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Interviewee: Jerry Brennan Story Circle: Richard Hause and Steven Leshner

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

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Abstract

This is a story circle with Barry Loveland, Richard Hause, and Stephen Leshner discussing the life and work of Jerry Brennan. They begin with the discussion of Jerry's childhood religion and his attendance of St. Bernard's Seminary in Alabama. Barry, Richard, and Steven also discuss Jerry's charitable works, including being a founding member of Gay Community Services, Gay Switchboard, and finally in the local Dignity chapter. The men attempt to nail down Jerry's personal life, from childhood to adulthood, although since he rarely talked about it they are only able to piece together clues from the time they knew him. They also discuss Jerry's social activism and involvement in both the Black Civil Rights Movement and the local gay community. Barry, Richard, and Steven go off on a pleasant tangent discussing comedians and speakers that Jerry had come to Harrisburg. The men finish reminiscing about Jerry by discussing what little they knew about his love life.

BL: Alright I'm here with – this is Barry Loveland and I'm here with Richard Hause, say hi Richard.

RH: Hello there!

BL: And I'm here with Steven Leshner.

SL: Hello.

BL: And we're here to do a group story circle, or memory circle, about Jerry Brennan for the LGBT History Project and today is March 8, 2017. Okay, so we're just getting into a real preliminary discussion of Jerry's background and what I'd like to do is, is start with your earliest recollections of what Jerry may have told you about his growing up. And from what I gather from the information I had from the obituary is that he was born in Shamokin [Pennsylvania] and grew up there. I don't know if he – I know his sister attended a Catholic school and graduated from a Catholic high school in Shamokin, but I don't know if he did, because that's not mentioned in the obituaries. But, do you remember, do you remember him talking at all about his childhood or family or anything...

RH: Well I know it was a very devout Roman—Irish Roman Catholic family and he talked very favorably and, and with much, I guess nostalgia about St. Edwards Church in Shamokin, which was the parish he belonged to all through his childhood and into his adulthood and apparently he was very fond of the pastor there. And that's how he came to know Father [Wallace] Sawdy, who was later the Chaplain of our Dignity chapter here. He apparently had been stationed there

many years ago as an assistant. And then later on they were reacquainted in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]. While Father Sawdy was Chaplain at Holy Spirit Hospital and pastor of a...the church was on South Cameron Street, I don't remember the name of it, but a Catholic church. But my first recollection of Jerry was coming into the 400 Club in '68, '69 in his uniform and I, I know he never talked anything about his military experience. I don't know if he was drafted or enlisted. I don't know if he was honorably discharged or whatever... He never really made a deal out of it. You mentioned a Southern connection there...

BL: Yeah, he, he went to the Selma—marched in Selma in Montgomery we know that. And we also know that's he's talked about either attending or spending some time at a seminary in Cullman, Alabama.

RH: Yes.

BL: And that was St. Bernard Abbey.

RH: Right.

BL: And they have something there called the Ava Maria Grotto. Which is a famous tourist landmark now.

RH: Probably where the Virgin Mary appeared [laughter], she's a busy lady.

BL: So one of the monks who was, I guess, he was in charge of the power plant at St. Bernard Abbey, started building these little grotto figurines and things like that. And they would sell them in the, in the gift shop...

RH: Uh-huh.

BL: ...for the Abbey and then eventually he started making entire villages and putting them into their landscape there. They have like a... I guess sort of mined out area...

RH: So it was an Abbey, not a seminary?

BL: Well at the time though, it's now an Abbey, they don't run a seminary anymore, but at the time they actually did run a seminary there.

RH: Because he spoke a lot about St. Bernard's.

BL: Yeah, okay. Well then he may have attended there in his seminary.

BL: There was nothing in the obituaries about it, but I, I do remember him talking about Cullman and being in Cullman.

RH: Well I think when he got out of the service he moved to Middletown [Pennsylvania] into a mobile home and I believe that's when he met his friend—his partner Mark. I don't remember

Mark's last name. But he's probably still with us. 'Cause I think there was a little bit of an age difference there. Mark was a couple of years younger. But they lived in Middletown as I said, and then later he moved to an apartment...was it South 18th Street?

SL: I think around that area, yes.

RH: Second floor apartment. And that was when he organized Gay Community Services. He just did a little bit of an introduction to all of his friends and acquaintances as to what he wanted to do. And he asked us all to come there one evening and we had a meeting. And he said he thought there was a need for this organization in Harrisburg, or in South Central Pennsylvania. And we were all in agreement that there was. And he said there's gonna be some work involved, which there was, and we started putting out a newsletter and that was every month. And he was at odds with the Catholic Bishop here who was Joseph T. Daly, and Jerry did a, a column every, every month in the newsletter, "Cruising around with J.T." [Laughter] So I guess it was like sweet revenge, I don't know. But anyhow, he'd talk about the activities at State Street and the, the bars and what they were doing, and things like that. But that, Gay Community Services was also a discussion group and we'd meet and discuss a different aspect of gay life. Like we'd talk about the bars in one session. We'd talk about pornography in another session. We'd talk about relationships. So we covered a lot of material and we had people come from all around.

BL: Do you remember about how many people would typically come to there...

RH: 12, 15.

BL: And you don't remember what year that started? Was it 1973 or....?

RH: Somewhere around there. Yeah I would think. Maybe a little later than that?

BL: Do you remember how long it met before they actually formed Dignity? Because that would give a better idea I guess.

RH: What year was Dignity? '75?

BL: '75, yeah.

RH: About three years, maybe?

BL: Oh really? Oh then that would be more like '72. [Affirmative noises from RH]. Okay.

RH: Yeah we used to do shopping trips and we had a whole social calendar. We'd go to not just different restaurants, which we still do with Dignity, but we'd go to different malls and things.

BL: Oh really?

RH: Down in Maryland and... yeah.

BL: And was the, was the newsletter – did the newsletter have like a particular name or anything or was it...?

RH: Well I think when Dignity came out it was called *The Keystone*.

BL: Yeah but I mean...

RH: But prior to that I don't know that the newsletter had a...

BL: had a name?

RH: ...had a name. I told you I sealed those in my house on Greek Street.

BL: Yes.

RH: So someday they'll find...

BL: You'll have to go...

SL: Time capsule.

BL: Yeah, you have to go and bang on that wall, Richard. [Laughter] Get that, get that capsule out of there. So yeah, so, so they—Okay so they existed for maybe three years, and then the-what, what made him decide to...

RH: Well the one thing you have to keep in mind was that, like a lot of the people who were active in Gay Community Services were not Catholic. So when he said he was going to, you know, search out the possibility of forming a Dignity chapter here that didn't go over with everybody, because at the same time M.C.C. was organizing and they were meeting at the Friend's Meeting House just as, just as we were.

BL: Well they didn't come along until 1980.

RH: Well, it seems like it was earlier than that. 1980? Wow. I wonder where—I didn't think it was that late. Yeah. But anyway we formed the Dignity chapter and the rest is history. It went very well.

SL: And that was 1975?

RH: Well received. Yeah.

SL: Did they have to—they had to apply to Washington [D.C.], right. The main, the main (several words indecipherable ?)

BL: Well then, I think it was L.A [Los Angeles, California] is where they were located.

SL: Los Angeles, okay.

BL: Dignity USA. Yeah, they, we, we got our chapter charter in July of '75. And I think they applied in like the winter prior to that or something.

RH: Well I do know that when, when M.C.C. finally was up and running we lost members who were non-Catholic, which stands to reason.

SL: Until then Dignity was, Dignity Central PA was the only game in town.

RH: That's right. That's exactly right.

SL: For not only non-Catholics, like me, but women...

RH: But you had asked about Jerry's convictions. You know, he was always for the little guy, that's the way he said it. And he was always very pro-union and was an officer...

SL: He was shop steward for PSECU

RH: Right.

SL: And knew Andy Stern... and you know all those people.

RH: Yeah, yeah, so he had a very strong conviction along those lines. That, you know, he was always all for unions and...

BL: Do you know where any of that came from – as up, upbringing?

RH: Well, his dad operated a car center, like a body shop, or repairs sorta place, I guess all his life. He was sort of the little guy, small business man. All of his brothers went on to do great things. He had a brother that became a warden of a big federal penitentiary in Texas and then Butch was like an accountant, right?

SL: Yes. I, I guess Butch and his family still live in this area. They lived around Hershey [Pennsylvania] somewhere.

RH: Right, right, yeah. And then his, his sister...

SL: Milly. She worked at Sears for a long time until she got laid off and then eventually ended up taking over Jerry's tax business when he got too sick. She and her, her daughter and son-in-law when he got too sick to run it.

RH: Yeah so I have a lot of fond memories of him, and some not so fond. He was a very strong personality and he could be very abrasive. Very abrasive.

SL: Yeah.

RH: He, he was very jealous of and guarded his privacy. So you didn't go there.

BL: Yeah. [Laughter]. So when, you said you first saw him when he came into the 400 Club. And did you...

RH: That would have been in the 60s.

BL: Yeah, did you meet him? Did you talk to him?

RH: That's how I met him. Yes.

BL: And so did you, like, keep, keep touch with him over the course of the next few years until '72...

RH: Well we all had mutual friends...

BL: Okay.

RH: They were all sort of connected. And a lot of those people are gone. They've moved away or whatever, but that's how it worked.

BL: Was Jerry kind of a fixture in the bars? Would he be there quite often or would he, he some that was just once in a while, do you think?

RH: Well, I wouldn't say he was a fixture. But he loved, he loved the gay community. And that was the only place to go back then to be with the gay community. So that's why I think he wanted to start an organization outside of that bar setting. Because not everybody liked bars.

BL: Right, and do you think other, other people from his circle were feeling the same thing and that's what drew them to...

RH: I think so, definitely.

BL: Okay.

RH: Yeah at our first meeting at his apartment when he, what I'll say is the kick-off for Gay Community Services we had a Catholic priest that everybody was sort of shocked. [Laughter] He was a local priest and I won't mention any names, but yeah so that was, that was sort of a surprise. But we, didn't bother us. He fit in with everybody and, you know....

BL: And what, I'm trying to think. Did they continue meeting at Jerry's apartment through that whole time?

RH: Yeah it started at the apartment, and I'm a little bit foggy, but I know that he eventually bought a house on Boas Street. And I think there were a couple meeting there before, before Dignity. And I'm not sure when we started using the Friend's Meeting House.

BL: Yeah I know that would have been after '75, or would have been right around late '75. The- as you may recall, Richard Hill wrote a ten-year history of Dignity, the first ten years.

RH: Yes.

BL: And one of the things it talks about in there the first meeting, which this surprised the hell out of me, first meeting was actually held in Reading at the home of a, a priest in Reading. So...

RH: The first meeting of what?

BL: Dignity.

RH: [To SL] Do you know anything about that?

SL: No, no I didn't come into Dignity until 1977.

BL: Yeah, so anyway they had....

RH: I don't know anything about any priest in Reading!

BL: Well they apparently had this Father somebody's house in Reading was the first meeting. And then they had another one at somebody's place in York. And then..

RH: Well I remember that one.

BL: Okay, well tell me about that one.

RH: Well it was out in the country and they had a big, big horse-drawn sled in the living room [laughter] and when we got there the old guy got up and come out in his long johns! [Laughter] And we - everybody still talks about the sleigh in the living room, whatever relevance that had. Yeah that's where we had it. Yes, I remember that.

BL: Like a farmhouse or ...

RH: It was out in a farmhouse in the country, yeah.

BL: Wow.

RH: But the long johns, I'll never forget.

BL: [Laughter] So then they moved back to Harrisburg. And started I think meeting, I don't know if it was Father Sawdy's or if was...

RH: Well Jerry had, had contacted a lot of different churches, of course he didn't waste his time with the Catholic churches – knowing that they'd all say no. And he contacted different Protestant churches and they all said no. And he always said when nobody wanted us, the Friend's took us in.

BL: Yeah.

RH: So he always had that admiration for the Harrisburg Meeting of Friends.

BL: Right. So yeah I know that, that they said yes, and they eventually....

RH: And what was nice there – not only did we have the meeting space, but they also had the kitchen...

BL: Social Hall....

RH: and the social hall. So we could do both.

BL: It's a good set up... okay do you remember anything, if Jerry mentioned anything about when he came out, or when he had any realization if he was gay?

RH: Well, he told me one time when he was, I guess a teenager living in Shamokin. He had been walking along the woods, and he saw some movement and he looked into the woods and he said, low and behold there was a guy on his knees blowing another guy and he said, I knew I wanted to do that. [Laughter] So anyhow, I guess that would be, he knew he was gay back then, as a teenager.

BL: Right

SL: He did tell me once that, that he was dating a woman for a while.

RH: Now that I did not know.

SL: I don't know, I guess it was in Shamokin, or maybe in his college years, something like that. And they'd mess around. I don't know how far it went. I'm not sure exactly when then he would have known, you know.

BL: He didn't talk at all about like if he was seeing men like in college or in, one of these seminaries [laughs]

RH: He never, he never went into that. Again that was sort of, private life...

BL: personal

RH: ... and he never, I mean if you ask him things about that he would volunteer it, but he wasn't, he was very uptight about his personal life.

SL: Oh I remember him telling me, now again this is a little bit ribald so I don't know if you want to turn off the tape but, but he-he said he picked up or got picked up at a motel or something, some guy that was older than him. He said he was much younger, he was like, you know, maybe in his early, maybe early twenties maybe. And the guy wanted to fuck him and he was quite large and Jerry, Jerry said to me I told him, "You're not sticking that thing in me!" [Laughter] So I mean he must have known early on, but as far as putting the political realization with the personal one together, I, you know, I 'm not sure. Now as far as his childhood, telling me about his childhood-and I, I went up to Shamokin with him a couple times and of course, you did [referring to RH] and I know he pointed out that church that you [Richard] mentioned. The, the cathedral that you mentioned. But he, he just talked generally about some of the things he went through as a child, and it seemed very normal. Obviously a large Catholic family, which most of them were back then. And the father was—the father's word was law. You know, the father was like a tyrant, you know, and I guess...

BL: strict

SL: and I guess that's the way, you know...

BL: strict upbringing

SL: ...the patriarch, you know, and I guess that's the way most Catholic families were back then, you know. And the wife accepted it and that was that.

BL: Was, was his mother a stay at home housewife or...?

SL: I believe so. And you know the times that I was there, if that woman said one word that was a lot.

BL: Oh really.

SL: She just kind of like wallflower sitting in the background. I imagine there, there was much more from her when guests weren't around, but... I never heard much from her. And as far as his

years in the seminary... I do remember that thing I told you about Cullman. I don't know if he had told you about that, Richard, but he said there was billboard in Cullman and I guess it was on some back road or, you know, out in the country somewhere, but it was in Cullman and I remember him telling me this, he said, that – And it wasn't just a sign, it was a *billboard*. A billboard! And it said, "Nigger, don't let the sun set on your black ass in Cullman, Alabama!" So you can just imagine the kind of effect that would have on people.

BL: Yep, in the 1960s I guess that would be par for the course down there...

SL: It was pretty obvious that he combined his religious faith and his sense of, of trying to, to correct injustice, you know. That must have come pretty early on in the seminary, and started—and he started...

RH: Well his, at his funeral mass Father - Monsignor Richardson, during his, his homily said that Jerry was all about justice.

BL: Yeah he did say that.

RH: I thought that was so beautifully put, you know. Because he was.

SL: Yes.

RH: For everything. And everyone.

SL: And I remember him saying to me about, about our union involvement, because he got me into the union and I eventually became a shop steward and later, when I became a nurse when we were still unionized at Poly Clinic [in Harrisburg, PA] became a floor rep, but I remember him saying, "You support what supports you." And I guess he always felt that way, or, or most of his adult life did.

RH: He wrote a lot of letters to Congress and legislatures, I mean he was always up on the latest laws that were coming out. And if he opposed them, he wrote. Profusely. To Congress and the state legislature, and anyone else!

BL: Lot of letters to the editor, as I recall. To the *Patriot News* [Harrisburg, PA].

SL: Yes, he did.

BL: Yeah, he was definitely a very, very much activist.

SL: Yes, to the core. [Laughter]

BL: Yup. Do you, do you know anything more about what brought him to Alabama in the first place? I mean was it the march, or was it the abbey, or was it something else?

RH: I think it was St. Bernerds, Bernard's. And that's how he ended up there, right.

BL: And did he say anything about how long he was there or ... was it he pursuing actually...

RH: He'd talk about some of the Brothers that were there and joke about them, you know tell stories about them. Apparently they were like all age groups there, but no, I don't know.

SL: But was he originally thinking about becoming a priest?

RH: Oh yes!

SL: And then he, he either dropped out...

RH: He never discussed that as to what happened. So I don't know.

BL: And you said that you had heard possibly that he, may have been asked to leave the one in Ontario?

SL: That was my impression, anyway. That he may have been asked to leave because they thought he was becoming too radical. But, whether that's true...

RH: Well you know he was involved with the Berrigan Brothers.

BL: How was that?

RH: Back – They were sort of rad – They were both priests and they were involved in the peace movement. Anti-war stuff. And I think when they had a demonstration here in Harrisburg one or both of them stayed with him. So he, he had a lot of contacts that way. They had a big demonstration at the Federal Building, anti-war.

BL: You know about what year that might have been?

RH: I guess that would have been sometime in the '70s. The early '70s.

SL: The early, early '70s. The Berrigan's were early to mid '70s.

RH: Someone said the last of them just passed away. There were I think three. Two or three Berrigan brothers.

SL: Yeah, yeah, I remember there were articles in the newspaper about them at that time.

RH: And I think they had written a book.

BL: It's interesting that he, he served in the mil – in the army during Vietnam War.

RH: Yeah and again, he never talked about that. Like I say, I don't know if he was drafted or whether he enlisted.

BL: Right.

RH: I remember seeing him in full uniform.

BL: Yeah I'm trying to think when the draft was in effect.

RH: '65 I think.

BL: Started in '65.

RH: Yeah if not earlier. '64 maybe.

SL: Yeah.

BL: So it would have been the late 60s he would have served. And then there was the Penn State thing. So I'm just wondering did he, you know, did he graduate from Penn State and then go into the Army, or did he...serve in the army....

SL: serve in the army and then went to Penn State...went on the GI Bill or something..

BL: and then went to Penn State on the GI Bill, yeah so it's hard to piece together the sequence of all these early things that he did in his life. But he did a lot things, it's amazing! He packed a lot of stuff into the '60s [laughs].

SL: Yeah, and the 70s. He was, he was he served on the Board of the Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union. He was in the Supervisory Committee, remember that big huge to-do that Jerry stirred up with the Credit Union that we attended? I forget what the crux of that was, but it was big. I mean it was really big, you know, we were in a big hall with, you know very largely attended - very large crowd came, I guess it was something about the heads of the credit union, I guess, wanted to bypass something, and you know, arrogate some power to themselves that he didn't agree with and he called this big meeting, or, or was the catalyst for it.

RH: Yeah I was telling someone just the other day about Contact Harrisburg. They—We used to do training with them for their volunteers; and their strategy was, they you know—to volunteer there you had to go through all of these different training sessions on, on different facets of, of operating a crisis line. And the last thing they did was the gay community because they said that was the litmus test. So we'd come in and we would make our presentation and some of them would get up and leave. And they'd say that's exactly what we wanted to happen. If you can't deal with that you're not going to deal with much of anything else. I remember one minister, Methodist minister who had volunteered and when we did our presentation he got up and made a tirade and stormed out of there. Yeah. But he was, that was part of Jerry's work too. That he contacted Contact and we got, you know, involved with them for training.

BL: Was that prior to the switchboard starting or was it after, after the switchboard?

RH: The switchboard?

BL: Yeah.

RH: It was—Well Contact was in business long before the Switchboard.

BL: Yeah, I just wondered if we, if the purpose was we were training them so that if we, or if they had referrals...

RH: Exactly, that was the whole.... And they did refer people to us.

BL: Yeah, so this would have been after the Switchboard started. And I know you said that he didn't, he didn't spend a lot of time, like, getting the Switchboard started and operational and everything; but he did invite someone from Philadelphia Switchboard...

RH: Lee Robbins.

BL: Okay. And, and they came from Philadelphia and did like a presentation or training session or whatever?

RH: Yeah, he, he was the director of the Philadelphia Switchboard, which was well established, because well it's a bigger city.

BL: Yeah.

RH: But anyway, he went through the paper looking for a store front rooms for rent. And circled them and said here's how you get started. and how much does it cost to get a regular, standard telephone line, and things like that. Then with seed money they bought furniture, desks, and things like that. And people—I think the beginning was on Verbeke Street, near Verbeke [Street]

and Green [Street], or Verbeke [Street] and Penn [Street]. It was a, like a shed in the back of someone's—Gay, gay couple's house. Because I heard stories about the volunteer would sit there with the bucket while it was raining and catching the water, roof leaked. But well yeah it had very humble beginnings but it did take off.

BL: Right.

SL: Didn't they then move it to some place on like Market Street or...

BL: They, they moved it to the – above the Strawberry, the old Strawberry Inn, which was on Second Street and it burned, yeah.

RH: That was always, there was always suspicion about that story. I never got the full story. Someone died there.

BL: Yes, one of the bartenders died. But yeah they had a second floor room, I guess on – up there.

RH: Then we were at the Council of Churches...

BL: Well I think they moved to, you said Market Street, I think it was the YWCA building. They got a room there briefly. I don't know how long that lasted. But then I think it went to the Council of Churches after that.

SL: And then Planned Parenthood?

BL: Yeah. The basement of Planned Parenthood, yeah. And it was there for quite a while. At Planned Parenthood.

RH: Well Debbie Reed was the Executive Director of the Planned Parenthood chapter there, her office. And she had contacted us [phone begins to ring] Oh Sorry! I went into see her and she [Telephone Rings] I don't know who that is. She said that Planned Parenthood wanted to do [Ringing – RH speaks over ring] something for the gay community. And I said well, there is [Phone rings again] I don't know what Planned Parenthood can do for us [Laughter]. But anyhow, she said well you know we have all this space we're not using, and she said we'll, you know, let you have it for a nominal fee just to cover utilities. And it was a Godsend because we had, not only office space, but we had a, a kitchen there, and a large meeting room and restrooms and all of that, so it was the perfect set up. And then I don't know where they moved after that. I think up to Front Street somewhere?

BL: I think it was one of Thurman and Ed's buildings. I think they rented an efficiency apartment or something to them for a while. And then it went to Third [Street] and Verbeke

[Street] which was where the, it's Mid-Town Scholar, in that corner building, it was like a basement. And the Common Roads had some space in there and the Switchboard had an office in there.

SL: So that was a pretty long time than...

BL: Yeah

SL: .. it was in existence.

BL: Well getting back to, talking about Jerry. Let me just get some questions that Bill was looking to try to answer. We talked about kind of his home life growing up a little bit, with being in a strict, large Catholic family. We talked a little bit about come, coming out – what we know about him. And that he was pretty much always involved with social activist issues. I think you mentioned how you met Jerry with him coming into the 400 Club. Do you want to mention about how you met Jerry, Steve?

SL: Well it was at the Friend's Meeting House. I had been going to the D-Gem, which is I know it's a mess in its self, but anyway that was my coming out bar I guess, and I was there one Saturday night, I remember and I just got to talking to some guy and I said to him, isn't there just something around other than the bars. And he said well, there's Dignity. And I said – I remember saying, "Well, but that's Catholic." You know. And he said, well that's pretty much it. And – But then shortly after that, maybe even the next weekend I, I met John Barnes and we started seeing each other for about four months. And it was John that persuaded me to come to the Friend's Meeting House. And so that was when I met Richard [Hause] and Jerry, John Onafree, some other people. And I knew immediately that it was for me, that it was a discussion group, you know. It was, you know, a very much a feeling of belonging and warmth and not having to deal with the loud music and cigarette smoke and the, you know, the crap at the bars. And – then that's where I met Jerry. So...

BL: Well, the next question that he [Bill] had was, "What led him to pursue degrees and a career in social work?" But I think we kind of get some sense that since he was always, kind of, feeling like he wanted to be an advocate for people who were down trodden...

RH: Right, exactly.

BL: That, that was something he would always be drawn to in his career choice.

RH: He did a lot of social work at the state hospital regarding black patients and their home life and when they were discharged and things like that. He told me one time he got sent to a lot of black homes.

BL: Did he talk much about his work with you guys?

RH: I don't think there was ever any animosity where he worked. I think that he did a good job and they recognized that. He never talked about any problems or wanting to leave or trouble.

SL: I remember though, he, he had helped—one of the reasons why I ended up getting into the Union then was because he had represented me as a shop steward when I was in trouble with my job. And he, he looked at my work record and he said, he said to me, "I wish I had some of the evaluations you've had!" You know, so there may have been, you know, so—As you know Jerry was a gadfly and you know a firebrand, and maybe there was, you know, some friction between him and his supervisor or whatever at his job. But no he never had – it never, whatever it was it never got to the point of you know them asking him to leave or anything like that. You know, they knew he was good at what he did.

BL: Yeah. Yeah, I mean Jerry, as all three of us experienced first-hand, Jerry had a personality that could be absolutely wonderful and sweet one moment and the next minute like something would set him off [chuckling].

SL: But I do remember him telling one time that he did regret that he didn't go into law. And that he knew he would have been good at it. Which obviously he would have been.

BL: Alright. Well Bill was wondering what ignited his desire to, to, to participate in the Black Civil Rights Movement, but I don't know that we really know exactly what, why he was drawn to that but...

RH: Well I think it was through his social work. He got into a lot of black homes and he realized what the situation was, that they were horribly treated and so forth. And it just stoked his passion.

BL: Well except this, the Selma to Montgomery March would have been before all that. but I'm just—I'm thinking that that was certainly, was like a progression by what his thinking was at that point, but I—it, it is interesting to think that he would, as a young man, you know as a young *white* man, you know, be drawn into going down to and march from Selma to Montgomery and really fight for the, the Black, you know, Civil Rights Movement, but I mean there were certainly white people who were in the movement and were participating in that way, but it wasn't very common that's for sure. So he was definitely kind of an outlier and sticking his neck out in a time when it was very dangerous to do so for anyone.

SL: You know, not to take you on a tangent, but is there any information at all about Jerry ever living in Washington, D.C.?

BL: I didn't hear anything about that, or see anything about that in the obituaries...

SL: Because I also remember him telling me once that one of his regrets was that he didn't move there. That, you know, he always thought that it would be great to live there because of the continuous being in the thick of politics and, and political ferment and all of that. So I don't know if he ever did.

RH: Yeah he used to talk about D.C. but I—I didn't know if he lived there. He was—talked about Foggy Bottom a lot. That's a good point, I don't know if he was there for a while...

BL: Maybe he had some friends there that he would visit or something... Did he go to the March on—the first March on Washington, do you know? That strikes me as something he would do, but...

SL: I don't know

BL: Because '79 was the first one and then '87 and '93. And I'm thinking he went to at least the '93 March. He may have, he may have gone to the earlier marches, but I don't know.

RH: Probably.

SL: Yeah, I don't know. I would think probably as well. I mean, I remember being there with you and John Barnes and what year was that? Was in, was that the '90s?

RH: I think so.

BL: Yeah that was '93 probably.

RH: That seems like so long ago.

SL: But certainly Jerry organized chartered busses for us to go to New York and March. He definitely did that for quite a few years.

BL: Yeah. Okay, so I think we talked about Gay Community Services being essentially a discussion-type group..

RH: Discussion and social.

BL: Discussion and social, right. And that eventually it kind of worked its way through deciding to morph into Dignity and...

RH: Yeah, with Gay Community Service we didn't have potluck dinners or anything like that. I think what sometimes we had receptions with maybe little hors d'oeuvres or pick up food, but that was it.

BL: Talked about those questions....we talked about that too...so I think we covered pretty much all of Bill's questions, but maybe just in general we could talk a little bit about once he started Dignity—kind of what things stand out in your mind as being something he was really passionate about doing, or things that he organized for Dignity, or what did he...

RH: Well, we started with a pledge system. I don't know if you knew that or not, but rather than, than just asking for money, he asked everyone to pledge a certain amount every month. And we did have pledge cards and they could check off whatever they wanted to give and they could send it in or turn it in whatever at the meetings and it produced a lot of good income for, for the chapter. Because other than that we didn't really have any income other than offerings. And yeah. But well yeah. The chapter did a lot of things. I mean was it our 10th Anniversary when we had Quentin Crisp.

SL: Quentin Crisp and that was at the Oakland..

RH: The Arches...

SL: The Arches, yes. And that was, I forget the numbers, was that when we finally reached 100 members?

RH: Yes, yeah.

SL: And some of that was because of, of, of, of the volleyball that was going on at the Police Athletic League. And, and I remember Jerry and I would leaflet the bars. He, he'd print leaflets and we'd go and ask if we could pass out leaflets about picnic—the picnics that we would do at Pine Grove Furnace and stuff like that. And we'd go through and hand them out and you know and...

RH: Yeah, the Pine Grove Furnace picnics were a big deal.

SL: Yeah.

RH: A very big deal.

SL: I remember at the one, we had up to 40 people.

RH: Yeah.

BL: Do you know how the volleyball came about? Was it, it was obviously some kind of off shoot of Dignity.

SL: Yeah.

RH: I know you ended up at the Salvation Army Gym then. That's where you played, right?

SL: Well it started out, for the longest time it was at the Police Athletic League. But I, you know, I was out of it by then, but when it got to the Salvation Army, but yeah, yeah that eventually moved I guess to the Salvation Army. But that's how a lot of people that we – Well Richard Hill was involved by then and Barb Graham came into the group.

BL: I know Rich was pretty involved with the volleyball. So I don't know if he was the one who actually started it but he certainly...

RH: Claire Gannet

SL: Claire Gannet, yeah.

RH: I don't know what else I could – What more I could tell you, what about you Steven?

SL: Well the only other thing I just, I guess I told you that it was either Jerry or Father Sawdy that that said that the reason, and I'm not sure if it was Gay Community Service – I think it was the Gay Switchboard, but they said the reason that it was started was because they heard of a suicide of a young man in the, in the central Pennsylvania area, I'm—I don't know if it was Lancaster or, but it was this area. And it was, it was because he was gay and closeted and you know and lonely and maybe being harassed or something like that and he committed suicide and when they heard about it they said this needs to stop. This needs to be addressed. Something has to be done. So, that was an impetus, now I don't know, you know, who it was that, you know, that died, but...

BL: Well it's a very telling story because I think back then there was probably a lot more of that going on than anybody had knowledge of and it was probably kept very quiet in most, in most circles. People didn't acknowledge that he committed suicide because he was gay. He just committed suicide. [Laughs] So, so yeah its...

SL: And they may not have even have known, you know the person may not have told anyone, you know.

RH: Well, that was one of the reasons too that Father Sawdy went to the Bishop at the time to let him know he felt there needed to be a ministry to this community.

BL: And Father was, well you mentioned that that Father knew Jerry from Shamokin or met him somehow through there and so Jerry already knew Father Sawdy and I guess must have reached out to him when he...

RH: Right, like I said at the time he was Chaplain at Holy Spirit Hospital and lived there and then he had a parish later on Cameron Street. It was Sacred Heart. It's no longer there. And that's where the contact was made. We, we – A group of us had gone there to meet with him.

BL: Okay. And so he was willing to stick his neck out basically at that time especially, even now...

RH: Well Father then, he didn't want to do this on the sly so he went to the Bishop and told him what he was going to do and why. And he cited that case of the young guy that they found hanging in the basement in a dress.

BL: Where was that?

RH: That was the person that committed...

BL: Oh yeah, that you were talking about. Steven was talking about. Okay. And that was...

RH: Bishop Daily was the Bishop at the time. And he was pretty much a hard ass. Very conservative. All the Bishops came from Philadelphia from St., St.—I can't remember the name of the seminary down there, but it's arch conservative, just pushed them out—pumped them out one after another. St. Charles Borromeo. So anyhow, but anyway. Bishop Daily said it was all right with him. He knew about it.

BL: Yeah that was definitely an amazing thing in those days for a Bishop to sort of winked and looked the other way.

RH: Right, I mean they weren't going to publicize it or shout it from the roof tops, but he had his, his...

BL: Permission, yeah.

RH: Yeah right.

SL: Sounds like it was lucky for them to get that, considering.

BL: Yes, yeah. Because at most, you know, at most places, cities and everything they wouldn't have given them the time of day, let alone... permission or whatever. Okay. I'm trying to think of other questions I have, but I can't think of anything else.

SL: I remember, it wasn't even – it was maybe two weeks or three weeks of my first joining Dignity that I found myself going to the Capitol Building with John Barnes. And that was on Jerry's directive that we were going—we were going to lobby for gay rights [laughter] and John and I ended up talking with Senator Jubelirer of Blair County. Talking—talk about an ice cold reception. [laughter] But it was, so it was pretty obvious, even back then that Jerry Bend was highly political in Dignity. And of course Dignity had been pretty much established by then. So I'm sure you saw all of that.

RH: Well he saw to it that we went to different chapters. We were at Baltimore. We were at – there was one in Wilkes-Barre. I remember you were along for that. They'd get a big crowd at the Chapel at King's College. Then we tried to found a chapter in York and that

SL: York kind of fizzled.

RH: York was always a tough nut to crack. It was, I don't know. They were really up tight about it. So we gave up on that.

SL: Yeah. Is there any information about when Jerry started his involvement with the Governor's Council on Sexual Minorities?

BL: Yeah. He, he started meeting in '75. Started having the meetings in '75. And then in '76, when they officially appointed the council, I don't think he got a position as an appointed person on the council, but he did continue to stay involved in like some of the sub-committee work that they had, task forces and things like that they had set up. So I never found anywhere where he was actually officially appointed to the council. But you know Jerry [Laughter] he wasn't going to go home! So he continued to stay pretty involved in it. I know he was on like the State Police sub-committee.

SL: Yeah, yeah that's right. That they would give tutorials..

BL: Yes. So they were involved in trying to do some training with them. And meeting with them for sensitivity and you know things like that, so. Probably a very tough nut to crack. [Laughs] Even with the force of Jerry's personality, it would have been tough.

RH: I remember we had one of those regional meetings here. We had to host it and it was at the Friend's Meeting House and God save us all – I was the cook.

BL: Really?!

RH: I came out with these vats of soup that tasted horrible, they were like motor oil. [Laughter]

SL: That's more than what they would offer us when we went to their regional meetings. You know, they'd put out a bowl of pretzels and that was that. And I remember the regional meeting we hosted at John Folbee's house when there was snow storm and John Lippert was out shoveling the drive way half the time. And people came in from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. It was amazing.

RH: Do you remember when Robin Tyler was here?

SL: Yes.

RH: And she, she was a Jewish comedian. And she talked a lot against the Reagan's. They were in office. She called them the geriatric Ken and Barbie. [Laughs] But anyway she had performed at a club down on Cameron Street, I don't remember the name of it, And the guys in the black suits were there. I'll never forget that. And there where we were all casual and everything and there they were.

SL: Yeah I was at that club, but I...

RH: And I guess they followed her where ever she went and monitored what she said.

BL: Wow.

SL: I forget the name of it now.

RH: That's scary.

BL: Yeah.

SL: Yeah, I remember that club. Because they had rock concerts there.

RH: [talking over Steven] It was a disco bar. A disco club.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RH: Robin Tyler.

SL: Yeah, and there was a lady that we had, oh I forget her name, but she did, she did like a one woman impression show of Gertrude Stein. She performed that for us at the Friend's Meeting House.

RH: We used to bring in a coll-a psychologist from State College [Pennsylvania].

SL: Yes.

RH: Couple of times, Joanne....

SL: Oh I forget her last name.

RH: Her first name was Joanne. She was so good. She'd do a - She'd just do a thing on psychological wellness. Like she'd start out, you know I've been all these years and I've never had a patient who was an animal. And then she'd go, you know, if you get exercise, fresh air, and eat right you'll be fine. [Laughs] And she would take it from there. And then I remember Louisa, I think her name was Louise Alexander. But she came in talking about the importance of coalition. So yeah.

SL: And we had Father John McNeil.

RH: Father John McNeil, right.

RH: You know he passed away not too long ago.

BL: Yeah there were – As I recall there were a lot of good programing sort of things that Jerry came up with..

SL: Well there was an education committee.

RH and BL: Yes.

SL: You know, there was a social committee, an education committee, women's committee, literature committee, and can you remember any others?

RH: That about covered it.

SL: And it amazes me looking back, you know, with *The Newsletter*, because around that time John Folbee and Larry Vallario were in the group and they were doing incredible art work for that newsletter before computers. Everything was hand done.

BL: Right.

SL: You know, look back on that and think, how?

BL: Yeah, labor of love.

RH: Yep.

BL: Yeah and the basic format that, that they followed was the – they would offer the Mass upstairs in the meeting room and then downstairs afterwards they'd have the pot luck dinner and usually followed by some kind of program.

RH: Right. And we had one Monsignor sitting Mass for us. So Father Sawdy always said we had a member of the Papal household [laughter] saying mass for our chapter. And that was Monsignor La Tocha from Sacred Heart in Middleton, not Sacred Heart, oh Seven Sorrows in Middletown, and he brought us a whole closet full of vestments, which I thought was wonderful. He was an older man.

BL: It was interesting how much cooperation Father Sawdy was able to get from other priests because I remember seeing like the list of priest that was on call for doing service and joint mass...

RH: We had Father Allan

BL: It was quite a few.

RH: Father Beaman. Monsignor Montochia. What was the other guy's name....Chet...can't remember, he was a big, big guy. He was a priest. Chet Snyder.

BL: Anything else you can think of? [chuckles]

RH: I think we covered a lot of it.

SL: Yeah.

BL: Okay, good.

RH: He of course as you know was in a couple relationships throughout his life.

BL: Oh yeah let's talk about that.

RH: But there were none that I would call long-term. Month to a couple years, maybe. Mark was his first partner that I knew. Very, very good looking younger guy. I don't know if he's still around or not. He certainly could be. I think they had lived together for a while and then parted ways. They remained friends, but they had their own – each had their own place. He had seen Bob, well I shouldn't mention names I guess these people are still around. But anyway, yeah and then the last one was Gregory, right?

SL: Did he—was he with Jeff for a while? He lived in Philadelphia for a bit, again I don't know if I should mention names...

RH: No. I don't know. Well the last one was Steve-Steven Felton. So he did have some long term relations. And some of them may have lived together.

SL: Yeah I remember Gregory now.

RH: Gregory was just on TV.

SL: Oh really? He had gone up to live in New York at some point?

RH: I think he was at the West Coast. Well he did hair and make up, whatever you call that when you...so he wasn't without romance and love.

BL: Okay. Anything else?

RH: Well thank you for the opportunity.

SL: Thank you.

BL: Yes, thank you.