

Responses for Tom Hier
(2nd Generation Washingtonian)

Questions for AOI Project 160 Self-Interview
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Childhood

What is your full name? Why did your parents pick that name?

- Thomas Charles Hier
- I am named after my Uncle Tommy (father's brother) and my Uncle Charlie (my maternal grandfather's brother).

Do you have brothers & sisters?

- I have one brother – Ronald Thomas Hier.

When and where were you born? How did your family come to live in DC?

- I was born at Doctor's Hospital in downtown DC.
- My grandparents on both sides emigrated from Lebanon (then part of Greater Syria) around 1905. I don't know exactly why they settled in DC, but there was a whole community from the northern part of Lebanon (the Tripoli El-Mina area) that came together and settled in DC, right around Maryland Avenue in Northeast, DC.

What is your earliest memory?

- Although I was born and have lived most of my life DC, we lived in Cleveland, OH for a short time when I was between 3 and 5 years old. My earliest memory is sitting in our apartment in Cleveland with my mother watching the funeral of John F. Kennedy. (I would have been 5 years old.) I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I remember my mother crying while she was watching TV.

Describe what your siblings were like. Who were you closest to?

- I have only one brother, and we were not close as children – he is four years older than I. As typical of brothers, we fought a lot, but he was much stronger than me and used to enjoy beating me up. I, on the other hand, used to delight in tattling on him to my mother, as he was a bit of a hellion, and I was a “good boy.” Thankfully, we get along well as adults.

Describe the house you grew up in. Describe your room.

- My uncle built my parents’ house in 1958, the year I was born. It was a fairly large split-level house in the North Portal Estates area of Washington, DC. He also built an identical house next door for my grandmother (his mother) and four of her children who never married. So we had a bit of a compound between the two houses – always eating together, spending time together, etc.
- Even though we had four bedrooms in our house, I shared a bedroom with my brother. We had twin beds, twin dressers, and two large closets in the bedroom. It was not a typical kid’s bedroom in that my mother would not let us put things on the walls or mess up the room. We had to make our beds every day and the room always had to look clean – no clothes lying around, toys out, etc.

Describe your neighborhood.

- Our neighborhood was an interesting one, and I know a fair bit about it because I have been helping another neighbor who is writing a history of the North Portal Estates neighborhood.
- In the early 1900s, the neighborhood was quite rural and had some very large, stately homes, and a lot of vacant land. Residents tended to be white and Christian (what we might call WASPs). There were deed restrictions that prohibited Jews, Blacks, Syrians, Armenians and others from living there.
- In the 1950s, the neighborhood began to change, as Jewish families started moving in. By the time we built our house in 1958, the neighborhood was almost all Jewish except for our Lebanese families. It remained primarily Jewish until the mid-1960s, when we had the first Black family move in.

- After that, most of the Jewish families moved to Maryland, and the neighborhood became a primarily Black upper-middle-class neighborhood. We stayed, and in fact, my mother lived in our house until she passed away in 2014.

Where did you shop? How far away were these shops and how did you get there?

- We bought groceries at the Giant at Blair Park Shopping Center, right near the intersection of 16th Street, Colesville Road and East-West Highway.
- We also shopped at the shopping district in Silver Spring. When I was old enough to venture out on my own, I used to walk from our house through the neighborhood, and up Colesville Road to the Silver Theater in Silver Spring. There was a frozen custard store along the way (Reindeer Frozen Custard) and I would typically stop there on the way to and from the movie theater for a dessert treat.
- Where the Silver Spring Metro station is now, there used to be a small stone overpass for the pre-Metro trains that passed through, and sometimes I and my friends would climb up onto the overpass and play on the train tracks. (Not the smartest thing for sure, but that's what kids do.)
- In Silver Spring, the main shopping venue was the Hecht Company. There was also a Park&Shop at the intersection of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue. The corner store started out as a Castleberg's Jeweler, and there was also a Drug Fair store there. (Drug Fair was owned by someone in our neighborhood.)
- Across the street, where there is now a high-rise office building there was a 1950s International Style building housing Hahn's Shoe Store, where my mom bought all my shoes.

What were your duties around the house as a child? What were the other children's duties? How did duties break down by gender?

- We had a full-time maid, so I did not have a lot of chores around the house. We had to make our beds each day, and each evening, my brother and I would take turns drying dishes and sweeping the kitchen floor after dinner.
- In later years, I suggested to my family that rather than pay a gardener to cut our lawn and tend to the yard, they should buy me a lawnmower and I would do the work. They did, and I regretted it for many years, as the grass grew relentlessly, and I had to cut both our lawn and my grandmother's lawn next door.

What did you do for fun when you were young? Did you have a favorite toy?

- We had a neighborhood full of young kids and we played lots of outdoor games in the summer – primarily dodge ball or kick ball.
- I had a mini-bike when I was about 12 or 13 years old. You were not allowed to ride it on the street, but our street was very quiet and another friend who also had a mini-bike and I would ride the streets. We also lived next to Rock Creek Park and would ride in the park as well.

What chores did you have? Which chore was worst?

- Cutting grass and raking leaves were by far the worst chores. We had woods in the back of our house, and also had Rock Creek Park one street away, so we always had mounds of leaves.

Did your family attend church? How did religion affect your family? What do you believe now?

- We went to church religiously (pun-intended) just about every week. My family is Antiochian Orthodox Christian (a branch of Eastern Orthodoxy, like Greek Orthodox), and church is a very important element of Orthodox families, both for religion and for community.
- Growing up, our church was comprised primarily of Lebanese families who had emigrated with my family from Lebanon, and our social life

revolved very strongly around the church. I was president of our national church youth group when I was seventeen, and I am still friends with a variety of folks from different Antiochian churches around the nation to this day.

- I'm not sure I was ever religious, but church was very important to me culturally and for the community it provided. I am definitely not religious as an adult.

Where did you go to school? What was it like?

- I went to Alexander R. Shepherd Elementary School at 14th and Kalmia Roads, NW, and then to Alice Deal Junior High School, and Wilson High School (now called Jackson-Reed High School). I loved school and I loved learning. In the early years DC still had "tracking" where they grouped kids of similar abilities or perhaps intelligence levels (however they decided that) together. I was always in the highest level and had some great friends who were smart and creative.

Was there a graduation ceremony?

- We had a graduation ceremony from Wilson High School. (I was valedictorian and gave a very lame valedictory speech!) I don't recall whether we had graduation ceremonies from elementary or junior high school.

What were your favorite subjects in school and why?

- Math and music were always my favorite subjects. I loved all types of math – Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus, etc. They were puzzles that I had to solve, and I enjoyed that.
- I started piano lessons when I was in third grade, which is also when I began singing choral music. As a third-grader, I was one of three kids from Shepherd Elementary School who was selected to participate in the All-City-Choral Music Festival, which was held at Constitution Hall. (The Kennedy Center did not exist back then.) I continued participation in choral music through college.

Who were your favorite teachers and why?

- Hands-down my all-time favorite teacher was Dr. L. Jeanette Wells. She was the choral music teacher at Wilson High School, and was also a professor at Catholic University. She believed that everyone could be taught to sing, to sight-read, and to be at least a decent musician.
- She had a Chamber Choir (25 students by audition only) and a Concert Choir (held at 8am before school officially began, where we had over 100 students). I was in both for all three years of high school, and we did some amazing concerts. She taught me so much more than music though – she inspired discipline, dedication, curiosity, creativity, etc., etc. To this day, those of us who were lucky enough to have studied with her still talk about her and how she inspired us in many ways in our lives.

Who were your friends and what did you do when you got together?

- My best friend in elementary school was a kid who lived down the street – Greg Shinberg. We spent a lot of time together – weekend activities, sleep overs. Oftentimes, I would go out to dinner with his family on Sunday evenings, when their housekeeper had the day off. Typically we went to Kushner's, which was in Silver Spring or Wheaton, as I recall.

Did you have any hobbies?

I had several hobbies. I started piano lessons in the third grade, and was also actively involved in a variety of musical activities. In third grade, I was one of three children from my elementary school – Alexander R. Shepherd Elementary School at 14th and Kalmia Roads, NW – selected to participate in the All-City Choral Music Festival, which was held at DAR Constitution Hall. The director of the whole program was a music teacher named Hortense P. Taylor. We sang three songs during our performance at Constitution Hall. I remember the names of two of the songs – The Ash Grove, and Tamale Joe.

Favorite stories? Favorite games or make-believe? Favorite toys?

We had a few new houses built in the neighborhood when I was growing up. There were three directly behind our house – overlooking Rock Creek Park. One of the three had an indoor pool and while the house was being

constructed, we used to go inside and play around the pool area. We hung a rope from the second floor, and used to swing over the pool – probably not the smartest thing to do, but fun for kids.

Another house at the end of the street also was being constructed with an indoor pool. (What is it with indoor pools??) Before house construction started, it was an empty lot and we played baseball there. One day, someone hit the ball hard and it went through the window of the adjacent house, which was owned by Bernard and Idele Goldstein. Mrs. Goldstein was furious with us and scared the heck out of us with her yelling. Bernie was the head of the Washington Beef Company, and later Bernie and Idele opened a high-end butcher shop in fancy malls. The shop was called La Boucherie Bernard. Eventually they moved to Western Avenue (Maryland side), and Bernie was later indicted for embezzlement and ended up in prison, to the best of my knowledge.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a doctor, simply because I didn't know any better. My family was an immigrant family, and like many immigrant families, were strivers, so they wanted their kids to "do better than we did." Since I was good in school, they just assumed I should be a doctor. (Later, my first biology class at Brown University disabused me of the notion that I had any interest in being a doctor!)

**What were the different groups at your school? Which did you belong to?
How do you think you were perceived by others?**

When I was very young, our elementary school was primarily comprised of Jewish kids in the neighborhood (except for me and a few others). By about third grade or so, as our neighborhood began having Black families move in, the school became more integrated. I don't recall at the time taking any particular note of the change in demographics. The first girl I had a crush on, Ann Pogue, was a very light-skinned Black girl. Her father was a dentist, and I can't recall whether her mother worked. What I do recall was that Ann's mother was beautiful, and Ann was very attractive as well. After elementary school, Ann went to private school and we lost touch. Until...many years later we both ended up at the Wharton School for Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

Were you involved in any extracurricular activities? What were they?

I was always involved in musical activities. As noted above, I sang in the All-City-Choral Music Festival at Constitution Hall. I was in plays in elementary school and junior high and high school. In high school, I was also the president of our Student Council for one year.

What were your plans when you finished school? Education? Work?

- After graduation, I went to Brown University and, after a few years working, got my MBA at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.
- My first job out of college was rather unplanned. I had done well in my major, Economics, at Brown and one of my Economics professors, who was also a board member of the Federal Reserve, asked me if I would like to work as a research assistant at The Brookings Institution. It sounded interesting to me, and it meant I didn't have to look for a job directly out of college, so I said yes. I ended up being the research assistant for Charles Schultze (the economist, not the cartoonist). Dr. Schultze had been the chairman of the Economic Council under President Carter and was just finishing his term. So I was assigned to him when he returned from public service.

Did you have jobs during your teenage years? Doing what?

The only job I had as a teenager was as a paper boy. I had a paper route with the Daily News (I think that was the name), an evening paper that competed with The Evening Star. I had 22 houses on my route, and I really didn't like the job. I think I lasted about one month before I quit.

At what age did you begin dating? What kinds of activities did you do on dates? Describe your first date.

I didn't really date much at all growing up. My first real girlfriend was in high school, for a few months. I can't recall that we ever actually went out on a date. In college, I didn't date anyone until senior year, and then I had a girlfriend for about four months toward the end of the school year. At this time, I was also dealing with the idea that I was actually gay, or at least

bisexual. After college, I had another girlfriend for about a year before I finally acknowledged that I was actually gay. At that point I dated a few guys, before eventually meeting the man who would become my spouse.

What books did you read? What music did you listen to? What sports did you play? What hobbies did you have?

I was an avid reader growing up. We had a program in elementary school where you could order books and they would be delivered to your classroom. I used to order at least 5 or 6 books at a time. (If memory serves, they were about 25 or 50 cents per book.) My favorite books were about a boy detective named Encyclopedia Brown. I also read mysteries and wide range of other stuff. Perhaps my all-time favorite book as a child was *Harriet the Spy*, by Louise Fitzhugh. It's about a girl who observes the world around her, including her friends, and writes everything down in her spy notebook. One day, someone in the class finds the notebook and shows everyone what Harriet has written about them. She is ostracized, and the book is about how she deals with it, how she wins back her best friends, and generally how to deal with difficult times in life.

Relatives

What are your parents' and grandparents' names?

Parents: Evelyn Mary Kogok Hier and Harry Henry Hier

Maternal Grandparents: Hannah Barrick Kogok and Anthony Kogok

Paternal Grandparents: Sadie Haje Hier and Alexander (Iskander) Hier

How far back can you trace your family line? Who is the earliest relative you can identify?

I can trace my family back to a great-great grandfather on my mother's side and to a great-grandfather on my father's side. The great-great grandfather on my mother's side is the earliest relative whom I can identify, although the earliest relatives that I actually knew were my two grandmothers.

What was your mother's maiden name?

My mother's maiden name is Kogok. (Pronounced like Kojak from the TV show.)

What type of work did your parents do?

My father did a variety of things – mostly related to sales. He and my mom split up when I was very young, and he wasn't around much, so I don't know a whole lot about what he did in later years.

Before marriage and until my brother was born, my mom owned a beauty salon at 5th and H Street, NE. (Jo's Beauty Salon) After my brother was born, she stopped working, and never did paid work again after that, although she led a very busy life doing volunteer work for our church and other organizations.

Tell me a story about your mother/father that shows what kind of person they were.

My mother was a woman devoted to her family and her church. She was raised in a traditional Lebanese household, which meant to her that her main calling was to care for her family. At the same time, she was very strong-willed, confident, and self-assured. She would never have called herself a feminist, but she was blazing trails for women in our community long before it became fashionable to do so. She led the Ladies Auxiliary at our church for years, and became the first woman to serve on the church's Board of Trustees. She was also the trustee of a building fund that my family set up for the church, and went head-to-head against a rogue priest in a lawsuit related to that fund. She was warm, gracious, and cared deeply for her family and those less fortunate than her. But she did not suffer fools gladly. She never backed down in working with men in our church or our community and never doubted that she was their equal.

Where is family buried in DC?

All of my mother's family is buried at Glenwood Cemetery, near Catholic University. In fact, there is a large contingent of Lebanese people buried there. Not long ago I went there and photographed all of the headstones in the Lebanese section, and then entered the names, dates of birth and death of all the people on the headstones into a spreadsheet, so that I could track the evolution of our community in the DC area.

My father's family is buried at Ft. Lincoln Cemetery, on Bladensburg Road in Maryland.

What did your grandparents look like?

Both of my grandfathers died before I was born, so I have only seen pictures of them, and there are not many pictures. My grandmothers both looked much older than they probably were throughout most of my life – which was not unusual for immigrants from the Middle East. My maternal grandmother was short (unlike my mother), had a round face, and wore her salt-and-pepper hair in a bun. I used to joke that she looked a little like Golda Meir. My father’s mother had snow-white hair and also wore it in a bun. She was thinner, but also short. Both spoke Arabic as their native language, but were reasonably proficient in English. I called both of them “Tita” – the Arabic word for “grandmother.”

Did your grandparents tell you any special stories?

Unfortunately, they both died when I was just in my early teens, so I never really thought about asking them anything about their lives in Lebanon, or what it was like to come to America and set up a new life here. It’s one of the great regrets of my life.

Do you know anything about your great-grandparents?

I know their names, but not much else.

Can you talk about about any "black sheep" in the family?

I have a couple of uncles who I believe were involved in “less than honorable” activities. One had a bar and grill downtown and I’m told it was a place where men could meet women for “salacious” activities. The bar is even mentioned in a book called *Washington Confidential*. Another uncle I believe “ran numbers” as part of a group of men led by a man called Snaggs Lewis. (I believe that was his first name.)

Can you describe the personalities of your aunts and uncles?

My mom had seven brothers and a sister. My uncles were all very proud men, very patriotic. Almost all of them served in World War II and were part of that “Greatest Generation.” They loved America and all that it had given to them and our family. They were total gentlemen – treating women with great respect, honoring their mother and taking care of her throughout her life – really good role models for me. Because my father left when I was very young (and later died when I was 15), my uncles (who

lived next door to us) supported us financially and served as surrogate fathers to me.

My aunt, my mom's sister, had rheumatoid arthritis from a very early age and was not able to walk. Back then, in the 1960s, there was no concept of ADA or supporting people with handicaps. Rather, it was viewed as somewhat shameful that a member of the family was "crippled." So my aunt really spent most of her time at home. (She didn't even have a wheelchair, but preferred to stay in her room mostly.) As a young child, I was tasked with taking her meals to her, sitting with her to keep her company, watching TV with her, helping her in and out of bed, etc. I look back on this time both with fondness – as we became very close and she was an interesting person – and with sadness, thinking that if she were alive today, her world would have been so much bigger. I would have insisted on taking her out into the world. But she had loving family around her all of her life, and no one would have ever thought of sending her to an assisted living facility or anything like that.

My dad had one brother and two sisters. His brother died in World War II – not from combat but from a massive heart attack while overseas. (Lots of history of heart problems on my father's side.) One of my father's sisters lived in Cleveland after marrying a man there. He had a major construction company doing infrastructure around the state, and after he was killed on the job (he fell into a ditch and a piece of heavy equipment ran over him and decapitated him), we moved to Cleveland for a short amount of time to help my aunt with the business. She was very generous with my brother and me, and a couple of cousins, taking us to Italy twice. (She loved Italy and was very involved with the Catholic Church and with clergy high-up in the hierarchy. As a result, we got to have a private audience with the Pope when I was twelve.)

My father's other sister lived here in Maryland, and she was a warm, sweet individual. She had two children, one my age, and one close to my brother's age, and to this day the four of us are like brothers and sisters.

Who was your favorite family member and why?

Probably my Uncle Joe. He was the best blend of Old World and New World. He honored the traditions of being in a Lebanese family, but was able to emerge somewhat from some of the strictures to embrace change and have an open-mind about things in the world. As my world expanded – through friends and through going away to college – I encountered lots of new things that I could talk to him about that others in my family would not have been as receptive to, or perhaps not understood as well.

Did you or anyone close to you serve in a war? What do you remember of that experience?

As I mentioned above, almost all of my uncles, and my father, served in World War II. I don't know a lot about their service because they rarely talked about it. I do know that my father was injured very badly at Anzio, by a land mine. He was in the hospital for almost a year, while they rebuilt his leg and he had to learn to walk again. Fortunately, other than a massive scar, he did not show any lasting effects from that injury.

Were there any special family foods or recipes? Do you still make any traditional family foods?

Oh my goodness, that's a loaded question for a Lebanese person! Food is one of the most important things in Lebanese culture, and there are too many foods to mention that are traditional, amazing, delicious, and incredibly time-consuming to make. My mother and grandmother and all of the many aunties often cooked together at someone's house, and the feasts were amazing. Not only that, the stories they told while together served to memorialize important events in our family, and strengthened the bonds of our extended family. I learned to cook while watching all of them, and to this day, I preserve the traditions by cooking a wide range of Lebanese foods. While it is impossible to talk about all of the foods, I have always said that if I am dying tomorrow, then tonight I'm eating stuffed grape leaves (stuffed with lamb meat and rice) and kibbee (the national dish of Lebanon – raw lamb mixed with bulghur and spices)!

What activities did the family do together?

We gathered every Sunday after church for lunch at my grandmother's house. Often, relatives came by after church and we all hung out together

throughout the day and evening. In later years, as the grandmothers and aunties got older and often had medical appointments, they gathered at someone's house on Mondays after doctors' appointments, and spent the evening together. The women would cook during the day, the kids would be picked up and brought over after school, and the men would come after work.

What did you do on Christmas? Thanksgiving? Birthdays? Other holidays?

For holidays, we spent each day at a relative's house – sometimes our house, sometimes one grandmother, sometimes the other grandmother. We always had a least 15 people at the table, and had a mix of American and Lebanese food, both at Thanksgiving and Christmas. One of the businesses my family had was a liquor business, but very few in the family drank. We'd open a bottle of wine for the table at dinner, and with 15 or more people, the full bottle was rarely consumed.

Birthdays were smaller celebrations – my mom (or I) would make a cake, there would be some gifts and a nice dinner.

Are there any family letters, photos, recipes, or other heirlooms that have been handed down to you?

I have many, many photos from all different eras of my family's history. And I have all of my mother's recipes, and some from my grandmother – many in my mother's own hand. I have tried to codify them and type them up so that I have them electronically. They are worth gold to me.

As I get older, there is less and less that I want to accumulate, but I have kept one thing from my grandmother's house – a 1910 German grandfather clock that a clockmaker in the area told me is a very special item. He described it as "the iPhone of its day" – i.e., an amazing piece of technology.

Do you have any objects or photographs to share from your past? Do they have any documents, such as a birth certificate, marriage license, or old yearbook? Do you have a family tree?

I have a variety of documents – not very well-organized at this point. I have a number of deeds that are either in Arabic or Turkish from properties that my family owned in Lebanon. I have a few birth certificates from family members, including my own; a will written in Arabic from my grandfather; lots of my mom’s Middle Eastern jewelry. I created a family tree years ago in hard copy, and now have a family tree on line in Ancestry.com.

A d u l t h o o d

Did you come to DC as an adult? If so, what brought you here?

No, I was born here.

Where did/do you live in DC as an adult?

Growing up, we lived in the North Portal Estates area – at the very top of the city near Silver Spring, but still in DC. My bedroom overlooked Rock Creek Park. In later years, I lived in Dupont Circle (after college); Capitol Hill and 16th Street Heights (after graduate school); and finally in Chevy Chase, DC where I am now.

What was your first job?

I had a few temporary jobs during the summer while in college – first as a credit clerk at Wilkins Coffee Company. (My aunt worked there and got me the job.) Then for two summers I worked at Tourmobile as a tour guide. (Those were the buses that used to run in loops in the downtown area and in Arlington Cemetery.)

My first real job – after college – was as a research assistant at The Brookings Institution for two economists – Dr. Charles Schultz (who had just returned from the Carter Administration where he was the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors), and Dr. George Perry, who was a macroeconomist.

How did you choose your line of work?

I majored in Economics in college and after working at the Brookings Institution – post-college – and some other economics-related work, I decided I did not want to become an economist. So I went to business

school at Wharton and got an MBA in Finance. I worked for a couple of years at Price Waterhouse doing econometric modeling when Congress was considering reforming the tax code (1986 Tax Reform), and didn't want to keep doing that, so I interviewed around town a lot and found a position at a subsidiary of the law firm of Arnold & Porter. The subsidiary was doing real estate development for universities.

I worked there for about 10 years, and then decided that I wanted to do something slightly different for universities, so I started my own firm with a colleague, doing what we eventually called "resource and strategic planning for higher education." We developed that into a successful consulting practice, working with over 100 universities over several decades until I retired last year.

Did you serve in the military?

No.

Do you have a partner? How did you meet them?

Yes, I have a husband. We met through friends.

Where did you go on dates?

We didn't really go on dates. Mostly, I had him over to my house for dinner. (I like to cook, and he enjoyed the meals.)

How were you affected by large historical events (WWII, civil rights movement, 1960s counterculture)?

I was never really a "movement" person and growing up in a traditional Lebanese family, counterculture was not something that was viewed favorably. My friends in high school were more active in these events than I was. As an adult, however, I have been very involved in certain social justice causes, especially related to the Middle East.

Did you participate in, or do you have any memories of any of the movements that came out of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, such as the civil

rights movement, the women's liberation movement, or the gay liberation movement?

I remember the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. I was in fourth grade, and announcement came over the loud speaker mid-morning. We were told what happened and were told to leave school immediately. It was real chaos. I remember teachers giving us rides home. Later that day, my family learned that their businesses in Northeast DC had been completely looted and some of the structures were burned. In our neighborhood in residential North Portal Estates, we had MPs in jeeps patrolling up and down the streets.

I came of age as a gay man during the height of the AIDS crisis. We participated in marches, in viewings of the AIDS quilt, and other things like that. (At one of the marches, there were a whole range of groups represented. One sign I will never forget was the group who described themselves as “Native American Gay Statisticians” – can’t get much more granular than that!) We supported lots of events both in-person and financially over the years.

What is the greatest challenge you have faced?

Like most people, I’ve had a number of challenges throughout life, but I’m not sure I can really say that there was one “greatest” challenge. Two stand out for me, however. First, was coming out as gay to my mother. It was an incredibly difficult road to acceptance for her, and as we had always been close prior to my coming out, the rift that existed for a period of time was difficult to bear. It took almost a year for her to even begin to get comfortable with the idea of having a gay son, but she did ultimately come around. And, thankfully, she loved my partner, eventually calling him her “third son.”

Second, I will say that dealing with my mother’s dementia toward the end of her life was a great challenge because of the sadness and sorrow in watching her gradually slip away mentally and become a different person.

What has been the best day of your life so far?

A few “best days” –

- When I became the first person in my family to graduate from college, and then from graduate school – at two Ivy League institutions. (My mother was so proud!)
- When I met my life partner, who later became my husband.

Why live in DC?

Why not live in DC? As I've always said, in DC local news is national news. It's an exciting, exhilarating place to live. So many interesting and smart people come here from all walks of life, from all parts of the world. It's a place where you can have interesting conversations with people, where people care about what's happening in the world, where you can learn something new every day. And so many of the museums and cultural events are free! Who wouldn't want to live here? The only downside is the weather in the summer – humidity sucks and makes it an absolute misery to live here during summer months.

What's your favorite place in DC and why?

There are many beautiful and interesting places in DC to visit, hang out, enjoy. But as corny as it may sound, my favorite place in DC is my home. It is where we entertain family and friends, create community through dinners and other meals, have interesting conversations with friends old and new. Except when the weather is miserably hot, there's no place I'd rather spend time than in my home, cooking and feeding people, sitting in the backyard sipping drinks and eating good food, talking about world events or life's great experiences and / or challenges, etc.

How has DC changed since you've lived here?

In so many ways....

- As mentioned earlier, growing up, I would walk from my house to the movie theater in Silver Spring. I walked past a stone bridge in Silver Spring where the Silver Spring Metro Complex is now. I passed a Reindeer Frozen Custard store on the way to and from the theater, and would stop each way for a cone. Silver Spring today is barely recognizable from the place where I grew up.
- The Metro has been one of the best things that has happened to DC, but (or and) it changed so much about the city. Any neighborhoods close by

became enormously expensive to live in. Urban life sprung up around almost every Metro stop. All of this has made for a much more interesting city, but some of the neighborhoods that existed prior to Metro are vastly different than they used to be.

- There are few local stores in the city anymore. Everything has become a chain – making for a much less interesting shopping experience. No more Hecht Company, Woodward and Lothrop's, Jelleff's, Kanns, Britches of Georgetown, etc.
- There was some sense, when I was growing up, that while not everyone was “from here”, many people had lived here for a few generations. The city feels far more transient now – people coming and going all the time; very few people staying for the long-haul.
- The political divides that exist today did not, to my recollection, exist growing up. I don't recall being focused on whether someone was a Democrat or a Republican, and I certainly don't have any notion that who you socialized with depended on your party affiliation. There was room for civil discourse among people of different political beliefs. That seems a rather quaint oddity in today's politically-charged world filled with animus toward opposing political views.
- We used to be at least a two or three newspaper town – *The Washington Post* in the morning, and *The Evening Star* and *The Daily News* in the evening. Now we barely have a *Washington Post* – just this past week it went from individual sections for each topic to basically two sections combining a variety of topics. Who knows...before too long, the hard copy version many go away completely.
- I could go on, but you get the point.

What were the biggest challenges living in DC growing up or as an adult and what are they now?

Among the big challenges were the racial divides that our city experienced in the 1960s. I went to Alice Deal Junior High School and Woodrow Wilson High School when they were integrated by busing students from all over the city. There were definitely racial tensions, but more realistically, the tensions were more reflective of different economic circumstances than racial categories. Nonetheless, we all survived, and being in a school with those kinds of tensions helped to sensitize me to how different lives of some of the students were from my own, and how important it was to be

open to understanding different people's life circumstances. In college, I was much better prepared for being in an environment with a great diversity of populations than many of my peers who had come from monocultural experiences in schools, say, in the Midwest or other parts of the country where there was little diversity.

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[Ed.] If you have any questions regarding submission or technical issues, please email us at: aoiofdc@gmail.com.