



# UNHEARD VOICES

## Stories of LGBT History



### Interview Transcript



*In 2000 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts of America could refuse membership to people who identify as gay.*

*It was a ten-year court battle.*

*The plaintiff in the case was **James Dale**, who began scouting when he was eight years old. By the time he entered Rutgers University, he had achieved the rank Assistant Scout Master as an adult.*

*Here, Dale remembers how he ended up as a lightning rod for gay rights in the United States.*

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**James Dale:** My second year at Rutgers I came out of the closet and got involved in the gay organization at school. I was pretty much doing what I was taught in the Boy Scouts—take a leadership role, be active, be visible. And I was speaking at a conference on the needs of gay teenagers. There was a newspaper there and there was a photograph taken for the Star Ledger of New Jersey.

I didn't really think much of it. But then as a result of that, I received a letter in the mail from the Boy Scouts. They said "avowed homosexuals" are not permitted in the Boy Scouts of America, which kind of blindsided me because I think as a gay kid, I didn't fit in a lot of places, but the Boy Scouts was some place where I felt important and valuable and connected.

But seeing those words in that letter, I knew that it was wrong. I wasn't gonna walk away from it. I didn't think at that time that it would've gone on to the legal system for ten years and went to the Supreme Court. I was nineteen and I thought, you know, I'm right and they're wrong and justice and the courts will see this. To lose to the Supreme Court was really devastating.

When the Boy Scout lawsuit started, I was out to my parents and there were times when we didn't talk and there was fighting. It's not usually the case that your son comes out and then a couple of months later he's in the New York Times, and I think my parents did the right thing before they fully accepted the right thing.

Ultimately that's kinda what I was thinking that the Boy Scouts would do with me, not that they were thrilled that I would be gay and visibly gay, but I did think they would rise to the occasion.