at all. Works hard, going to school. He’s a really good kid he definitely is a totally different kind of person than me…so like they say…nature trumps nurture.

GREG PIEROTTI
Did you see your son ever, since the murder?

AARON MCKINNEY
Never seen him since I was locked up.

GREG PIEROTTI
...Um OK. Well, I think we’re running out of time, Aaron. Before I leave you, I know you say you’re never gonna get out of here. But if you did get out, if you were going to get out, where would you go?

AARON MCKINNEY
Shit, I don’t know. Italy, maybe or Germany. I am really interested in Germany. But I probably couldn’t go there cause I heard you can actually get arrested for some of the tattoos I have. I got some Swastikas, and I got NAZI across my lower back, in big Old English lettering – looks amazing. I heard they’ll put you in jail for that now in Germany. Italy’s beautiful though – I would definitely like to see Italy. I used to always watch the travel channel in Texas and whenever they’d show Italy I always liked those the best. They don’t have that channel here – we only got maybe 10 channels here. I’d really like to see NY too. I like sky scrapers and you all got the most. That’s where you’re from right? You guys are lucky. You got the best skyline. I wish I could go to NY and look at the skyscrapers from the water.

GREG PIEROTTI
Yeah, I really love NY. It’s pretty great there. Well, Aaron, thank you so much for seeing me.
AARON MCKINNEY
Sure, man, like I said, any friend of Father Roger’s. Take it easy.

GREG PIEROTTI
You too. Take it easy.

MOMENT: JUDY SHEPARD

NARRATOR
Company member Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Ten years ago during the trails of the two perpetrators, we met Judy and Dennis Shepard in Laramie. We saw them day after day in the courtroom as they watched the proceedings, and then faced the endless press conferences and media coverage. I sat down with Judy, ten years later, to talk with her.

(To Judy) Judy, when I met you at the trials you were a very private person. You didn’t want to talk publicly. But now you’re a very public figure. You’ve been lecturing around the country and advocating legislative changes and you’ve met with Clinton and Obama. How did that happen?

JUDY SHEPARD
I’m just doing… what a mother does when you hurt her children. I don’t think I’ve done anything spectacular. Um, I’ve told a story, I’ve kept Matt’s story alive. I certainly haven’t gotten the hate crime bill passed yet, not that it’s solely my responsibility, but… you know I really haven’t accomplished anything yet. Other than maybe talk to people around the country about losing my son.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
(Pause) What can you tell me about him?

JUDY SHEPARD
Well, I think I was pretty sure Matt was gay when he was eight years old. Sometimes, you know, something in the back of your mind. When he dressed up as Dolly Parton for Halloween—for the third time. He really worked at it too; he got better each time he did it. He always was very serious about acting. He played the little brother in Our Town. When he turned 18, he called me in the middle of the night and he said, "Mom, I've got something I've got to tell you." My first reaction was, "What took you so long to tell me?" And he said, "How did you know?" I said, "It's a mom thing."

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
Judy, you know we met with McKinney this time?

JUDY SHEPARD
Yes, I know. It will be interesting to hear what he has to say now. (PAUSE) When Dennis and I made the recommendation to the judge to take the death penalty off the table for Aaron McKinney …we did that because we just didn’t think taking away another son was going to fix anything. And we didn’t think Matt would want that either. But it wasn’t entirely altruistic. We also understood that if we took the death penalty off the table, we would never have to deal with McKinney again. No appeals, no nothing—he’s just gone. And we didn’t want Matt’s brother Logan to have to deal with that in his life. He would just be gone. So, when McKinney showed up on 20/20 I thought, this is exactly what we didn’t want. Here he is again, saying whatever he wants whether it’s the truth or not. Changing his story.

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
I so vividly remember being at the trial and seeing you then. And now I see this woman and they don’t seem like the same person.

JUDY SHEPARD
Yeah. I’m angrier now than I was then. Because it’s still happening. (begins to cry softly, but does not give in to the tears) sorry. Dennis said it best, ‘10 years of change, no progress.’ Meaning that yes, things have changed at the human level, at the grassroots level… but legislatively… legally, nothing has changed…. the hate crime legislation hasn’t passed on the federal level, “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” is still there, the Defense of Marriage Act is still there. We just can’t make it to the top.

So here I am at the 10-year mark still fighting, and I had to adapt so I could keep doing this. Or, the feeling would be that it would have all happened in vain! I wasn’t going to let that happen. Plus, just doing the work was my survival! It was how I coped with losing Matt. I could keep him with me all the time. And I was talking to someone and they said “Well don’t you think maybe it’s time to let go, don’t you think you’re keeping Matt alive by doing that?” And I said “Of course I’m keeping him alive by doing this! That’s the point!” That is exactly the point. And I can keep telling the same wonderful stories and my friends don’t say “Judy, you told me that story yesterday and the day before that and the day before that.” I can just keep telling it.
MOMENT: LEGACY

NARRATOR
Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS
We heard that when they took the fence down, the pieces were incorporated into other fences. So no one knows where the original pieces are.

NARRATOR
Jonas Slonaker

JONAS SLONAKER
I remembered where the place was and I would still go back, and it’s…yeah. The fence is gone. Ten years later and the fence is gone…. and ten years of snow and rain have washed through there. I mean it’s just a place, in the end I guess. And I decided not to go any more. I had to let it go.

NARRATOR
Dave O’Malley

DAVE O’MALLEY
(STANDS)
This is a photograph of the fence that my son took, and some people had been out and kind of made a little memorial there and… I don’t know how many people came to town when I was still working at the police department to visit the fence. But I remember one older man – spent thirty years in the military—had to be in the closet through the whole thing. And Matt’s death had a huge impact on him. He was from Vermont and one day he just showed up, and I took him out to the fence. I did that with several people, it was important for them. It was important enough for them to come all the way to Laramie to see it! You know? But other than crime scene photographs, this is the only photograph of the fence that I’ve got.

NARRATOR
Company Member Greg Pierotti

GREG PIEROTTI
We asked people if there were any final words they would like to share with us before we left Laramie.

NARRATOR
Jeffrey Lockwood

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
I don’t think we are all that different. I think this could have happened in dozens or hundreds of communities and ten years later we’d be telling the same story. The difficulty that we have on reflecting, on dealing with deep social justice problems, I think it’s a warning – it’s a warning to other communities that unless they aren’t extraordinarily intentional in the face of such tragedies, there will be no growth in ten years. There may be pockets of growth or individual growth, but there won’t be community growth.

NARRATOR
Jan Lundhurst

JAN LUNDHURST
I would say that there are some people in Laramie who try not to think about it. But it can’t be hidden. There are books about it and people who come back and ask about it. And I don’t forget. And I think most of the people—we don’t forget. I don’t forget.

NARRATOR
Beth Loffreda

BETH LOFFREDA
For all the people who want to castigate Laramie, they might remember that there are people who are here who are working. We’re working hard. We are working hard. So when that work becomes more visible change that might be another five or ten years. But that doesn’t mean that the work isn’t happening.

CATHERINE CONNOLLY
There’s a lot more work to do----and we’re going to do it. We have to do it. We have an obligation to. Our place in history is not insignificant. But, when you really think about it—even in New York City there hasn’t been the kind of change you’re asking of us here. Has there? So, how then, do we all get this done? Not just in Laramie, but in the whole country?

NARRATOR
Reggie Fluty

REGGIE FLUTY
And personally, I think somebody so small in stature, you know, sure made a huge difference in the whole dang world, you know? Because it just went further than Laramie, for our community. It just went bigger than that. And you know, in life the man was so small! But his legacy is huge!

NARRATOR
Company member Moisés Kaufman

MOISÉS KAUFMAN
As we get ready to leave, I find myself wondering if in another ten years, we will still be trying to gauge the impact of this event, on this town, on this country.
NARRATOR
Company member Stephen Belber

STEPHEN BELBER
Andy and I head back to Denver on the Interstate.

NARRATOR
Company member Leigh Fondakowski

LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI
Greg and I take the more scenic route, south on 287…

GREG PIEROTTI
I think about all the people we’ve talked to here in Laramie, and how their lives and their town have been shaped by Matthew Shepard.

ROMAINE PATTERSON
Over the years I’ve kind of defined Matthew in two ways.

NARRATOR
Romaine Patterson

ROMAINE PATTERSON
There’s Matt who I knew and the good friend that I had, and then there’s Matthew Shepard. And Matthew Shepard is very different from Matt. Matthew Shepard is this iconic hate crime that has happened in our history, and Matthew Shepard is not necessarily about Matt, it’s about a community’s reaction, it is about the media that followed, it is about the crime, but it’s not about Matt. And that was a distinction that I had to make, making my way through this storm over the years, so that I could hold on to who Matt was to me personally, but also to recognize the importance of Matthew Shepard, and that story, and how it was told and will continue to be told throughout the years.

END OF PLAY