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Interviewee: George Centini, Gary Hufford

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Date of Interview: January 30, 2017

Location of Interview: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

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Abstract:

Gary Hufford (born 1952) and George Centini (born March 11, 1937) are a married couple living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In this interview, George and Gary recount their time in the gay bar and restaurant business. Both grew up in the restaurant business and became business partners together. As successful restaurateurs, they provide insight in the running of their business, the Tally-Ho and the Loft, as well as other local gay bars. They also speak about employing family and friends as workers and employing both gay and straight workers. They also speak about how both of their families were supportive of their relationship and are both part of the other's family. They liken Lancaster to a "bubble" where many outside problems did not affect them strongly. Even so, they speak about the impact of the AIDS crisis on the young people who often visited their bars and the loss of many in the gay community in Lancaster. Additionally, they talk about their annual trips to Key West in order to live the "gay lifestyle." Finally, they speak about their choice to finally marry after many years together.

JH: So we do have it here, you're right.

BL: So we do a test of the sound and everything?

JH: I just did.

BL: Okay.

JH: You're okay.

BL: Good. Alright, I want to welcome both Gary and George we appreciate your willingness to be interviewed today. My name is Barry Loveland and I'm here with John Howe who's our videographer we're here on behalf of the LGBT Center of Central PA History Project. Today is January 30, 2017 and we're here for an oral history interview with George Hufford and Gary Centini. This interview is taking place at their home in Lancaster. And Gary and George do we have your permission to record the interview today?

GS & GH: Yes.

BL: Okay, great. Like I mentioned before, we'll have a consent form for you to look over and sign at the end of the interview. So (clock chimes, laughter)

GH: Sorry!

BL: (Inaudible) So I wanted to start at the very beginning so maybe we'll alternate a little bit between the two of you so that we get your whole sort of original family story growing up and

everything. So I wanted to find out first of all what—where you were born and what year you were born and then talk a little bit about your family life growing up and so forth. So, George you want to start?

GS: I'm George Centini and I was born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. March 11th, 1937. And my grandfather who came to Lancaster from Italy, landed here and he worked for the Gulf Funeral Home and at that time the Southern—the Southern end of the city was mostly Italian people. And he bought a piece of ground down there and they built their own home there. And he opened a restaurant there at that time an Italian bar and restaurant it was called "Patsy's Café" and that's where I was born and raised so that's where I got my upbringing in the bar business at Patsy's Café. As a young boy, lived there all my life up into my teens when I started junior high school with my mother and father, it was the whole—after the—the family more or less run the restaurant after my step-dad built it, he stayed off working for the Gulf Funeral Home and his wife and his sister they did the kitchen work and then his boys and their wives—my mother and dad—they more or less run the restaurant part and the bar part you know. So that's where I was born and raised.

BL: Okay, did you have any siblings? Your sisters or brothers?

GS: I had no—no.

BL: Only child.

GS: Yeah.

BL: Okay. Gary?

GH: Gary Hufford, I was born near Chad's Ford, Pennsylvania, Chester County, born and raised on a farm and I had one brother, my parents were both gone. It was a nice upbringing living on a farm I always liked the restaurant business I'd come out working up in a restaurant at a very young age I liked the farm but I didn't want to stay on the farm. So I always worked in the restaurant business all my whole career you know, and I've been in Lancaster since '72, so.

BL: George, talk a little bit about your like school life, too.

GH: School I finished junior high school, started high school and at that time my mother and father got divorced and I lived in with my mother and so at that time then I quit school and helped keep the household.

BL: Okay. So did you find school a good experience or?

GS: Oh yeah all through school, I enjoyed school but at that time to make things go better at home I quit school and went to work and she worked and then over the years—over the years then that's when I got involved in tending bar for the people that I bought the Tally-Ho—well it was called "Pips Bar" then, Pip's Bar—Pip's Place—I worked for them people for five years and when Miss Phoebe's husband died, then she made—she worked out a deal with me to buy the business from her. That was back in the—around (thinking) guess that would be, around the...

GH: 60s?

GS: Yeah around the late 60s, early 70s.

BL: Mhmm. Okay. And did you—trying to think of the question I had on my mind it just kind of escaped me but maybe we'll turn to Gary then and talk a little bit about your school life and what that was like.

GH: I went to school in Unionville, Unionville School and I also went to a private school for a while, Phelps Boys School. I had no problem at school, I like school and I wasn't a great student but I did go to school and I graduated from Unionville eventually, at the end but yeah I had no problems with y'know, school or anything or bullying or anything like that. But I—it was a good experience.

BL: I guess for you, for both of you, eventually, did you—when did you feel that you were different or that you might be gay or that you had some kind of feelings that you felt were not y'know, like heterosexual?

GH: I always was attracted to male men, I was, really was. I mean, matter of fact, I really came out in gay life when I was 12.

BL: Oh, really?

GH: Yeah with an older man.

BL: We'll talk a little about that.

GH: But yeah, so I had no issues with myself I felt comfortable in it and I have to honestly say I have never had any problems being gay. I know a lot of people probably have but I've never had any bad experiences never been bullied or picked on, or I've had a good – I've been lucky.

BL: How did that experience come about with the older man that's—

GH: He lived with my cousins, he was like a hired man and just y'know, he liked—which is not really good right now—but he liked younger, younger kid, guys, y'know, my age. 12, 13, 14.

BL: Wow (laughs). You were okay with that?

GH: Yeah, yeah I really was you know. I'm sure other kids probably might've said, well he—and eventually he did get caught with a younger, younger person and you know got in trouble, so. But you know, we all have our cross to bear.

BL: Yes. Did you say what year you were born around?

GH: I was born in 1952.

BL: '52? Okay. So, the same question I guess for you George, is, when did you sort of feel different or feel like you were gay?

GS: Well I did have a lot—affairs with women before I more or less come out and got attracted into the gay life, I guess. I think my gay life started around the time that the Village Night Club

was running and they had the gay bar downstairs and I went out and had a couple of affairs with different gay men.

BL: Mhmm.

GS: Where I was more or less – I was trade at that time. And then they always say, the old gay business “today’s trade is tomorrow’s competition” and then that’s when I actually came out into gay life.

BL: Uh-Huh. And this was probably the early ‘60s? Do you think or?

GS: In middle ‘60s.

BL: Mid ‘60s.

GS: Mhmm.

BL: Okay, good. And talk a little bit about that time in Lancaster. I mean what was Lancaster like besides the Village that was probably the only—

GS: That was the main bar where gay men hung and I was in my early 20s then and these men were – they were a little older than me, you know. But—and I was more or less if I didn’t hook up with a girl or felt ornery or got approached by a man why I was more or less trade, you know.

BL: And you said that the village was like a night club on the first level?

GS: Yeah that was a nightclub on the first level.

BL: And the gay people—

GS: And the gay people were downstairs.

BL: Okay.

GS: Yeah.

BL: And that was like a separate bar area and stuff like that?

GS: Yeah and during intermission when the crowd would stomp upstairs with the entertainment the people from upstairs would come down and mingle with the gays.

BL: Really?

GS: Oh yeah. So it was it was known more or less as Lancaster’s gay facility for gay men, the downstairs of the Village Night Club.

BL: Okay. So at what point did you—you said that you purchased the bar?

GS: Well I always went—I ran around then I had a gang of men my age and we used to go downtown Lancaster had a lot of night clubs then and we’d pop from night club to night club and at that time it was just a little bar on Orange Street and Waters Street it was called “Eby’s (?) Pit (?) Place”. And we would go there ‘cuz it was a cheap bar to go in and drink with draft beer and

like they had pick-at food on the bar and stuff at night time. And we would meet there all the time and we were drinking there but we got real close with the people that owned it and Mr. Ebey needed a bartender and he knew that I was born and raised in the hotel business, the bar business, and he approached me at that time I took him—a job from him—working as his daytime bartender at that time and so I was in my mid-20s then. And I worked there for them for quite a few years and then when he passed away that’s when his wife wanted to sell the place and she had ‘em for sale for five or six years, they owned two bars at that time, and I more or less managed two for her. And so she approached me and she set up a deal that I could buy the bar off of her. So at that time they didn’t own the property, they just owned the liquor license and equipment. I bought that at that time and then went down the road then I was able to purchase the property. And I was the one that named it the “Tally-Ho” and it was always after I bought it – it was more or less just run like a...a neighborhood bar but I was more or less adventurous at that time there was different eras I went through I tried everything. They had go-go girls, I had go-go girls, they had Mickey Finns, I had Mickey Finns. I did a little bit of everything, anything to get people in there like on weekends. I’d hire a little combo (?) or I’d hire a go-go girl. We had a girl at that time in town, Rosie, she weighed oh close to 300 pounds so I bought her, her first go-go outfit and made her, her first, be the first go-go—“Big Rosie from Lancaster, County”. She ended up dancing at the Village Night Club several times, too.

BL: Wow.

GH: She’s still alive. I see her all the time.

GS: So the Tally-Ho went through a lot of stages. Then when the Village Night Club when out of business I thought: “well, the Village went out of business I’m gonna capitalize on the gay bar.” So what I did then I remodeled the place. The first soft thing I did I put dress code on, to try and keep the rough guys out, you know. And did away with the draft beer and just had mixed drinks and bottle beer—well prices—‘cuz I spent some money on the rum. And to keep the rough stuff out, so at that time we had an organ—organ music, Dick Derimus, an old-time organ player and so—after that I went down the line like they say eventually we get into when I met, Gary started coming into the Tally-Ho. And I was on the door and got to know him. We got to know each other I had a previous lover that I had lived with for ten years that our relationship was really on the rocks and that’s when I broke away from him and that’s when Gary and I hooked up and with Gary being in the restaurant business with the experience he had he said “well let’s—let’s open up a restaurant upstairs.” So it was just a rooming house so I made everybody move and Gary and I worked with a gay boy that came into the Tally-Ho, he was a good carpenter. We worked for over a year building the Loft restaurant. So then we ended up – we hired a chef from down in Chester County that Gary worked with at one of the fine dining restaurants. Chef Henry Hodges and he came to Lancaster and opened the Loft for us. And at that time, that’s when we had a lot of fine dining restaurants in Lancaster. And the one well-known fine dining restaurant which is called the—

GH: Tom Paynes.

GS: Tom Paynes. His wife said “that place will never go it’s owned by a bunch of gay guys, it’ll never go.” Well, within two months we had ‘em all in town, even at the Loft because we had good food and good service. And so that’s how the Loft got started and then we were still at the gay bar downstairs. So at that time we had a great class of gay kids. That’s when gay kids could go out into gay bars and they were having fun we always had a good DJ left him to buy his own music, we didn’t—we spent money on music we tried to do things downstairs that the kids would enjoy and so we started running bus trips at that time to Atlantic City [Chimes go off in background]. And we gets down to Atlantic City and the kids would grab their ten dollars’ worth of quarters and go into the casinos, spend them at the gay bars. Some of our drag girls they dressed—they’d stay dressed in drag and go to Atlantic City and get into the shows down there. So we always—it was always a good time. So I said “dammit there, they’re dancing in Atlantic City, we’re going to dance too, boys in Lancaster.” And how (inaudible) how we gonna get away with this? So I thought, well at that time, the only way I could get away with it was put a minimum on the door on Fridays and Saturday nights, to keep the rough stuff out and that actually, the two dollars kept a lot of the bully guys kinda guys out. They didn’t want to pay two—they’re not gonna pay two dollars to come in and pay, especially not a gay bar. So what we would do then at that time we would give them a ticket that was good for the first drink and then that’s when we still had the good—we still had the good DJ music and stuff and then we had the mix then between the gay girls and the gay guys but then that – not long not too long after that they say that’s when the Sundown Lounge was purchased by a man and wife that had a gay daughter and that’s when they more or less opened then the girls’ gay bar in Lancaster and that still runs as a girls’ gay bar, The Sundown. And they run a tough ship up there, too. They really do. So...

GH: A lot of people for years thought that the Tally-Ho and Loft were two separate places, but it was the same liquor license, ran it the same way but...

GS: But all of that from the time we opened the Loft we did get a certain amount of straight people that ate at the Loft a lot of times would go downstairs after dinner because—

GH: We had good music.

GS: Because had great music and it was never no talk about it...

GH: (Inaudible) the back stairs, the back stairs.

GS: (inaudible) There was never no trouble y’know, so we had a pretty good mix then of people. We still go some of the gay girls that would drift back and forth in town but we always tried to give the kids at the Tally-Ho what they were and what they needed. We would go out on occasion and go down to Philly (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and then we’d come up to Harrisburg we’d see what’s going on around different places and we’d try to keep in step with what we needed to do to give our kids in Lancaster what they wanted in a gay bar and that was hard at that time. Really hard.

GH: You can see how needy we are

(Laughter. Video cuts out)

BL: Go back a little bit and talk about, you said you had a lover before you met Gary. Can you talk about how you met that man and what the circumstances were of that relationship?

GS: Like I said I was more or less trade and I met him, as, as more or less trade. He approached me and we started going out and then we got attached and he would – I more or less came out into gay life then.

BL: About what year do you remember that being?

GH: That would have had to be the early 60s.

GS: Yeah, that was in the early 60s and then he worked-- he was, I took him on as partner into the business, but I was the money behind the business. And then when we broke up I ended up having to buy him out anyhow, through a lawyer, and then down the line that's when I met Gary and we decided to put the Loft together and then we run the Loft and the Tally-Ho together. And so....

BL: And I'm trying to get some of the time line too. Like when the Tally-Ho first opened, when you first bought the Tally-Ho, do you remember about what year that was? I think when I looked on the corporation website for the state it said 1966 was when....

GS: Yeah it was around 68 I think.

BL: Okay 68 okay. And then, about when the Loft was opened, when did the Loft...

GH: The loft opened 72

GS: 72.

BL: 72 okay.

GH: And then we sold – George Sullivan in 85.

GS: Yeah and like I said, I felt – always – my feelings is that the gay-bar owned by gay people offer - try to offer more to the gay clientele than a bar that's not owned, gay owned.

GH: Well you were real generous with the clientele. I mean we would like, there would always be a great Halloween party, there was a Christmas party, a New Year's party, anything for a party that was going to be there. And he always put out a big spread of food, for free, and ya know he was very giving to the kids. And then after he sold, it was just total different.

BL: Tell me, when you guys first met, how that relationship first developed.

GH: Well I was, ya know, I was from Chester County which I said and I had a – I was a dog groomer also, I had a lot of trades I did and I had my own shop and then I worked for a kennel also. And I had a lot of gay clientele that came to my shop and I made myself a rule that I would never fooled around in my own neighborhood or my own area. Ya know it was still – it was –

people were still pretty closeted in those days, ya know. And this one customer of my told me that, about the bar up in Lancaster. And so I went up there one day – one night to try to see what it was about. And ya know I started going in as costumer and then I met other people there and I liked that it was an hour from home so I felt comfortable, I didn't know anybody and no one knew me up there and so I started going up there. And then – him and his friend were on the way out so then we just got to know each other and ya know before long we got together and ya know –

GS: And we have been together then since. 43 years.

BL: So what year was that?

GH: It was 70, like 71 beginning of 72

BL: Okay. And that's when you decided to go with the restaurant?

GH: Yeah about, it was late 71, maybe early 72 that we started to do that. And then we worked for almost a year doing that with the carpenter.

GS: And after we sold that, every time we sold any one of our businesses we had to sign a five year non-compete, 10 mile radius, we couldn't even work for anybody, other than – we could work for a caterer but not another –

GH: Or 10 miles out of the city

GS: Yeah so after we sold the Loft we bought a farm in Southern Lancaster County

GH: 20 miles south of the city ...

GS: And we opened a bed and breakfast there. And at that time I had been racing race horses. I owned horses, I built a barn on the farm and we were there for about what – about 8, 10 years?

GH: No not quite that long

GS: 8 years. A little over 8 years. And we only had four rooms so we weren't making a livin'. So it was that time we sold the farm and came back to town so then –

GH: So we bought –

GS: That's when we bought –

GH: It was called Peg's Place on Shipens Street.

GS: Peg's Place. That was owned by two gay girls. It was more or less a girl's gay bar, Peg's Place. I forgot that part.

GH: It was a neighborhood kind of bar. She had a boarding house, she had rooms upstairs she rented to a bunch of guys and –

GS: But we bought that then opened Miles (?). And then we were there how long?

GH: 6 years.

GS: 6 years.

GH: 6-7 years.

GS: And then we sold that. And then we had a break and then we went into Characters and that was our last venture behind the courthouse of Lancaster. And we have been retired now for what?

GH: 5 years.

GS: 5 years.

BL: And Characters was a restaurant?

GH: The space itself was empty for 50 years, the downtown, if you can believe that. It was on the second floor and so that was, we had that. It was a pub, bar, restaurant. I think as far as the three restaurants our favorite was probably Molly's. We just liked the feel of that. Characters was the easiest to work it was all one floor but I think Molly's had our heart. That was, that was just a really great time. We had a great staff and our dog was named – the restaurant was named after her. She was a black lab. So we had a lot of people that loved animals and we would have people bring their dogs in and it was near the park and the setting there was just great. It was a fun time.

BL: Well neither one of you served (video cuts out)

GS: Oh yeah I did. I was in reserve for a while.

BL: Oh, were you?

GS: Yeah army reserve for six years.

GH: Yeah.

BL: Wow. What time frame was that, do you remember?

GS: Well, I was in the engineers.

BL: Okay and about what year was that, that you served?

GS: Well, let's see here. That would've been in...I guess...that was before I opened the Tally-Ho so that would've been in the '50s.

BL: Wow, okay.

GS: Yeah

BL: So this was after you got outta school and you were helping your mom—

GS: That was before I met Gary.

BL: Right

GS: That I was in the Army Reserve.

BL: You were helping your mom.

GH: Well that was before you met Larry [laughs] so you were probably late '50s or—

BL: Helping your mom for a few years and then you decided to go into the Army Reserves?

GS: No, the Army Reserve, yeah.

BL: Right, that's great. And as far as the community the LGBT community in general, have you, did you get involved in any sort of organizational activities in the city in Harris—in Lancaster, I mean?

GS & GH: Nah.

GH: No, there was nothing really going on in those days. I think in the last few years there's been things but I don't—we had the Tally-Ho there was really nothing going on there was no help for anybody. I mean you just kinda you were on your own, kinda thing. You sucked it up and dealt with it, you know.

BL: Right.

GH: But I don't remember any kind of agency or anything you know that I know of.

BL: And you had mentioned off-camera before about a bar called the Fez or?

GS: Red Fez.

BL: Red Fez.

GH: That's where the girls bar is now

GS: Yeah that's where the Sundown Lounge is now. That was where—

GH: Duke Turner.

GS: Duke Turner owned that. He was well-known in the city and that was the

GH: Fun one

GS: He had the go-go girls. And the dancers.

GH: He was awful. You gotta admit he was a pain in the ass. He'd bring those girls in, his girls in for dinner and he would just treat 'em terrible. He'd treat the servers the same way, he was just awful.

GS: Very, very demanding.

GH: He was rude, he was rude.

GS: He drank nothing but, he was a gin drinker. Seagram's cheap gin.

(Barry laughs)

GS: So I had to keep Seagram's gin on the shelf.

GH: Or he'd want red wine and he'd call ahead of time and want it refrigerated. He'd want it cold, ice cold. He was, he was a creep. (laughter)

GS: He was a character.

GH: He died a horrible death. He ran into a wall.

BL: Let's see, I'm trying to think of maybe you could talk a little bit more about the Tally-Ho and kind of what it was like you mentioned to me off-camera about the neon and so forth maybe talk a little bit about the décor and how you developed it or—

GS: Well every couple of years more or less we change the décor...

GH: It used to be, first it was that knotty pine, remember? Remember the old knotty pine, the real world, it wasn't like paneling.

GS: Then we...we did the walls with like a...

GH: Shingle and wagon wheels, custom Western theme.

GS: We had a forty-seat bar and it was the biggest bar in the city.

GH: Big rectangular bar it was a great bar.

GS: It seated forty people at the time and so then we used to go we would close every year for a year—

GH: A week.

GS: And for a week and being gay, we always went to Key West because we were going to Key West for the gay life.

GH: It'd be a whole entourage we'd go every year.

GS: We would see what was going on in Key West. The trend was they came out with peach schnapps.

GH: We'd never heard of it.

GS: So we were drinking peach schnapps in Key West so we brought a couple bottles back.

GH: We brought a suitcase back.

GS: We brought a suitcase back of it.

GH: But they were doing all these crazy you know, they were doing peach schnapps in the gay bars at one point.

GS: And then finally like Pennsylvania finally came out with it that you could buy it so we brought that back from Key West, the peach schnapps. And then the one year we went down there one little gay bar that we went to they had, they were doing beer taps it was a bowl beer tap

made up like a snapcap on a beer can that all the kids were wearing and we brought em down there then I had—

GH: There was a jeweler that made them down there we bought them down there.

GS: So then I had a friend of mine that was in the jewelry business here in Lancaster and he came back here and he sold and if any of the gay kids would want them then he would make them up for the gay kids. I have one upstairs somewhere.

GH: They were really cool.

GS: Yeah, they just looked like a beer tag.

GH: One year we met this little old guy that was a local artist and he only did portraits of all different types of men and we bought how many—how many did we bought? They were like this (motions size with hands) nice size.

GS: Beautiful paintings.

GH: And he came to our hotel and laid about in the lobby and we picked the ones we want, it one was a construction worker, and one was blond, all these different poses.

GS: We bought a dozen

GS: Good looking men body b—you know.

GH: Brought em back here

GS: Brought em back here.

GH: Got them re-framed and we did the whole perimeter of the bar in those.

GS: And so naturally then when Gunther came into town and he bought the gay bar it wasn't long before he bought it that after that he took em all down and sold them to the gay kids.

GH: Yeah, he didn't want them. Probably gave them away.

GS: And they were gorgeous. These were really professionally done gorgeous, gorgeous gay men. You know, showing their—

GH: I don't think a lot of them were even gay, I think they were just—this guy, y'know, he was a gay artist but I think he just paid them and they were like, they'd do it for the money. You know, they weren't even nudes, even, most of them were just from here up (motions to chest) there was the one with a guy with like a back shot or something but most of them were just very well-done.

GS: Good looking men, all very attractive. So he had no problem selling them to the kids.

BL: And tell me about the story of about the neon on the ceiling.

GH: Oh yeah, we had there was the old comic drive-in it was closed for quite a few years and an electrician friend of ours ended up buying the sign for a good price and he did work for us, Kevin. Kevin? Kevin—

GS: Kevin Landis.

GH: Kevin Landis. He set about...

GS: He come in and installed along the ceiling and he put it

GH: He said, “hey, you know”

GS: He put it on all these pulsators that would flash on and off but that’s when neon was and mirror balls was in, you know

GH: He was into all that stuff. Plus he made a sign that said “the Tally-Ho” in neon. I think that’s all still there—

GS: I—I think that’s down I don’t know. The neon may still be on the ceiling, you know.

GH: The last time we were there it was still there.

GS: And I think the DJ area is still in the same area where we had the DJ booths in the same here where we had it but since then Gunther’s put a new bar in high-top tables ya know and all real, he made a nice—it’s a nice lounge it really is.

GH: That bar was the original rectangular that was a fun bar because the gay kids loved the camp and carry-on and they’d go back and forth and you know you’d say something smart and someone else would say you know how they are

GS: We could seat forty people at that bar and like Gary told you, and on Fridays and Saturday nights it was always always overflowing with two hundred people in there.

GH: It was fun, it was a fun place.

GS: And every time, it would never fail, any time you would have any trouble it was always the goddamn lesbians that started it.

GH: Oh yeah, we could have two hundred men never have a problem.

GS: It was always the lesbians.

GH: We had two girls and there’d be a fight. Always, it was always the girls fighting.

GS: But I’d credited it to that, I credited a lot of that \$2 minimum. Helping to keep us a way from a lot of trouble. It would turn a lot of people away just didn’t wanna pay that \$2 to come in, you know.

BL: So did you have any incidence of trouble? During the time?

GH: Oh, sure. This one [motions to George] this one he would, he could put his hand on the bar and jump over the bar and he had a nightstick full of lead and he'd run down the street and he'd knock em out, I mean he wouldn't take their shit.

GS: I didn't take no.

GH: He was tough. I mean he would, they'd come in, throw a beer bottle or something or say some smart words and then they'd be out the door but he'd be right out the door after them he'd run them down it was, it was funny [laughs].

GS: We never had a—in all the—in all the years that we owned liquor licenses we never had a drop of trouble with liquor control board as far as violations or citations and the same way with the board of health. Never no violations in forty-some years in the restaurant and bar business, from either one. We tried to run a pretty straight place.

BL: And you didn't have any trouble with the local police or anything?

GS: No, no, no, no. We never, no.

GH: In fact, we had quite a few police who ate upstairs.

BL: Yeah.

GH: Yeah and the mayor, we never had any problem with that and I'll tell ya, there was, there was two young doctors that really got us started. The one had been a M.A.S.H. doctor and there was one that was an Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist and they were two of our first customers and they became lifelong friends and the one has passed one, but the one's still alive and to this day, they're still friends of ours.

GS: When we first opened the Loft, we didn't take credit cards we had a lane take come here from Philadelphia to—one of them restaurant critics and she wrote in her article, "when you go there you gotta have cold cash 'cuz they take no credit cards." We had our own billing system where my stepfather at the time, he helped he helped us get started in the restaurant. He bought us our first kitchen after my mother got re-married my stepfather bought us our first kitchen. And he was the one that pushed us into doing the Loft, really, c'ause they use to go down to the restaurant where Gary worked as a waiter, my mother and him and my aunt and uncle and eat and they loved the food there. And when we—we came and we worked on that, he put money into the restaurant for us and he insisted and we hired the chef from that restaurant to come and open the Loft. And that's when we hired Chef Henry to come from down there in Chester County to open the Loft for us.

BL: And how—speaking of your families, how accepting have they been?

GS: Oh as far as my mother he was like a son and I was like a son, yeah very well accepting.

GH: My parents were always very accepting and my mom worked for both, well she didn't work in our last restaurant she'd passed on but she'd worked in the other two restaurants she'd drive up here on Friday night and Saturday night, never stay over, no matter how bad the weather was, she'd have to get home for my father, she said, but she'd come up and work (inaudible)

GS: Doing whatever and but there was never no problem and he does have a brother.

GH: It's never been a problem with any of our family my aunt who is 92, I'm definitely one of her favorites and she and her my uncle and her worked for us at the Loft at the Holidays they would work our catering crew because we didn't have enough staff to do catering. And they would work every Holiday season on weekends for us.

GS: Both sides of the family accepted.

GH: We never had any issues, I know.

GS: I was like a third son to his mother and dad he was like a brother to me—my mother.

GH: I don't hear a lot of stories about families where they're kids or parents disown them or this or that.

GS: We never had any of that.

GH: We never had that problem.

GS: But then, with his brother and with the grandchildren and stuff, we never, Gary and I never really flouted our gayness and even all the years that I've been gay, I never can say that when I owned the bar I never tried to let myself get involved amongst too many relationships with any of the customers. I come out in the gay life but I really, I really only had two gay men that I was really ever involved real much and that was my first lover and then when I met Gary and that was more or less it. Yeah.

BL: That's amazing.

GH: Plus, I don't think our staff ever saw us like hugging or kissing or any of that I mean we just it respectful for them as well as ourselves

GS: His brother's two sons they call me Uncle George you know and we never left and his brother always respected us for that. And his brother always just treated me like he, like he does Gary, you know.

BL: One thing I'm curious about being that Lancaster is kind of the center of Amish country, did you ever get any Amish young guys come?

GH: We would have—remember those couple of those Amish guys would come in the bar but you had a couple...

GS: Older men...

GH: You had a couple, a lot of girls that use to come in there that were like trade that would take them out, but they never really went with the gay guys

GS: We would, see when I first bought the place we were open in the daytime like a neighborhood bar, you know and then like I say with that strip down on West King Street where there was bars and where the gay were allowed and lesbian hung and stuff and they don't have a

block to walk up the Tally Ho and there was like hookers and stuff, they walked back and forth we did have some Amish men that would drift in now and then and buy a beer and try to hook up with a woman you know.

GH: Well, that one girl— Shiela.

GS: Yeah.

BL: But no, no....

GH: But we know a couple of people now that are in Lancaster that were Amish and have dropped out and...

GS: And this was before drugs was really bad. I can truthfully say I don't feel that in our era at the Tally-Ho where drugs was really a big, big big issue and that time, maybe pills, like diet pills upper and downers but it wasn't cocaine and shooting up and stuff like that. None of that. And even wasn't even much marijuana then, no.

[part of video cut off]

GS: How gay kids would do that.

JH: Especially bartenders.

GS: Now we always, we never had much trouble other than now and then

GH: We didn't really have any fights.

GS: A little skirmy breakout like on a Saturday night or some—and it was always late, just about time the bar getting ready to close and we'd try to get it broke up, you know but we didn't have—we didn't really have to have the cops—

GH: We didn't have the cops come here.

GS: And it was always mostly then like we said, lesbians. But that when that was our only time it was lesbians like I say they rolled their cigarettes up in their white t-shirts and this they were wearing black leather jackets but I usually tell 'em “hey you come in here you gonna behave if you wanna be treated like a goddamn man I'll treat you like a man” (laughter) you know what I mean? If you don't behave. I didn't take no shit off none of them. I had that nightstick because that came through my grandpa running his place, he always had a nightstick behind his bar and he was a tough old Dego (?) he didn't take no shit. And I run a good place.

GH: Our staff was mostly mixed. It wasn't all gay people. We had straight and most of our staff was straight, to tell you the truth. They weren't gay but you know they all mixed good together once in a while you'd have a customer that would be a little smart ya know about stuff but we didn't have too much trouble.

GS: But at that time, Harrisburg was the area for gay bars. I mean, Harrisburg had three four—they had the Clock. You remembers the Clocks?

BL: Clock Bar.

GS: That was some gay bar. That would get so crowded you'd go in the front door and if you went outside you had to go outside to pee, you had to go out the front door and to get to the bathroom or something, and you'd come in the backdoor. And they—that bar as long as I can remember they more or less didn't have gay bartenders they had two guys that run that for them for whoever owned it and they were handsome men but they knew how to play the game and they were loved by the gay kids now they made money hand over first. So I—a good gay bar you don't need to actually have gay help, but you have to have—to run a good gay dance gay bar you got to have attractive looking bartenders. And they gotta be— if they're straight, they gotta be able to make up and have fun with them while they're there and when they leave, they leave, you know what I mean? (Barry laughs) That's how those bartenders were as far as I know in Harrisburg at that time. But then there was the other bar in Harrisburg, that was the big hotel there in the basement there they had a bar down there I can't think what that one was called...that and the Clock did the most business. Then they got some of the newer ones came later. You know.

BL: What do you remember about the Clock bar? Going in there, how often did you go in there?

GS: Every now and then I could break away from Tally-Ho and we'd go up you know what I mean. It was like Tally-Ho, wall to wall. And they had the good bar downtown and the Clock, they were both good bar. They were close enough that they were in that big, one big hotel downtown down I think it was called the Warner—

BL: Warner Hotel. Yes.

GS: Maybe it was called the Warner, yes. And they would walk from the Warner up to the Clock and back and forth. You know, and both of them bars done real well in Harrisburg at that time.

BL: And the reason it was called the Clock Bar is because—

GS: All them clocks, yes. Different times for all around the world.

BL: Different times zones, yep.

GS: And now I don't—they never danced in there. That was just a drinking bar because it was so s—it wasn't that big and it would get that crowded that they couldn't dance. Ya know, there was no place for them to dance.

GH: Well you used to always say the dancers didn't make any money, you remember that?

GS: Huh?

GH: You used to always say that dancers don't make any money (laughing)

GS: No, no.

BL: When did the Tally-Ho start dancing, did— was that right from the beginning or did you?

GH: That was before I came in.

GS: Yeah, yeah.

GH: Had to probably be '68, '69.

GS: Yeah around that—around '68, '69. Yeah.

[Clock chimes]

GH: Sorry about the clock. Speaking of clocks.

JH: Pause it again for once second.

BL: Sure.

[Part of video cut off]

GH: And it would be packed and that guy, you know how the gay kids are about show tunes and things like that, that guys hardly ever had to look up any of the music he had all the stuff in his head and we often said you need just to have like a little piano bar that you could sit around and maybe like pick at stuff and just have drinks we-we loved that bar we always went there, the gang of us.

GS: And another thing, all the years that we been in the business and the way that Pennsylvania liquor control board is about wanting to make money why they never came out with now, especially now, why they don't just come out with just a beer and wine license that allows you just to sell beer and wine in Florida they have a lot of them. Can you imagine how many beer and wine license the Pennsylvania liquor control board would sell? Just in Philadelphia alone, how many little great restaurants do they have that are all BYOB because they cannot afford the license and now with this new law the liquor board come out with, liquor license was selling for 100, 125, 150,000 now they're getting up to 300,000 dollars for a liquor license.

BL: 400,000 here now.

GS: And you have to buy it from somebody else. So why, if they want to make some fast money, if they don't come out with just the issue beer and wine license for these small restaurateurs that wanna open—that have restaurants that would buy em if they could afford em and if they come out with a license just for them would they allow them to sell them they'd sell a hell of a lot.

[Barry laughs]

BL: Yeah.

BL: Okay. So in terms of your relationship, you said off-camera about getting married. Maybe you could talk a little about that as well as?

GH: We kind of really held off for a long time, we're still kinda maybe old-fashioned I don't know, we figure we're gonna go to hell for being gay anyway, maybe so we kind of held off not

getting married for a long time. And we have a really good accountant who is not, he is straight he's not gay and he was in the military and he was an attorney and he was our attorney for years, he did our wills and all that and he does our taxes and he kept saying "I'm telling ya, you gotta do this or you're gonna be sorry." and he said "I keep," he said, "I keep up with all the gay stuff that's going on," y'know, which really cracked us up we figure, here's a straight gay that y'know and he kept on us and he said, "I think you should do it" and then when they finally passed it in Pennsylvania we thought, okay.

GS: And really there wasn't many in Lancaster area that was, when they first come out with I—I think more or less being that has the—

GH: Belvedere.

GS: Belvedere. Was one of the first ones we known to get married and then it was the one that has Isaac's.

GH: Oh yeah, Phil Rheiner...

GS: Phil Rheiner and his friend got married. And they'd been married quite a few years and like to say then, we just we did it, we just— after we didn't think it was necessary. And then to us—

GH: He just kept on us.

GS: The accountant said.

GH: For tax reasons.

GS: He more or less pushed it and then we did it, you know.

GH: We finally...

GS: We don't have no rings or nothing.

[George laughs]

GH: We're weird gay people. We're still in the closet [laughs]. But we, y'know, we talked about it but we just never it was never a big issue for us you know.

GS: And it's a shame to say, but over the years from the time we owned and run the Tally-Ho together all, so many gay friends that we had are gone. You know. A lot of them through drugs, AIDS, you know, and but they those kids we can remember they're all good looking kids but they were living in the that fast lane. Really in that fast lane.

GH: When we look back at how many we knew and think they're all gone, I mean they were all a lot younger than we were, it's just, it's just unbelievable.

GS: You know most of them that we know, that are gone, they're younger than we are. But they were living in that fast lane, just tricking, tricking, tricking. And then they got...

GH: Moral of the story is, pick somebody and settle down—

GS: Then it got to the drugs and needles and you know

GH: Don't be shopping around too much.

[laughter]

BL: Well, in terms of the AIDS epidemic, do you recall during that time period did you get involved at all in the community about that? That whole issue or was there any like—

GS: It was never a big thing in the area I don't think people

GH: In Lancaster, Lancaster has always been kind of like in a weird bubble with stuff and it just—

GS: Not like Philadelphia and the bigger cities.

GH: We knew still, it's still like when it first come out, it was pretty—people didn't talk about it. Matter of fact, when we had our second restaurant, one of our kids that worked for us at the Loft, he—we knew that he was full-blown AIDS and his friend had died and he came to me about a job and we hired him and he worked in the kitchen with me and we were really careful about everything just like, it freaked me out all the time. And one morning he cut himself on a slicer, blood everywhere, well of course we couldn't let this get out so he was all upset so I said, “you sit down here, take care of this.” I had bleach and man I bleached that place from top the bottom, whatever, and then soon after that, he knew he was getting worse and he said that “I think I should leave ‘cuz it's not good for me to work”

GS: He didn't want to get it to the point where people would find out

GH: Where it go out, where it would ruin our business

GS: Where he was working for us and would hurt us. That people said “well, I'm not going there to eat anymore that guy in the kitchen has AIDS”, so he—

GH: Left.

GS: More or less left.

GH: I'll tell ya, it worried us I mean because

GS: It was a blessing, really, because it was worrying us at that time too. You know, but and at that time we didn't wanna say “well, we can't have you here” we weren't that rude or that nasty people to work for at that time, but when he finally said that he was quitting, we were happy. Yeah.

GH: It never really seemed like it got as bad here as like it did in the bigger cities. I'm sure it was here because I know we lost a lot of kids to it, but it didn't seem like much ever happened here it seemed like.

GS: And when it did, it wasn't, if it did happen it wasn't really broadcasted that it happened, you know.

GH: I'm sure a lot of people that's what they died from.

GS: We had so many still, have so many nice gay friends like Charlie and –

GH: John.

GS: John and then the older, old boys that go back way back to the Tally-Ho that really enjoyed we seen them growing up and meeting each other and getting involved and they're still good, great guys but they were always they got involved and they stayed involved with each other and they live a nice gay lifestyle, you know.

BL: And in terms of the community in general, in Lancaster and the whole atmosphere for LGBT people, have you seen changes over time in terms of what the—

GS: We never like you say, we were never hassled much like by the mayor or—

GH: I think this town was very open about stuff like that, our mayor definitely is very good. He's not judgmental about it.

GS: He ate at our restaurant. Him and his wife, they're personal friends of ours. Mayor Grey and his wife and we're great friends, you know.

GH: I mean I think the community in general here it doesn't seem, 'course we're out of the loop we're not involved in anything anymore so it doesn't seem like we're probably up on with what's going on but it doesn't seem like they're having a lot of problems here, either. I'm sure there are issues.

GS: This is the first time we've ever been approached to do something like this that's why I sort of thought it might be nice to do it, you know.

BL: Yeah it's really important to sort of get the perspective of people who've been involved in the community so long because it's for young people, they really don't understand the history.

GS: I mean like, in all the years that we've been involved in the restaurant business all our customers never come to the restaurant know we're gay and I mean we always catered to our customers and we had such a report with all of our restaurant people straight and gay people that it's just unbelievable.

GH: I mean when we go out we always see people that we know I mean a couple of customers or people in the business I mean we still... ya know.

GS: First thing we hear from them "oh when you gonna open another place?"

[Laughter]

GH: Get a life.

GS: That's over.

BL: I'm trying to think back to some of the things you said before, off-camera. One of the things you mentioned was the Whore House? Was it?

GH: The Stevens House, it was called the Stevens house. It's still there, that building by the corner of King and Prince.

GS: King and Price, the Stevens house. There was a restaurant in there called the Whore House and that was run by two young gay boys at that time. It was fine dining restaurant, very high tech.

GH: And then they had like a lounge with a—

GS: It was on the same caliber as the Loft.

GH: It was nice.

GS: Very high-tech. And then they did have a room in the back

GH: It was a pretty good sized room for a bar.

GS: They was after, after the Tally-Ho was gone they sort of less opened that back room for gays and they had dancing back there and stuff of course we all had it they had it too and the kids would walk it was only a block and they'd just walk between the two back and forth and they ended up closing and that was the end of that.

BL: What timeframe, what timeframe was that?

GH: I think they probably closed after we sold the Loft or about the time we closed.

GS: Yeah about the same time.

GH: So early 80's maybe. Early 80's.

BL: And John (?) mentioned a bar called the Fiddler? Do you remember anything about that?

GS: The Fiddler that was also down there

GH: The Stevens House

GS: The Stevens House. That was more or less a restaurant type bar too but beings—

GH: Was that before the Whore House? Or after?

GS: I think that was after the Whore House, yeah.

GH: That place has gone through so many different changes, different names and all that.

GS: But the Fiddler they did they got some gay people too, you know. 'Cuz I think there was, I think there was a gay man at that time involved in the Fiddler that there was a gay man involved in some of the management at the Fiddler that's when they start getting involved with havin' some of gay clientele there also, you know.

BL: Okay. Anything that you can think of that I've missed in terms of?

GS: I think we've covered most of it.

GH: They used to call George the “Godfather of the Gays” that’s what they used to call him, the Petrona.

[Laughter]

BL: seems like an appropriate name.

GH: Well George is gonna be, he’ll be 80 in March.

BL: That’s amazing, yeah.

GH: So he’d seen a lot happening in the gay life in this little town, the good the bad and the ugly.

BL: Yeah, definitely. Well, thank you so much.

GH: It was fun.

BL: Thank you for the interview, I think it’s been a great interview.

GH: Memory Lane here.

BL: Yeah, great. So I think we can go ahead and shut.

GS: So I wish you’d gotten more involved in Molly’s when we had it.

JH: Yeah!

GS: Cuz you’dve really liked it when we had it because we’d, it was really, it was a great place a great place.

[Video of artwork on the wall of Gary and George’s home]

GS: We really love it here, this is a good area of town, really. It really is. They have one little house down here coming up the street that has Southerby’s sign on it, it’s a little stone and a half...(Video cuts out)

[Video of a photography]

GH: That’s one of our favorite (inaudible) this year that we had done in Paris that was here it was one his his.

GS: And there’s one in the bathroom there.

[New photograph of someone with a dog]

GH: It’s kinda hard to see this one here but that’s one of Freiman’s.

JH: Oh wow, that’s nice.

GH: Freiman. Freiman.

BL: Mhm.

JH: And how do you spell his name? F-R

GH: E-I-M-A-N.

BL: F-R-E-I

GH: I-M-A-N. Yes.

(?)

[Same couple photograph as before]

(?)

GH: It's between Chestnut and (?)

[George sitting in a chair]

GH: He didn't take many oils (?) because in his early career he did course in the 30's they did a lot of mural work in restaurants and public buildings and Wegman's...

JH: [to George] It's snowing. It's snowing behind you again.

GH: So he stopped during Boyle's (?) and that's so we have two oils of his so that's all we have so.

JH: Gotcha.

[Laughter]

[George and Gary standing together in the snow, laughter]

JH: Maybe look at each other?

GH: Look at me, look at me!

[Laughter]