

“I not only have my secrets. I am my secrets. And you are your secrets. Our trusting each other enough to share them with each other has much to do with the secret of what it is to be human.”

–Frederick Buechner, theologian and award-winning writer

COMING OUT

DAVID AMMONS TOLD A SECRET

No cub reporter in the checkered history of the Olympia press corps likely made a more lasting first impression than the AP’s 22-year-old David Ammons when he arrived at the Capitol in the summer of 1971. He wrote so quickly and so well that his beat soon seemed boundless. He covered the Washington Supreme Court, interviewed up-and-comers like freshman State Senator Booth Gardner, a boyish millionaire from Tacoma, and explored trends, visiting Pasco to profile a WSU horticulturist who predicted great things from Washington’s expanding vineyards.

The practice then at many newspapers was to remove bylines from wire service stories, giving prominence instead to their staff writers. Sometimes the copy desk would even “localize” a few paragraphs and label the story “Daily Herald and AP reports.” Ammons’ stories were so brightly written his byline invariably stayed put. They were longer than usual, too—so interesting they were harder to cut. When the AP gave him a column—“Ammons on Politics”—it often filled two full columns on weekend editorial pages from Port Angeles to Pullman.

Along the road to becoming the longest-serving capitol reporter in state history, he covered seven governors, more than 40 legislative sessions, the eruption

Facing page: Ammons interviews Brian Ebersole, D-Tacoma, the House majority leader, in 1990.
Washington State Archives

of Mount St. Helens and the search for skyjacker D.B. Cooper. Dixy Lee Ray, Washington's first female governor, initially took a liking to Ammons, misjudging his niceness as timidity. Before long, he was as persona non grata as the other reporters. "She named the pigs on her Fox Island farm after us, then presented each of us a neatly wrapped package of sausage when she had them slaughtered," he remembers with glee. "It was like, 'See, I can grind you up!'"

Ammons was fastidious about ensuring quotes were accurate and in context. Aside from the mercurial Dixy, politicians of all persuasions and press secretaries trusted him. His disarming smile and wry, contagious laugh opened doors for 37 years. When he retired from the Associated Press in 2008 to become communications director for the Office of the Secretary of State, Dino Rossi and Chris Gregoire—adversaries in the most contentious gubernatorial election in state history—stood practically side by side to wish him well.

In an abrupt role reversal, Ammons was soon fielding reporters' questions about a lawsuit against Secretary of State Sam Reed. His new boss maintained that the state's landmark public disclosure law mandated the release of the names and signatures of voters who had signed a petition for a controversial ballot measure. The sponsors of Referendum 71, Protect Marriage Washington, hoped to block implementation of a law dubbed "everything but marriage" because it expanded the rights of same-sex domestic partners. Opponents asserted the Public Records Act cited by Reed was being applied unconstitutionally "because there is a reasonable probability that the signatories ... will be subjected to threats, harassment, and reprisals."

Ammons handled Protect Marriage Washington with the same professionalism he accorded gay rights supporters. An article of faith in journalism is that good reporters never let their biases show. Ammons had opinions, of course. But he never shared them indiscreetly, even when other reporters were blowing off steam after a long day.

What no one knew—or at least only a few suspected until 2015 when he surprised even himself by deciding to tell his secret—is that he is gay.



His collection of AP press passes. *David Ammons*



Ammons at a joint session of the Legislature in 1973. *Washington State Archives*

Ammons' life story italicizes that coming out is complicated. Sometimes the journey says as much about the inertia of inner conflict as courage.

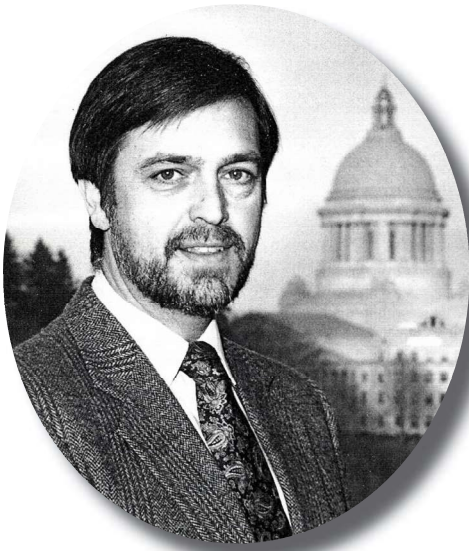
For the record, Ammons believes his job with the AP wouldn't have been in jeopardy had he come out years earlier. He believes his objectivity would have defined him more than his homosexuality. However, when he became Secretary Reed's chief spokesman and senior political adviser, he knew being out could cause grief for the agency. Exhibit A being the controversy over the identities of the petition signers. Referendum sponsors could have questioned whether the agency's gay press secretary was being even-handed. Ammons knew Reed, without hesitation, would have defended him vigorously. It was still worrisome. He kept his secret.

AMMONS' CAREER as a journalist, historian and press secretary dovetailed with landmark Northwest moments in LGBTQ history. He covered disheartening setbacks and resounding victories.

In 1972, his second year with the AP, managers of a roller rink in suburban Seattle called the police because two gay skaters were holding hands. The cops handcuffed the miscreants and booked them for disorderly conduct.

Marriage equality was first litigated here in 1974 when gay activists argued that Washington's Equal Rights Amendment prohibited the denial of a marriage license to same-sex couples. When the Court of Appeals denied their claim, the state Supreme Court declined to review the decision.

One of Ammons' most memorable interviews was with Colonel Margarethe



Ammons' 1991 column photo. *Associated Press*

Cammermeyer, the Chief Nurse of the Washington State National Guard. She was discharged in 1991 after revealing she is a lesbian. "I was shocked that they could cashier a decorated Vietnam veteran whose patriotism was beyond reproach," Ammons says.

In 1997, Washington voters soundly rejected a ballot measure to prohibit job discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Slowly at first, the tide began to turn.

Ammons was on hand in 2006 when Governor Chris Gregoire signed a law prohibiting, on the basis of "sexual orientation," any discrimination in employment,

housing, lending or eligibility for insurance. He was also in the press house adjacent to the Capitol that summer when the fractured Washington Supreme Court released a decision that's still reverberating: On a 5-4 vote, it upheld the Legislature's 1998 Defense of Marriage Act.

Unsettling as it was, Ammons says the court's split-decision defense of DOMA proved to be more of a bump than a fork in the road. Today, he marvels that Washington's high court is the most diverse in America, with two lesbian justices.

A widely-read column Ammons wrote in the summer of 2007 summed up a turning point in the struggle:

After three decades of controversy and contention, Washington has quietly adopted back-to-back gay rights laws with little pushback from critics and no blowback from the voters.

Starting Monday, same-sex couples can sign a domestic partner registry that triggers some of the key benefits of marriage. That follows on the heels of a gay civil rights measure that gives gays and lesbians the full protection of the state's anti-discrimination laws.

Neither law was challenged on the ballot, as both sides had originally predicted. Independent pollster Stuart Elway says the

once-radioactive issue of gay rights has mostly fallen off the radar screen and was scarcely mentioned in the last election. ...

The state's first openly gay legislator, Cal Anderson, and other lawmakers struggled for nearly 30 years to get the civil rights bill through Olympia last year. Democrats padded their majorities in both houses and came right back to pass marriage-like rights this year.

On Monday, Senator Ed Murray, Anderson's successor in the Legislature and in leading the charge, and his 16-year partner, Michael Shiosaki, will line up at the Secretary of State's counter in Olympia to register their domestic partnership.

Then Murray will drive home and get started on the next phase of the battle that has sometimes consumed him.

What's next? The gay community isn't much interested in civil unions but plans to seek full marriage equality. How long that takes, say the advocates, will depend on how quickly public opinion continues to turn their way. "I believe we will get there in a decade, if not sooner," says Murray, the senior of five gay men in the state Legislature.

They got there in only five years. On November 6, 2012, nearly 54 percent of Washington voters endorsed same-sex marriage. Opponents had attempted to overturn a legislative mandate signed into law by Governor Gregoire. The first same-sex marriages in Washington took place a month later.

DAVID AMMONS' background will come as a surprise to many. He was born in 1948 in Appalachia, the grandson of a Methodist preacher who often rode a horse into the "hollers" of the mountains of western North Carolina to share the gospel. "That was Grandpa Stevens, my mother's father," Ammons says. "My mother was one of five children. The family was pretty poor all the time. People would pay the preacher in chickens, eggs and cantaloupes. My earliest years were spent there in Waynesville, Haywood County, N.C., not too far from Asheville. That was the big town near us. We were also near Chimney Rock, where Carl Sandburg was from. My father's people, originally from Massachusetts, had homesteaded that area. They were mica and coal miners, literally living off the land.

"My dad was blue collar his whole life. He was absent quite a bit early on. I didn't know if that was due to a divided marriage or just him off earning mon-



Young David in bib overalls in North Carolina. *David Ammons*

ey, the story we were told. In my earliest years I was raised by my mother, an absolute angel devoted to her children. My sibling, Marilyn, came along five years after I was born. We lived in a little house—one of three or four in a family compound of sorts. It was a life of cold running water, with an outhouse out back. A coal stove heated the four rooms. My father would send checks, but I know my mother struggled. She was a brilliant person; valedictorian of her class; hired by the FBI during the war right out of high school. She had come back to the Asheville area to take care of her ailing mother.”

Ammons’ earliest memories are of learning to read on his mother’s lap. Their meager circumstances did nothing to damper her intellect or appetite for literature. “She was my first and best teacher,” he remembers fondly. “There was no kindergarten at Allen’s Creek School, a two-room schoolhouse. My mother made up for that. I was reading and doing my numbers and all of that by the time I started school. I liked to write stories, too. My grandpa, the preacher, was well read in the classics and all the other books he could get his hands on. He was a wordsmith with his sermons. Writing seems to be in my gene pool.”

The seeds of Ammons’ abiding Christian faith were planted by his devout mother and grandfather. “Even though they were conservative theologically, the churches I went to were like a warm blanket,” he remembers. “If I appeared different in any fashion it didn’t matter. I was Free Methodist when I was in college, and Seattle Free Methodists are a little more liberal than a lot of the more fundamental folks. So as I’ve reflected, I don’t recall it [being gay] ever being castigated from the pulpit, or even mentioned. Those churches were about getting you ready for heaven, and following the precepts of the 10 Commandments and all of Christ’s teachings. It’s the subtext I think of from my childhood years. Growing up in the racist South, I could clearly see that blacks and whites were treated differently. I grew up hating all forms of hate.”

When he was in the third or fourth grade, David, his sister and mother moved from North Carolina to Wilmington, Delaware. His father had found work in a

Chrysler plant. The family was reunited for the rest of his childhood.

“Then, all of sudden, just before I was to enter 10th grade, we moved across the country to Vancouver, where a lot of my father’s brothers and sisters had migrated during the war to work at Vanport, the big Kaiser shipyard between Vancouver and Portland, or other blue-collar jobs. It was like the Joads’ trip out west in *The Grapes of Wrath*. My father traded the family Chevrolet for a huge truck. All that could fit of our worldly possessions were in the back under a tarp. We happily headed off to our adventure!” Ammons chuckles, marveling at the memory of their rag-tag migration.

“When we arrived, an aunt and uncle let us use their double-car garage, which smelled like fish because my uncle was a fisherman! Eventually my father found some property with a little cabin on it in Orchards, on the outskirts of Vancouver. Mount St. Helens was practically in our back yard.”

Vancouver’s Evergreen High School was a revelation. With his sunny disposition, the handsome new kid in the sophomore class fit in quickly, becoming a standout member of the school newspaper staff. Ammons’ writing stood out for its clarity. “I had known since junior high that I wanted to be a journalist,” he remembers. “At Evergreen, I received a scholarship to Pacific Slope, the University of Washington’s summer training institute for high school journalists and advisers. That cemented everything. I loved every minute of that experience.”



David Ammons as Spring News Editor for the *UW Daily* in 1969. *University of Washington*

WHEN HE matriculated at the University of Washington on scholarships in the fall of 1966, Ammons immersed himself in a journalism program on the rise from an influx of talented professors with real-world newspaper experience. William F. “B.J.” Johnston, the award-winning managing editor of Idaho’s *Lewis-ton Morning Tribune*, had joined the faculty as publisher of student publications in 1965. The former Associated Press correspondent and editor

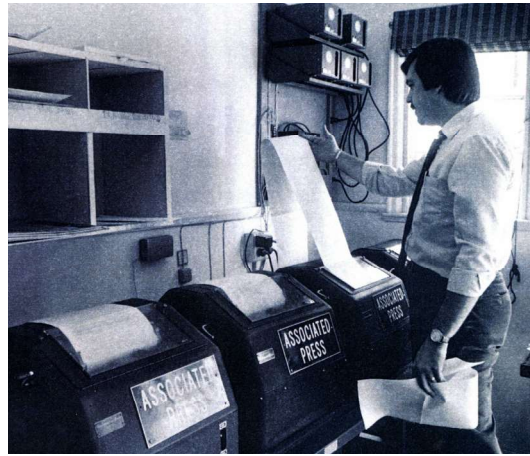
was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Idaho, where he rose quickly from reporter to editor of the student newspaper. At the *Tribune*, Johnston’s editorials drew national attention, notably his withering attacks in the 1950s on the

red-baiting demagogue, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy. Johnston was a patient teacher and a demanding editor. What Ammons remembers most are his high expectations, especially an insistence on even-handedness. A prominent Idaho politician whom Johnston often took to task once observed, “Bill is the fairest editor in Idaho. He gives me better treatment [in the news columns] than do some of the papers that support me.”

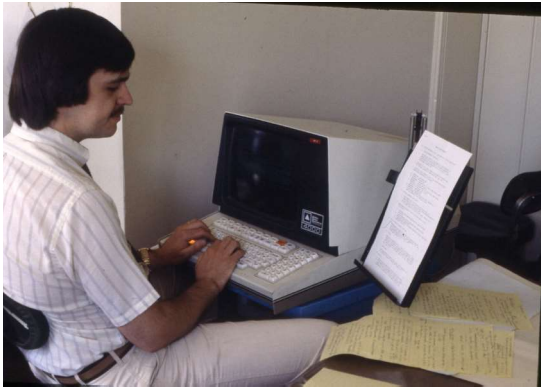
The adviser to *The Daily*, the UW’s student newspaper, during Ammons’ senior year was Bill Asbury, another standout former managing editor. A UW graduate, Asbury modeled integrity and chutzpah during a staff revolt over conflicts of interest by the paper’s left-wing editor. Six staffers resigned, saying their editor had become a mouthpiece for the anti-war movement. One was David Horsey, a future two-time Pulitzer Prize winner for his *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorial cartoons. Asbury was frustrated, too. He wanted his name removed from the masthead. To make his stand perfectly clear, he also submitted an opinion piece about the controversy. When it was rejected, he paid to have it printed as an ad. “That was classic Asbury,” says Ammons, who as luck would have it, missed the fireworks. He was student teaching at Seattle’s Queen Anne High School when the dispute erupted in the spring of 1970, his final quarter of college.

Ammons acquired another mentor in Jim King, the avuncular editor of *The Seattle Times*. King was adviser to the UW chapter of Sigma Delta Chi, the society of professional journalists, when Ammons was chapter president. King’s long remembered advice to young journalists is that good reporting is more than just the time-honored “5-W’s”—Who, What, When, Where and Why? There were three more, King said: So what? What if? What next?

Ammons’ stories for *The Daily* also caught the attention of Wick Temple, the AP’s Seattle Bureau Chief. Ammons had considered becoming a teacher or enrolling in law school. But when Temple offered him a job, Ammons says, “I jumped all over it in about 10 seconds!” He collected his diploma, married a bright and pretty Seattle girl and gleefully reported for duty as a reporter for the world’s largest newsgathering network. The AP was fond of citing Mark Twain’s 1906 ob-



Ammons checks a row of AP teletypes in the 1980s.
David Ammons



Ammons writes an AP dispatch on a video display terminal in 1981. *Washington State Archives*

ervation, “There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe—the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press down here.” And “I may seem to be flattering the sun.”

When a slot opened in Olympia in the summer of ’71, Ammons grabbed his dream job—covering the capital. That meant “every sort of story imaginable,” from legislative politics to the corridors of the state Supreme Court, and dozens of state

agencies. “Imagine covering a gubernatorial press conference at the age of 22, or interviewing the chief justice,” he says.

Ammons and his wife soon had two charmingly inquisitive children, a son and a daughter. The AP routinely offered promotions. He was content to be a star reporter rather than a bureau chief who had to spend more time wooing publishers and putting out fires than doing journalism.

Ammons says everything in his life—overtly at least—seemed so, well, *normal*: “Looking around me growing up, and all through my college years, I saw what the definition of ‘being a man’ looked like—a ‘successful man.’ The script said: You get your degree. You date. You get married. You have children. There wasn’t really another option that seemed apparent to me, even though I was probably attracted to my own gender back when I was a boy. I can remember that first happening when I was 8 or 9 years old. It was something I compartmentalized. It’s called ‘impression management.’ Putting on what the world wanted to see and what I decided to be. That was a bargain I was willing to do. I had some good years in my marriage, especially early on. But certainly, if I had known that [coming out] was an option; if it felt like an option; if I had had a love relationship—which I never did—with a man, should I have done that? I have tried never to get into the area of regret, in part because of my children, who are amazing human beings. And I wouldn’t have had them. They wouldn’t exist, at least not with me as their dad.

“My marriage fizzled in 1991 after 21 years. When it wasn’t working anymore, we had a friendly divorce. The fact that I had been in a marriage and that children were there, it was like I had cover for as long as I wanted it, in the press



With Ammons in his accustomed front row seat, Gov. Booth Gardner fields questions during a packed press conference in 1986. *Tacoma News Tribune*

house or the Legislative Building. If people assumed anything differently, they were kind enough not to make an issue of it or invade my privacy. At that time, it would have felt that way.

“Most of the press corps were just fabulous people. Were and are. I don’t think coming out would have hampered my profession. I had wonderful relations with both sides of the aisle. I’m a people pleaser, but a lot of that was my nature. I was brought up to be kind and gentle. And ironically, that’s part of the feminine side of us. I was able to embody that kind of treatment of people so that everyone I talked with felt respected, whether it was a firebrand conservative or an arch-liberal from Seattle. I could talk with anybody. I also learned empathy, I think feeling at my core a little bit marginalized.”

Ammons had a front row seat for emotional debates over gay rights—from repeal of the state’s sodomy law in 1976 to passage of the landmark gay civil rights bill 30 years later. The judgmental things said during the debate over funding to combat AIDS—that the disease was divine punishment for “the sin of homosexuality”—were deeply troubling. Then, in 1995, Cal Anderson died of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a complication of AIDS. How did Ammons cope with those emotions? “It was definitely part of processing things,” he said, voice quavering at first. “I was trying to keep my head about me while others were losing theirs.

“But the cost was going to be too high to tear off that mask. I was good friends with Roger Nyhus, another AP reporter who was openly gay. And some of the

press secretaries and others over the years were gay. I would go to lunch with them and it's like, I wanted to say, 'You know, *me too*.' It was a hard façade to crumble.”

MANY COLLEAGUES and friends were baffled by Ammons' decision to leave reporting after 37 years to go to “the dark side”—as reporters like to refer to public relations and speechwriting, as opposed to the noble calling of low pay and long hours. “Sam Reed was a long-time friend and news source,” Ammons says. “I'd known him since his days as a young ‘Dan Evans Republican’ and Thurston County auditor. He was a smart political scientist, with academic credentials, too. So he was on my speed dial. Steve Excell, Sam's assistant secretary of state, was also a friend since our days together at the University of Washington. We were in the same dorm. When they double-teamed me with a heavy pitch to leave the press corps and be the agency's communications and policy adviser, I went to the beach for a week to think long and hard about whether I would leave something I loved so dearly as the press corps. I was also doing the *Inside Olympia* program for TVW, which was tons of fun. But eventually I came to the realization I needed to stir the pot and start something new and different and re-energize myself. So I said ‘Yes.’ ”

In the spring of 2008, they stenciled his name on the frosted door-glass of a cozy office adjacent to Reed's. The in-basket was overflowing and the phone wouldn't stop ringing. The “Top Two” primary Reed championed—with strong support from Washington's famously fickle voters—was now the U.S. Supreme Court's to decide. Before long, battle lines were also drawn over the identities of registered voters who had signed the petition to challenge the “everything but marriage” law. If, in his fresh start, Ammons had any inclination to come out, he kept it in his cupboard of secrets and second-thoughts. Ill-timed, the revelation would have been potentially compromising, he says.

When Reed retired in 2013, his successor as Secretary of State was someone Ammons knew and admired. Kim Wyman, who also had succeeded Reed as Thurston County auditor, was a centrist Republican with a big heart and a rarely



Ammons with Secretary of State Sam Reed, center, and Steve Excell, assistant secretary of state, in 2012. *Washington State Archives*



With Secretary of State Kim Wyman. *Washington State Archives*

closed door. She asked him to stay. So he did. He had been closer to Reed, “but 95 percent of the time we had a really warm relationship.”

Wyman, now a top elections security official with the Biden administration, is a cheerfully self-described “crier” moved to tears by a kindergartner’s Mother’s Day poem or the introduction of a junior-varsity girls’ basketball squad. Ammons wasn’t the least bit surprised one day in 2015 when he entered her office and found her emotional.

“Is everything OK?”

She was worried about the pain LGBTQ people were feeling when they decided to come out. Worried, too, about their parents and friends—and the conservative backlash against the growing acceptance of gays.

“I was so struck with how sweet that was. I went back to my office and couldn’t get it out of my head. So, half an hour later, I went back into her office and closed the door.

“I said, ‘I have something to tell you: I’m gay.’

“Kim was the first person I came out to. She jumped up, hugged me, kissed my cheek and said, ‘I’m so happy for you. Thank you for sharing that.’

“Then, at 66, I decided, ‘In for a penny, in for a pound.’ I went up and down the hallway. Mark Neary, her assistant secretary of state, and some of the other

staff were in a pow-wow, so I just told all of them, not knowing what the reaction was going to be. They're like, 'That's wonderful, David!' Everyone I talked to that day was supportive. Some said, 'You know this doesn't change my feelings one way or the other.' I knew that was a vote of confidence, but I thought, 'Well, it shouldn't!' " He laughs at the memory.

Looking back, Ammons says the tenacious "incremental" approach to LGBTQ civil rights pursued by the state's first two openly gay legislators, Cal Anderson and Ed Murray, carried the day, despite galling setbacks. When the voters bluntly rejected the gay civil rights ballot measure in 1997, "we had a culture that was still living in yesterday's understanding of what was appropriate," he says. "The Defense of Marriage Act was another stopgap."

AN ACTIVIST PRESBYTERIAN for decades as a member of his church's board of elders, Ammons is in the thick of what he describes as "an internal, long slog battle over equality."

"There were national votes against the appointment of gay and lesbian pastors, with studies on the psychology and sociology of the issue, as well as the biblical narratives," Ammons says. "The overriding message, of course, is 'Love God. Love your neighbor.' No exceptions, period. That subsumes everything else.

"I credit the young people of America for teaching us important lessons. At our church in Olympia, the youth group was the first to say, 'Hey, let's join the Pride Parade and have a banner that says 'Westminster Presbyterian loves all.' That was very scandalous at the time. But a year later we did exactly that. A younger, more tolerant generation is rising.

"Our pastor at that time was David Kegley, a wonderful, loving man of God. He had preached three powerhouse sermons on why the church is getting it wrong on gay rights and why it's required that we love all our spiritual siblings. It was really powerful stuff. He had been training with the Mennonite Peace Institute in Chicago on dispute resolution and is now doing that professionally. He led a year's worth of conversation to let everyone in the congregation have their say. The framework was 'Shall we become open and affirming?'

"I told David, 'I'd like to bring this conversation to a head in The Session,' which is what we call the board of elders, in a nod to our Scottish forebears. I had three motions: One, that we become open and affirming. Two, that our pastors be authorized to use our facilities to perform same-sex weddings, if they choose. And third, that we would proclaim our stance on our website, on our reader board, and any other way that seemed appropriate to spreading the news. All of those

passed our Session, with two dissents on same-sex weddings. The Session makes the rules. It's not a plebiscite among the congregation. We lost a few members, but now every new class of people that comes knows what we stand for. There's a rainbow flag on our welcome sign. If you're not looking for a church that's open and affirming, that would be a deal breaker right from the start."

Eventually, through a series of votes, the General Assembly of the national church decided there should be no outright prohibition on Presbyterian churches appointing gay pastors, or ordaining elders and deacons. "That essentially leaves it to local control right now," Ammons says. "Still, could a church in backwoods USA ever appoint a woman pastor, a person of color or a gay person? Unlikely. But acceptance of gays has moved in church culture quicker than I thought, just as it has in the national culture. That's what gave me the energy and the final courage.

"I didn't think I'd ever come out," Ammons says with a small sigh. "It was just baked into me. My upbringing was not anti-gay, but I could read the tea leaves as to what being an upstanding person looked like. So I lived that script until age 66. It was just a long journey for me, from it being my secret, from it being nobody's business; not wanting to carry any of that baggage of homophobia.

"I came out to my choir, which was like a separate little family in the church, and then just around the coffee hour after church. There was no blowback, although there were a few families that left just before I came out that winter."

Ammons says his daughter and son were "wonderfully supportive" of his decision. Jennifer Ammons is an attorney with the Northwest Justice Project. Jonathan Ammons is a records management analyst for the State Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

"My mother was one of the last calls to make. She said, 'You know what the Bible says, right?' And I said, 'Yes, Mom, I've seen those verses. I've also seen verses that talk about the love of Christ for all of us. All means *all*. I'm the same man I was an hour ago before you got my call.' That kind of stopped her in her tracks. Finally, I said, 'Well, at the very least, let's agree to disagree on the theological aspects of this.' For the rest of her life she went out of her way several times to say 'I love you so much.' That was as close as she could come to welcoming my news. I thought she might want to talk about it some more. But I didn't bring it up. So she never said anything more, and our relationship was as warm as ever. Perhaps more. She died at 93 in 2021."

AMMONS RETIRED from the Office of the Secretary of State in January of 2017. One of the first calls he received was from Governor Jay Inslee, offering an ap-



Ammons in 2019 when he was inducted into the UW Department of Communication Hall of Fame. *University of Washington*

pointment to the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission. It was a full circle moment. As a cub reporter, Ammons covered the birth of the PDC after passage of a citizens' initiative in 1972. Backed by 72 percent of the voters, I-276's goal was to ensure transparency in campaign financing, promote access to public records, and monitor the activities of lobbyists and the financial affairs of elected officials. "I had seen first-hand what an important role the PDC plays in open government," Ammons says, "so it was a perfect way to begin a new career as a citizen activist." He also represented the public on the 2018 Legislative Public Records Task Force, and in 2019 was chosen chairman of the PDC. That same year, he was named to the University of Washington's Department of Communication Alumni Hall of Fame.

Now chairman of the board of directors of the Washington State Parks Foundation, a donor-driven nonprofit, Ammons is also a volunteer and board member with *Side-Walk*, a robust Thurston County program to combat homelessness and hunger. After several terms as a trustee of the Washington State Historical Society, he is now part of a group hoping to create a new Olympia historical museum.

He has had a front-row seat for a half-century of Washington history.

As he reflects on the 10th anniversary of marriage equality in Washington, Ammons says he has never had a serious relationship with another man. "But the fact that I could, felt so affirming and so freeing. Not only did coming out feel like a 5,000-pound weight lifted off my shoulders, the realization that the culture has moved enough to not only empower LGBTQ+ people to be in a relationship—even marriage—is wonderful. Even if I haven't used that opportunity as a lot of people have, just that affirmation feels delightful!

"There's still lots more to do along the road to equality—on race, poverty, and indigenous people. But I think we've come a long way. I didn't expect to see marriage equality happen, really, in my lifetime. It's amazing, isn't it?"

John C. Hughes