Interview Transcript

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.

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.