

UC Davis Presentation: Reflections on Matthew Shepard

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Thank you, Carol, and good afternoon. I appreciate that very generous introduction.

It's good to be back. I spent many years on this campus and in this town. The changes—just since 1991—have been remarkable. In fact, Tom Dutton, after whom your new Student Services Building was recently named, gave me my start in administration. And gee, now Tom's a building!

And it is good to see many of my old friends here today. Since I've been gone for nine years, I know some came just to see if I was as good looking as I was when I left.

Well, now you know.

Others might be here for revenge. Yes, the truth can now be told: I was the chairman of the Social Science Building Committee. In my own defense, I was the guy who went into then-Chancellor Hullar's office and said that the design we were being asked to accept wouldn't work. Here's an important lesson from

administration—when a 5’9” associate vice chancellor goes up against a 6’4” chancellor, the little guy loses.

When I received the call asking me to speak about the Matthew Shepard tragedy, I’ll confess that I initially rejected the idea. This was one of the most painful episodes in my life, both personally and professionally. Indeed, other than the death of my parents, I cannot recall anything that made me so profoundly sad over such a long period of time. Why would I want to relive it?

A more sober second moment caused me to rethink that impulse and decide to come here today. Reflection is not something that most university presidents have time for, so the occasion today forced me to think about what happened, why it happened, how we reacted as an institution and as a community, and what we learned from it all—and most especially what we learned about ourselves.

At a personal level, it has also caused me to think about what it means to be a leader—and to realize the importance of leadership as any community attempts to deal with a tragedy of this magnitude.

I should say, at the outset, that one could approach this at several levels.

It was, of course, first and foremost, a family tragedy for Matt's parents, Judy and Dennis Shepard, and his brother, Logan.

It was a University crisis as we struggled to obtain information, manage the media, and support our faculty, staff, and students who were traumatized by the event.

And it was a community awakening that a hate crime, as this one most surely was, can happen anywhere at any time. Our work to make our society more accepting of difference must continue—not just in Laramie and in Wyoming, but everywhere, in Davis, in San Francisco, in New York.

I'm going to only have about an hour here (and I want to leave some time for questions). I'm sure there are things I will leave out. But I want to share with you what I learned and also, if I can, to take you back to those days to see whether you can feel what we felt. To do that, I'll be using some media to assist me, and I hope you'll indulge my interrupting myself with a little technology now and then to illustrate a point or two

Let me begin with the context in which this tragedy unfolded.

Wyoming is the nation's least populated state, with 475,000 residents spread across 90,000 square miles. You can do the math and see that the state's character is overwhelmingly rural. Laramie is a small city with a population of about 27,000, including the University of Wyoming's 11,300 students. Indeed, in the fall, when we play football, our stadium holds enough fans so that, for those brief couple of hours, the University stadium is the state's third largest city.

It is fair to describe Wyoming as a conservative state. But notwithstanding what you think you know about it, it is not populated by a bunch of pistol-packing rednecks. Now, to be sure,

we do lead the nation in pick-up trucks per capita. But it is not the kind of macho, close-minded, bigoted, and homophobic place that you may have assumed or come to believe as a result of the media coverage.

Indeed, because of the presence of the University, Laramie is by far the state's most cosmopolitan and politically liberal community. But even beyond Laramie, you will find wonderful communities of good and decent folk; not terribly religious, but fundamentalist in their belief that a person's word is their bond and a handshake is as binding as a contract; and, to a large extent, citizens ^{who} ~~that~~ are fiercely independent and believe that most people deserve to be left alone to live their lives as they see fit. There truly is a "live and let live attitude" in Wyoming that I've not encountered elsewhere, even here in California. → *where I grew up.*

Sodomy statutes (which, by the way, still exist in 18 states) were eliminated in Wyoming by the legislature in 1977, just a year after California. I should point out that Wyoming also was the first state to grant women the vote; the first to allow women to own property; the first to elect a female governor; ratified the Equal Rights Amendment in 1973; and Wyoming has repeatedly rejected

anti-abortion initiatives. Indeed, the 1998 party platform of the state's Republican Party, which dominates the state, contains none of the boilerplate anti-gay initiatives or rhetoric found elsewhere. Although issues relating to gender equality still persist—as they do elsewhere—Wyoming's motto as “the Equality State” had some basis in its history.

I say this not to be Wyoming's apologist, but simply to tell you that much of the national commentary about the Shepard case ^{was} ~~were~~ made by people with a poor understanding of the State's history, its culture, or the reality of living there.

It is also fair to say that Wyoming, the University, and the community are not diverse. We have small numbers of ethnic minorities, with Hispanics and Native Americans being by far the most numerous. And our population of citizens who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered is certainly not a visible population.

It is fair to say that the reality of life in a rural area is different than life in a city, and this appears to be especially true for the gay and lesbian population. In a city, it is possible to be

lost in the crowd. In Wyoming, it's hard to find a crowd! So, in a place like Wyoming, your choice is pretty stark—you are either “out” or you're “in the closet.” It's hard to be both. So, to a large extent, the perspectives of individual gays or lesbians about how safe it is in Laramie and in Wyoming is a product of their own personal experiences.

Ironically, Matt Shepard returned to Laramie from Denver to attend college because he perceived it to be a safe place for him, notwithstanding the fact that he was “out” and a member of our lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered student organization (called LGBTA). His parents had attended UW; he had spent many days in Laramie attending cultural events and football games; Matt Shepard loved Laramie and considered it safe.

And, although the University's support of gay and lesbian faculty, staff, and students might be criticized in some areas, overall the record was pretty solid:

- The University has officially recognized gay/lesbian/bisexual student organizations for more than 20 years.

- We had had regular Safe Zone training sessions designed to raise faculty, staff, and student awareness of gay issues and concerns underway for at least three years before the murder of Matt Shepard.
- We had in place an anti-harassment statement in place, adopted in 1990, that included sexual orientation among the list of personal characteristics like race or religion which would not be tolerated on our campus as a basis for discrimination or harassment.
- Since 1991, the curriculum of our required introductory course for freshmen included a component devoted to the value of diversity, and our Minority Affairs Office had been offering campus diversity programs since 1990.

This is not to say that Wyoming or the University was perfect. As most of you know, at the time of the tragedy and still today, Wyoming has no hate crime statute. And the University, at least at the time of the tragedy, had not extended its anti-harassment policy into the core of its regulations relating to equal opportunity. I'll talk some about how we remedied this later.

For me, the events began with a casual conversation with my Vice President for Student Affairs who caught me running across campus on a Thursday morning in October¹⁹⁹⁸. He told me that a one of our students was in the hospital down in Ft. Collins about an hour to the south. He appeared to have been the victim of an assault and probably would not survive. As with all such student matters, I appreciate being informed, but I rely heavily upon our very qualified staff to follow-up with the parents, the student's instructors, and so forth.

When one of our campus police lieutenants showed up at my office later that afternoon, ^{it got my attention.} ~~I gave it more thought.~~ He said that not only was the victim, Matthew Shepard, a UW student, but there was a possibility that the others involved were students too. We learned that one of the young women accused as an accessory after the fact was also our student, Chastity Pasley. The two men accused of the attack, Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, were not UW students and never had been, nor had the second young woman, Kristen Price, also accused as an accessory after the fact.

We found out that Matt had only enrolled as a student for the first time in September—and we were barely a month into the semester. We quickly learned that he was a member of the LGBTA. The bells didn't go off immediately for me but my Vice President, Jim Hurst, is a man of uncommon perception. "Phil," he said, "if this assault was a gay bashing and if Matt Shepard does not survive, this will become the University of Wyoming's Kent State."

By Friday morning, the newspaper stories were out—and the lead article by the Denver Post erroneously reported that both the victim and all those accused were University of Wyoming students. This information appears to have come from a back-shop employee of our campus student newspaper; the Denver Post never called anyone in an official position to check ^{nor did our student newspaper} ✓. But the damage was done, and the Associated Press put out that story on the national wire to be repeated and retold endless times over the next few days. Of course, the fact that it wasn't true never got the same amount of attention.

This was the beginning of the longest two weeks of my life. I've been in University administration long enough to know one

thing. If good things happen at a University, it is due to the hard work and dedication of individual faculty, staff, and students. If bad things happen, the institution is responsible—at least in the eyes of the public and the news media. What had the University done—or not done—we were asked, to foster in young people—our students—such hatred and violence toward another?

By that afternoon, we had assembled our Crisis Intervention Team which is a standing body on our campus. In this case, we added a couple of folks from the community, including the mayor and the city manager, to make sure we all had the same information and were distributing it effectively. And we added a couple of folks from the LGBTQA and from Matt's church to make sure we provided appropriate support for Matt and his family.

By Friday afternoon, I had arranged to be on the steps of our county courthouse to address the media. At this point, while it was clear that Matthew was gay, it was not at all clear that the crime had any hate-related elements to it. The facts were simply not known. As a result, my statement at that point reflected our concern for Matt and his family.

That statement and our accompanying press release taught me **Lesson #1:** There is a tremendous disconnect between what the public thinks are the facts—in this case, that both the victim and all of the perpetrators were UW students—and what really are the facts. As a result, I immediately began getting email that my statement was completely inadequate, that I should have, at a minimum, suspended the accused students, and take immediate steps to correct the environment at the University that fostered this horrendous crime. “How can President Dubois sleep tonight,” wrote one individual, “knowing that his leadership has resulted in the loss of a young mind, crushed beyond the ability to even sustain breathing at this time?.”

Saturday, as it turned out, was Homecoming at the University—and we had a full set of events planned for that weekend, including those associated with honoring distinguished alums. I met with the Crisis Management Team, and we determined that, while we shouldn’t cancel Homecoming, we would do everything we could to acknowledge what was going on around us. It was also clear that because so many people had come to town for various events, I had to stay in town. But I dispatched my Vice President for Student Affairs to Fort Collins to deliver a

personal note to Matt's parents to let them know of our concern and our availability to help in any way that we could.

This was **Lesson #2:** In a crisis, it is easy to get diverted by concerns over managing the media. It's important to keep your eye on the ball—and that, first and foremost, is a concern with helping the victim and his family (if you can). There were a number of decisions made throughout this crisis where we asked ourselves, “What is best for the family?” This provided a much better set of answers than if we had been asking the question, “How do we best spin this to the advantage of the University?”

By Saturday morning, it was clear that a massive outpouring of protest was beginning to develop. And it was lead largely by our students—and especially by our minority students through our Multicultural Resource Center. Students in the MRC came up with the idea of wearing yellow armbands with green circles—the yellow symbolizing anti-violence as was the case after the Oklahoma City bombing and the green circle as the international symbol of peace.

And they went into mass production of these armbands, even going so far as to getting the local Wal-Mart and K-Mart to donate all the yellow fabric they had, and to cut it to armband size at no cost. The elected leadership of the Associated Student government joined the effort and pretty soon it was in full swing. In a couple of my clips this morning, you'll see some of this activity.

Those armbands made their first appearance on Saturday morning at the Homecoming Parade and on a large banner that lead a spontaneous mini-parade that tagged onto the end of the regular parade lead. Even the University Trustees who were in the parade were wearing armbands. Here's a clip to give you some feel for that event:

INSERT TAPE SEGMENT 1 HERE

The parade demonstration had a tremendous catalytic effect.

- Our fraternities and sororities mobilized to help ~~the MRC~~ make armbands and to raise money for the fund that had been set up in Ft. Collins for Matt Shepard.

- The athletic teams, from the football team to the women's volleyball team, voluntarily voted to put the yellow and green symbol on their helmets or on their uniforms.
- Banners were prepared that draped down the front of the student union and from residence hall windows—as you saw in the clip, townspeople also made banners expressing their values and denouncing hatred and violence.
- I ordered a moment of silence at the football game that afternoon. You could have heard a pin drop except for the sounds of people crying. The same sort of thing happened at the traditional Homecoming Sing.

On Sunday, Matthew's condition was just about the same and it looked hopeless, so there was quite a bit of discussion about whether he would be removed from life support by his parents. A candlelight vigil was then organized by Matt's Church, the campus Catholic Newman Center, and I was asked to speak.

I'm going to show you a clip of this, but I'll draw your attention to a couple of things. First, the importance of the candles as an ongoing symbol that, in many ways, carries through the end of the story I'll tell you today. You'll also notice that the members of my family—my wife, Lisa, and our three children—are in front of the podium when I am speaking. This turned out in ways that I could not have imagined to be extraordinarily important to the people who were there—that we were speaking as a family to reject violence, hatred, and prejudice. And frankly, the main reason they were there was that Lisa and I wanted our two sons and our daughter to understand these issues—this was one of those teachable moments that we agreed we needed our children to grasp.

As you'll see in this tape excerpt, the community never perceived that this “a gay issue.” It was “a human issue” affecting all of us. This observation is made by Jim Osborne who, at that time, was the student head of the LGBTA. Although Jim was definitely “out” as a gay man, he had no idea how his position would place him in a position of real leadership in our community.

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At about 1 a.m. on the morning following this vigil, Matt Shepard died. At about 3 a.m., my phone rang. It was a reporter with CBS Radio in New York who wanted to know my reaction to Matt's death. I had not heard, so it took a moment for this very sad news to sink in. He said that he appreciated the early hour—but that but he needed a quote to play on the morning commute show in New York.

That should have been a tip off to me that things were going to go nuts, and they did. (And yes, by the way, after I took a shower and cleared my head, I gave him the quote he needed. Having already learned Lesson~~s~~ 1 ~~and 2~~, I knew that I had to seize every opportunity to tell our story to anyone willing to listen).

Here's a clip of the national evening news that night (with Tom Brokaw), followed by a bit of black space and then a second clip about the reaction on campus:

INSERT TAPE SEGMENTS 3 and 4 HERE

These were probably the fairest and most objective reports we would see from that point on. As Tom Brokaw mentioned just at the end of that segment, there were over 8,800 hate crimes reported in America each year, but for some reason this one was different.

When you think about the icon-like images that were cast across the nation those first few days—the buck fence on a barren plain, the vulnerable and gay young man who was just over 5 feet tall and a hundred pounds, the popular mystique of what life in rural America and especially in the state nicknamed “the Cowboy State” is like, the fact that Wyoming had failed to pass hate crimes legislation—those conditions combined to create the proverbial media circus.

I should note that we have one small town newspaper in Laramie much like the Enterprise here, with the major TV news coming out of Denver about 2.5 hours away. In this kind of a low key media environment, I am sure you can appreciate that the town was in a bit of a shock as we watched ten network satellite trucks roll into town and park across the street from the Albany County Courthouse in Laramie. By the time this was over, I had done two

gigs for CNN and two for Court TV, not to mention NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX, and all the rest. Members of my staff also did interviews with media in England and New Zealand.

I don't think there is any question that the media coverage made us defensive as a community. To a significant extent, the media's representations of Laramie and Wyoming were a function of reductive stereotyping based upon the preconceptions of people who had never been there. This kind of reductive stereotyping, where there was an attempt either to homogenize the people of Laramie or Wyoming or to offer up simplistic explanations of the murder, were among the most frustrating parts of the experience. Obviously, some very important truths get lost in this process. Little was said about the coming together of a community around the very thought that ~~he~~^{Matt} might have been attacked because of his sexual orientation.

Of course, TV and radio were not the entire media story. The Internet had been born, and this produced **Lesson #3** of the tragedy. Email and modern communications have changed completely how any institution might react under similar circumstances. The opportunity for email to be used directly to

contact not just the public relations folks at the University, but all of my faculty and staff, and myself personally allowed individuals who did not have any conception of what we were going through to deliver repeated blows right to our collective gut. Take, for example, one message that came to me the next day:

“You and the straight people of Laramie and Wyoming are guilty of the death of Matthew Shepard just as the Germans who looked the other way are guilty of the deaths of their Jewish, Gypsy, and homosexual neighbors during the Holocaust. Unless and until the people of Laramie and Wyoming repent the sin of homophobia, your city and your state are no different than Auschwitz, no different than the killing fields of Cambodia. You have taught your children to hate their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. Unless and until you acknowledge that Matthew Shepard’s death is not just a random occurrence, not just the work of a couple of random crazies, you have his blood on your hands . . . Shame on you, President Dubois. Shame on Laramie. Shame on Wyoming.”

Fortunately, there were some positive personal emails too. One of the emails I received was from one of my former student research assistants here at UC Davis who revealed to me that he

had been “in the closet” during his time at Davis but since had “come out” and was living with his partner in Southern California! He wrote to express his horror, but also to say he knew I was a good guy.

And, of course, some folks did use the traditional communication devices. One of my favorite singers, Madonna, called my office and ragged on my secretary for forty minutes about what a horrible place Wyoming was, what an irresponsible University we were, and how I must be the worst leader ever placed at the head of an educational institution.

Following upon the media were, of course, all of the things that go with it. Magazine writers, playwrights, documentary film makers followed soon after. And they were fed along the way by folks seeking to build a sociological theory that the community had killed Matt Shepard, rather than individuals.

Now, let me say, at the outset, that I do share the view that how our society views difference and diversity does have an impact on individuals and can contribute to the development of

attitudes in some individuals that could be played out in acts like those that led to Matt's death.

But most thinking people seem to understand that what causes deviant human behavior is a pretty complicated question. What we got in Laramie was the tendency of the media—and maybe our larger society—to want to find as rapidly as possible a simple explanation for the unexplainable.

One of the weirdest of these was based upon one author's weeklong experience hanging around the downtown bars looking to capture the essence of Laramie and find out what could have caused this tragedy. Naturally, in any town, if you look around enough, you're bound to run into the village idiot.

Many of the news media also made a big deal out of the fact that Laramie has no gay bars. Well, we don't have any shopping malls either! This is probably as much a function more of our small size and the economic realities than anything else. Most retail establishments, especially bars and restaurants, have a hard time staying in business. In this respect, it is probably like the vast

majority of the communities in this country, particularly those in rural settings.

Perhaps in reaction to all this media pressure, we learned **Lesson #4.** We became part of the tendency to feed “either-or” characterizations of Laramie and Wyoming. While the media was portraying Wyoming as a primitive backwards place populated by a bunch of rednecks "with gun racks on pick-up trucks," we fell into the trap of saying “this can’t happen here” or “Wyoming is just like the rest of America, no worse and probably a little bit better.” The fact was that such crimes can and do happen every day—they happen in Laramie, they can happen in Davis, they can happen anywhere.

The media coverage only heightened as we approached the day of Matthew’s funeral, held in Casper. Enter stage far right—the Reverend Fred Phelps from Kansas' Westboro Baptist Church, dedicated principally to convincing the world that homosexuality is a perverse lifestyle choice from which individuals can be liberated if they will follow the scriptures. Phelps’ Internet address: godhatesfags.com gives you an idea of what this gentlemen is about.

This next clip gives you a sense of this. Don't confuse this with a soap opera—this is what happened! I had never before been to a funeral where we had protesters. This clip also shows you Matt's parents, Dennis and Judy Shepard, two people who have come to be close friends and who, throughout this tragedy, were pillars of dignity.

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As you saw from that excerpt, people like Phelps feed off the anger of others. This fact shaped our response to him when he appeared on campus the following year (and I'll show you a bit of that later).

Because the funeral was in Casper (about 2 ½ hours from Laramie), we decided that it would be important to hold a community memorial service on campus. During all of the following week, our faculty had been leading teach-ins on campus to address issues of prejudice, violence, and sexuality.

I should say that the idea for this approach really came from my student experience here at Davis where, during the bombing of Cambodia, teach-ins were held on the Quad, and from my experience as a faculty member and administrator where we organized teach-ins at the time of the Gulf War.

As an educational institution, we had an obligation to take the Matthew Shepard tragedy and to use it as a teachable moment to help students understand what had happened and why. And that was **Lesson #5**. As horrible as this tragedy was, the University was in a unique position to help people learn from the experience—and our faculty was simply spectacular in stepping up and organizing those opportunities.

You'll notice in this clip some comments from me about "closure." It is important to distinguish between bringing closure to the personal tragedy—the death of Matthew—and the larger issues with respect to diversity, acceptance, and non-violence. We needed to bring closure to the personal tragedy, to move beyond the grief, ~~to heal~~. At the same time, we needed to find a way to exploit the moment—if you'll pardon the term—to take our students and our community to a new level of understanding.

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As you heard from the tape excerpt, it was as part of this memorial service that I called for Wyoming to enact hate crimes legislation. I tried to indicate that this was my personal view and not an institutional view of the University or its Trustees. To me, no hate crime law would have prevented this crime and no punishment provided by such a law would be greater than the death penalty to which Henderson and McKinney might be subjected. But our laws reflect our values; and it was time for Wyoming to state clearly that this act, this murder, this crime of humiliation, was not acceptable to us. It did violence to our state motto—"the Equality State"—not to recognize in our written law that we had a collective zero tolerance for hatred.

Well, this became the front-page headline the next day and that showed me **Lesson #6**. A University President does *not* have a personal opinion. Especially in Wyoming, the President speaks for the entire institution and possibly the entire community. And in this case, it appeared to many that the President and his University were trying to upstage if not embarrass the Governor

and the Legislature. Fortunately, to my Trustees' credit, not one of them called me about it.

(Parenthetically, let me note that my call for "hate crimes" legislation also caused me to look my own University in the mirror a bit and to initiate a review of our own policies and procedures relating to non-discrimination. And, as it turned out, while we had a broad non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy statement that included sexual orientation, most of our internal policy and procedure statements within our official University Regulations did not. We remedied that within the year as the Trustees approved including sexual orientation—and nine other factors—in all of our policy statements.)

It was now late October, 1998. I had been president for 18 months. Frankly, I felt like retiring. And I think many of my colleagues in the administration felt the same way. And it wasn't limited to us—our Counseling Center had been working overtime trying to counsel students, staff, and faculty to deal with their grief. Throughout this time, I can't tell you how important my family was, and especially my wife, Lisa. I recall coming home the day of Matthew's death and simply hugging her and crying. It was if I

had lost one of my own sons. And I still feel that way today. This could have happened to my son. It could have happened to yours.

It was also during this time that I became much more sensitized to issues of language. Those of you with teenage boys will occasionally hear them describe things that they think are weird or “uncool” with an expression: “That’s so gay!” I had never given that expression, which I must have heard every night over the dinner table, very much thought. I do now, and so do my sons.

It was about Christmas time when I was sitting in bed watching a PBS broadcast of a television concert by Peter, Paul, and Mary. How many of you know who I’m talking about? Well, certainly the “boomers” in the audience will remember Peter, Paul, and Mary as a folk-singing group of the 1960s and early 1970s who sang songs having to do with justice, civil rights, and peace.

One of the songs during the concert was called “Light One Candle” and the rendition by Peter, Paul, and Mary moved me to tears. (I guess you can tell by now that I cry a lot). The song, the words of which you’ll hear in a later clip, also involved a candle

lighting by the audience which reminded me—so powerfully—of the candlelight vigil for Matthew, held just hours before he died.

The next morning I was on the phone to their agent to ask whether they would consider coming to Laramie in the following October on the one year anniversary of Matt's death. Eventually, after a bit of negotiation, they agreed to do so. You can imagine how crushed I was when I proudly announced to the students that this was going to happen and their collective reaction was: Who?

By the following spring, Russell Henderson had entered a guilty plea to the murder charge against him and had been sent off to prison, sparing us a trial. But Aaron McKinney was going to face a trial and, ironically, it had been set to begin exactly one day after the 1999 Homecoming and one year after the death of Matthew Shepard.

As all of the dread of a trial began to settle on the town when we heard that Elton John wanted to come to Laramie for a benefit concert in memory of Matthew Shepard. Fortunately for me, most of our students had at least heard of Elton John. Fortunately, for the University, Mr. John agreed to help us create the Matthew

Shepard Chair in Human Rights. Although not yet fully funded, it was one tangible good thing to come out of this tragedy.

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As we came closer to the October trial date of Aaron McKinney, we saw the media move back into town. And with the media came Reverend Phelps who wanted to protest on campus in front of our Student Union.

We were determined to send a strong message about how we felt about his message of hate, but not in ways that would feed his point of view. So we did three things:

- First, we indicated to Reverend Phelps that we was welcome to come to exercise his First Amendment rights as long as he held his protest in an area where we could "ensure his safety." You would be surprised at just how small an area that turned out to be.
- Next, I placed a statement in our newspapers asking our faculty, staff, students, and community to ignore Reverend Phelps. And,

as a prominent statement of that philosophy, our LGBTQA students organized themselves as “silent angels” with large wings that they lifted to screen the Reverend Phelps from public view but not to engage him in public debate. In effect, we were going to starve his hatred with indifference.

- Third, we invited to campus an exhibit of photographs produced by Adam Mastoon called "The Shared Heart." The photographs tell the story of young gay men and women coming to grips with their sexuality. Mr. Mastoon had written to me shortly after Matt's death telling me about the exhibit, so we arranged for it to be part of our Gay Awareness Week on this one-year anniversary of Matt's death. I strongly recommend this exhibition to you, if you have not already had it on your campus.

The following tape focuses on "The Shared Heart" exhibit, but you'll see the angels in the first frames.

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Whatever we did must have worked because, within a week, I was being condemned on the godhatesfags.com web site as a “perfidious pandering poltroon” for having used the platform of a publicly supported institution to condemn a religious organization and for having crossed the line between church and state. He called upon me to offer America and his church a public apology. You know, it still hasn’t gotten that cold in Wyoming so the Reverend is still waiting ...

This brings us to the one-year anniversary of Matt’s death, the next Homecoming Weekend. Another parade and another candlelight vigil on campus, in collaboration with our colleagues from the Newman Center, one that provided an opportunity for folks to sign a pledge of nonviolence.

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From the vigil, we moved to the Peter, Paul, and Mary concert. This was, of course, an important moment for me personally, since I had worked hard to get them there and had arranged for Dennis and Judy Shepard to be there with us. You can imagine my horror when, an hour before the concert, I was told

that Mary was in the local hospital getting treatment for altitude sickness and oxygen deprivation. (Laramie is at 7,200 feet in elevation). Fortunately, one of the local pediatricians was available to minister to her.

Well, needless to say, she recovered. In the clip, featuring Peter Yarrow, you will hear him recite the words to the song “Light One Candle” which was used as the title of the concert, and sing a new verse to the Phil Ochs song, “There But For Fortune.” (Let me ask the technical folks to quickly stop the tape at the end of that song before the next clip which comes up quickly.)

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While we were sitting in the audience through the concert, I was watching Judy and Dennis Shepard carefully. Up until that night, they had graciously declined to be part of most of the events or activities at the University, including the memorial. We had, of course, respected their wishes. But they had come—very quietly—to the Elton John concert, and they came to this one.

About mid-way through, I asked Judy and Dennis Shepard whether they would like to join me on stage afterwards and, much to my surprise, they agreed. You'll see that interaction with Peter, Paul, and Mary in this next clip, and a hint of the 2000 battery-powered candles that were waving in the audience that night. What you won't see is the tank we had off stage giving Mary periodic hits of oxygen!

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Judy and Dennis later told me that this concert and the reception afterwards at our home with Peter were one of the most important parts of their own personal healing process. The reception itself was amazing, as Peter moved around the house talking personally with our invited guests, including many of the LGBTA students we had invited. One of my white-collared white male members of my fund-raising Board came up to me as he was leaving and gave me a big hug and said: "I just had to do that!" So it was obvious that many people were touched.

The entire sequence of events—the Elton John concert, "The Shared Heart" exhibit, the angels, the Peter, Paul, and Mary concert, and the reception—provided **Lesson #8**—and that had to do with the importance of organized opportunities for people to come together, whether around song, or art, or in silent protest, to reaffirm the community's values.

And my involvement as a public leader—whether speaking at a candlelight vigil, at a memorial service, or in confronting Reverend Phelps—provided **Lesson #9**—that it is extremely important for a University president in these circumstances to help the University community speak its values. I didn't realize this until I started getting the tremendous number of notes, letters, and emails from faculty, staff, students, and even folks from other universities saying that my words had made a difference in their understanding of what had happened and what role they might take in preventing a similar tragedy in the future.

I think Larry Vanderhoef would be the first to tell you that most University presidents and chancellors learn pretty quickly that you can make a mistake by responding to each and every controversy on campus with a presidential edict; you can keep

controversies alive that don't deserve an ounce of attention. The kind of experience we had with Matthew Shepard was just the reverse—the community wanted someone to speak to them, and for them.

This concert, of course, cannot be the end of the story for us. We're still talking about how best each year to remind our students and ourselves about what happened in Laramie, why it happened, and what we can learn from the experience of having to have dealt with it.

I think I can say that we grew together as a community. We learned that life's not fair—Matt found that out, his parents found it out, and the University and Laramie found that out.

We learned how easy it was to pass judgment—whether it was the national media passing judgment on us or those seeking to blame Matthew's murder on Matt himself.

We also learned that the answers to explain these tragedies are not simple; they are not to be found by amateur sociologists or by easy stereotyping of individuals or whole communities.

And we learned that, while the answers are not easy, we need to continue to search for the answers—to search our souls for what makes people hate others simply because they are different and to act out that hate in violent ways.

Each of us has a role to play. With our kids, we can teach them that those who are different are, simply that, different—the kid who has glasses, the kid with braces, the kid who is fat, the kid with a disability, the kid who is black, the kid who is gay—deserve the same respect and friendship as anyone else. There should be no pleasure taken in inflicting pain and ridicule upon others.

And for ourselves, whatever the answer, at least a part of it includes the willingness to speak out in a variety of ways—whether by starving hatred through our physical presence as was seen with the angels or by directly confronting prejudice where it occurs and to reject attitudes that seem to diminish the humanness of others.

I think these words from Ellen Degeneris capture it best for me:

INSERT TAPE SEGMENT 12 HERE

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today. Thank you very much.