LGBT History Project
of the LGBT Center of Central PA

Located at Dickinson College
Archives & Special Collections

http://archives.dickinson.edu/

Documents Online

Title: LGBT Oral History: Nancy Datres

Date: June 19, 2013

Location: LGBT Oral History – Datres, Nancy – 020A

Contact:
LGBT History Project
Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Interviewee: Nancy Datres
Interviewer: Lonna Malmsheimer
Date of Interview: June 19, 2013
Location of Interview: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Transcriber: Sara Tyberg
Proofreader: Lillian Sweeney

Abstract:

Nancy Datres was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania in 1948 and moved to Harrisburg to pursue computer science after becoming blacklisted by the Altoona Police Department when she was just 27 years old. Thereafter, Nancy moved through several careers, holding positions such as college professor, journalist, legal writer, and lawyer. In her interview, Nancy discusses the incredible impact of her sexuality on the course of her academic and professional life, which required her to change schools and even careers whenever an environment became too unsafe for her to stay. She illustrates several examples of harassment and discrimination in her life, as well as the inefficiency of local law enforcement, educational institutions, and court systems to help alleviate these injustices. Additionally, Nancy remarks on lesbian bar culture, her difficult financial situation, and her 20-year relationship and engagement with another woman. Although she began identifying as a lesbian as a teenager, Nancy explains her difficulty to fully "come out," insisting that she does not feel completely "out" in all aspects of her life. She believes that her hardships have impacted her ability to consistently feel comfortable sharing her sexuality with others, but expresses great hope for feeling that freedom someday.

[audio seems to come out of right headphone only; interviewee's voice is very low]

LM: Okay, Nancy, you've done a lot of this yourself, so you know the routine here, but I'm Lonna Malmsheimer, and I'm interviewing Nancy Datres for the LGBT History Project of Central PA [Pennsylvania]. This is June 19th, 2013. Is that all the relevant information?

ND: [nodding] I believe so.

LM: I think so, okay. So, is it—do you agree to have us tape this interview?

ND: Yes, I consent.

LM: Excellent, and after we're done, you will decide whether or not you will give permission to use the material and in what ways and if you want to restrict material. The other thing is that you don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, and you can call for a break at any time.

ND: Alright, thank you.

LM: Okay? Please state your name.

ND: Nancy L. Datres.

LM: And birthdate and place?

ND: 9/8/48 [September 8th, 1948], and I was born in the Altoona Hospital… Altoona, Pennsylvania.

LM: I know Altoona people. Your parents' names?

ND: My parents' names are… my dad is Paul J. Datres.

LM: Mhm.

ND: And my mother is Mary Ann—middle initial, not two—not all the same name [makes hand motion] Mary Ann Worst.

LM: And do you have any siblings?

ND: I have four siblings, so I was the youngest of five, the only one born in the hospital. The other four were born at home.

LM: And their names?

ND: They're all deceased except one. There's Dotty, was the first born. Norman, was called Bud.. and Jerry. And they're all deceased, and the one who's living is Francis. She lives in Illinois, but her and I are pretty much estranged due to my lifestyle and some other factors. [nodding]

LM: Did you—what were your parents' occupations?

ND: My dad only went to school to the eighth grade. He had gone to a Catholic school and did tell us tales about—the proverbial tales, but, coming from him I had to believe it that—they were—they really did hit you on the knuckles, on the shins with rulers and so forth, and he decided he wasn't going to put up with that, and he quit in eighth grade, and he went to work for a Pennsylvania Railroad as a machinist.

LM: And did he stay in that the rest of his working life?

ND: [nodding] Yes, yes. My mother was a homemaker.

LM: Okay. How long have you been living here in Central PA [Pennsylvania]?

ND: I consider it really where I'm from, although that's not technically true, but I've been living here since 1976.

LM: And did you move here to go to school or after school or when—how'd you leave Altoona?

ND: Well, actually, you might say I left for fear of… my life. I—I had… I was in a relationship with a woman, but you really weren't "out" back that—"out" so to speak. I means this was like in 1972 that I had met the first female that I had had a relationship with, and at the same time, I was finishing a degree at Mount Aloysius College up in Cresson [Pennsylvania] in Criminal Justice, and I had done excellent. I had like a 3.9 grade average, and the Altoona Police Department was advertising four openings for police positions. And I had applied for one of them, had taken their civil service test, and was like number three on the list. And they did go through the motions of interviewing me, but then I was told that I wasn't going to be hired. And I was gonna let it go, but my partner at that time and some other people felt that I shouldn't, because they felt that it was clear sexual discrimination—gender—because they had absolutely no women, and Altoona's known for being behind the times. And so, I did, I filed a complaint with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, and during that investigation, while they did not find for me—Commission claimed they didn't find any gender discrimination—which, to me, was amazing—but they did discover that the Altoona Police were bypassing veterans who should have been offered these jobs who—based on getting their ten-point preference, and because they already knew who they were going to hire when they ran that ad. Well, that blew up all over town. There were, you know, and I was on TV more than once, I was on subjective radio stations, and so for the next year and a half, I was despised in that town. I couldn't walk down the street in broad daylight like this without somebody saying, "You fucking bitch, we're gonna kill you," you know, and stuff like that, because they were so angry that I exposed all this about them—it was the proverbial, "if it hadn't been for you, you bitch, none of this would have happened" and we could go on doing what we want here at the Altoona Police Department, but you totally upset our apple cart. And, I would get anonymous calls during the middle of the night at 3 am, people would say weird things, often—I think it was always a man, not the same man, and they would say things like, [mimics raspy voice] "I put a poisonous snake in your apartment earlier today. Watch out." You know, stuff like that, and you'd think it's crazy, but then you know you're dealing with crazy people, and—plus they blacklisted me. I couldn't get a job anywhere. They labeled me a troublemaker. They brought out that I was a lesbian. [touches hand to chest] I didn't volunteer that. And—

LM: So you were outted by the police department?

ND: [nodding] I was outted by the police department, and meanwhile, the male secretary to the mayor of Altoona [Pennsylvania] at that time was gay, and in fact, he was so worried about all this publicity going on that he left town, and got a job at some other city. I don't know if it was Lancaster [Pennsylvania] or where—he left and got away. 'Cause I'm sure that he didn't want to be pulled into that, because people just weren't out in that town. I mean, Altoona's…

LM: What year are we talking about here?

ND: We're talking about now 1975 and 1976.

LM: Okay.

ND: And, so, I finally left, and moved to Harrisburg area with two gay guy friends. We shared an apartment, and was able to get some part-time jobs—various jobs, like security guard jobs,

and then I got a job at a car dealer. And, every time I would apply for a job at the State, through their civil service, I wouldn't even get the interview. And so I did wonder how far this blacklisting had gone, and eventually I decided—well, I needed to get some other—go into some other field, this just wasn't going to go anywhere, because applying for anything in law enforcement, criminal justice, probation, parole—which is really where I had hoped to go, probation and parole, I didn't want to be, you know really, a police officer. I had applied for that job, thinking that it would be a stepping stone to where I really wanted to go. So, feeling that I wasn't going to get anywhere in that field for sure, because they were going to make—blacklist me no matter what. I went to HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] over here and took their computer courses and got straight A's in those… 4.0… and that professor who headed up that department helped me get my first job in a computer field which was with the city of Harrisburg [Pennsylvania].

LM: Okay. And what did you do with them?

ND: Computer programmer.

LM: Okay.

ND: And then I also taught the introductory computer class at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] for three and a half years.

LM: Okay.

ND: In addition to the full-time job.

LM: Mhm.

ND: But that was a long story on how I know I got from Altoona [Pennsylvania] to here…

LM: No, no, no, no!

ND: But I think it was important.

LM: Oh, yeah. So, you've given us two schools that you've gone to. How many years of schooling do you have?

ND: I have a Juris doctorate law degree…

LM: Okay.

ND: And that is from DePaul College of Law in Chicago, Illinois.

LM: And you did that while you were being a computer programmer?

ND: No, I did this later in life. I didn't go to law school until—I started when I was 51, would you believe? And, so, I was really a late, non-traditional student, and I actually had started at the Widener [University] campus here in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], and, believe it or not—and this would have been 19—wait, no, I'm sorry—it's 2001… 2001, I started at Widener [University] in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], and stayed there for about two years, and I had had enough. And what I mean by that are two things. I had had enough of the fact that they… they made the academic program so dull and boring, because they required you to take every single course that was on the bar exam. And, you did not have any freedom to take electives until like, your last year, and this was not the experience I wanted, especially being a non-traditional student, I didn't want that. Secondly, to my horror, really, I couldn't believe that I had classmates harassing me, because they suspected I was gay. And they would make comments to people before class like, "Well, you know, so-and-so professor, right, we think she's gay, maybe you should go out with her." You know, and they didn't even know for a fact whether I was gay, because I never truly "came out," because I've had such negative experiences. I've never been one like to wear rainbow t-shirts or anything, you know, or on my backpack or on my purse, nothing. They just speculated, 'cause they know—they ask questions, "You're not married? Oh, you've never been married?" And then, pfff [smacks hands together] black and white, you must be gay. But—and I got sick of that, and I had taken it to the attention of—

LM: This is a Widener [University]?

ND: [nodding] –of administration and to me, they really didn't address it. And so, for both those reasons, I transferred out to DePaul [University] then, even though I had to repeat almost a year of credits. I—it was worth it for me to get out, away from that environment.

LM: Now, where are we in terms of time at this point, you're?

ND: At this point in time, right—we have a big chunk of area there, we need to go back and cover

LM: Go back to, yup.

ND: Because this takes us from 2001 to 2006. 2001 to 2003, I was at Widener. I took a semester off, and while I went and visited different colleges—law schools, and then I applied and transferred to DePaul [University] and was out there from 2004 to 2006, and actually lived in Chicago [Illinois] downtown for two years.

LM: Okay.

ND: Loved it. [smiles and nods]

LM: Uh huh. Well then, let's step back. You're leaving your computer job, why?

ND: Okay. [laughs] This is a long story, too. Although, if I can, can I go back just to give some context to what happened in Altoona [Pennsylvania]?

LM: Oh, certainly.

ND: I would like to give this context, because I think it's so important, because now—and I'm thankful for this—now, gay people have so much support. That's not to say there aren't bad things that still happen to gay people, there are. But for the most part, I mean, just the existence of the [LGBT] Center and different groups and gay-straight alliances in schools and so forth. Back in 1973 or '4, when I filed this complaint against the Altoona Police Department, based on gender not sexual preference—there was no protection for that and still is no protection up to my knowledge in Pennsylvania… I had contacted the head of the local chapter of the National Organization of Women to see if they would help me, and they seemed very interested in helping me until they found out I was gay, and then it was like, "Well, we can't really get involved in this. We can't really get involved in this." And I was devastated. I was very hurt and angry, although now I understand looking back and looking at the history of women's rights movement. I can understand why they did that, they called it the [air quotes] "Lavender Menace" back then. They were—women's rights groups were so afraid, because that's what the critics would do to belittle them and to take—to try to cut any credibility they might have. They would call them, "Oh, these feminists are just a bunch of man-hating lesbians," you know, so they avoided the gay issue. But, but at the time, it didn't matter to me, because at the time, I didn't have that perspective, and I was very hurt that I couldn't get help anywhere. I even wrote to the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and even they wouldn't help me. So, I—I felt very, very alone. Very alone and very abandoned by organizations I thought would help me but didn't. [shrugs] So, going back to the computer field. So, I'm working in the computer field, and teaching part-time as well as working full-time, and this professor, who was head of the computer department 'cause we're now in the early 1980s. He decided to take a shine to me. I rebuffed his gestures. He was probably... I would say in his early 50s. At that time, I think I was 29 or 30. He was married… had an adult son with special needs… his wife, I understand—I only learned these other facts afterwards. He married his wife at—when she was only like 15 or 16… had to marry her… kept her out in a very rural area, never allowed her to get her driver's license… never allowed her to finish her high school degree, nothing. And I didn't know any of this about him, all I knew is that he was the professor up there, the head of the computer department, and he was in charge of getting people jobs, because back then, a lot of companies didn't have their own IT [Information Technology] department, so they didn't have their own [circular hand motion] pool of references, so they looked to HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] and this man for job placement. Well, so again, he decided he, he wanted, you know, to put the make on me, and he didn't stop. I mean this just went on and on, and to the point where, after I'm in the computer field about three years, he decides to find out where I live and, on a Sunday morning in the summertime—Sunday morning, you know, things are peaceful, a lot of people are in church, it's quiet, it's a beautiful day… and, I had gone for a bike ride. I was living next to Susquehanna River up in the Middle Paxton-Dauphin Borough area [Pennsylvania] immediately next—I mean, I could walk out from my yard and walk into the river and go fishing. I lived there with another woman, my partner. And her parents lived in the other half of the house. It was a duplex—oh, we changed it into a duplex, you wouldn't know it by looking from the front of it, there was one door in the front. It was a real old home, and it just lent itself very nicely. Here, he shows up and is wandering around the yard calling out my name, "Nancy! Nancy!" And, he's not even drunk. He runs into my partner's parents, and they speak Finnish… and some English, but their English is a little bit rough… and they try to explain to him that I

went on a bike ride, you know, I'm not there… who is he? And then my partner came down into the yard, and said, "Well, I'm a friend of Nancy's. She's on a bike ride. What do you want?" "Oh nothing, nothing. Just tell her I stopped, and I was looking for her. I'll get in touch with her this coming week." [rolls eyes] Well, what happened then is he told the current employer I had—he called that employer up—I don't have any proof of this, but I—some things you just know. He called the employer up where he had placed me, and said how, "Oh, I really made a mistake placing her there, I had no idea she was a lesbian. I had no idea she was one of those damn lesbians. You know, you might try to think of some way of getting rid of her," or whatever. So, I forget how I did lose that job, I wasn't actually [rubs chin] fired for cause, I forget, but I did lose that job. I was—after three and a half years of part-time teaching at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] with excellent student evaluations every semester, all of a sudden, that job disappeared, too. My services were no longer needed. And then I had a hard time getting a job in the computer field. So, I had to—he had so much influence in the Greater Harrisburg area, everywhere I applied, I just never even would hear from them. So, eventually I just applied outside of this area, and I applied at BorgWarner in York [Pennsylvania], which is now York International. And, apparently that must have been out of his reach, out of his sphere of influence, because I was hired, and I worked there. And I, I did end up spending about a little over a decade in the computer field. And then I voluntarily got out of the computer field, because it just became very boring for me.

LM: And that's when you moved into law?

ND: [smiles] No, then I moved into—[laughs and puts a hand up] I know—writing and journalism. I took—Temple [University] has the branch here in Harrisburg, a small branch… and I always loved to write. I remember in college, I just loved to write and teachers would ask if they could keep my papers, you know, not just in English literature courses, but in other courses—a lot of social-type courses where you had to write papers. And stupid me at the time, I didn't think anything of it, and I would say, "Sure!" I never even had a copy for myself, you know, because a lot of them were handwritten, which may sound bizarre to some people now. [laughs] "Oh my god, they had to handwrite, they didn't have a computer!" But… and I didn't have any copies for myself later on in life. [shaking head] I was so upset, 'cause why did I not have a copy for myself? But I loved to write, so I started taking some journalism courses at Temple's [University] branch here in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], and one was taught by Nancy Eshelman who worked for the *Patriot News* and so forth. And so, I started doing some freelance work for them as an independent contractor. And then I got a full-time—

LM: [mumbles] *The Patriot News*?

ND: Pardon me?

LM: *The Patriot News*?

ND: [nodding] Yes, yes. I covered—

LM: Freelancing?

ND: [nods] Yeah, freelancing and… but it was fairly regular, although you weren't their employee, you were essentially self-employed. I covered most of Upper Dauphin [County, in Pennsylvania] schools, school board meetings, municipalities, but I did love feature writing, which I really loved. That's—and I think they knew that, and saw that's where my strength was, and they gave me a lot of assignments for feature writing and human interest stories. Then I got hired at the *Press and Journal* at Middletown [Pennsylvania] full-time as a reporter and writer, and they then gave me my own column which I also wrote—an opinion column. And I loved that job. [smiles]

LM: What kind of opinion?

ND: Anything you wanted to have an opinion about, like curr—but I always picked current events or things that I [touches chest] perceived were injustices, you know, [smiling] in the news, like something that would happen or someone would be found guilty of this and—but someone else who did something in my opinion, even far more serious, was—

LM: So what's our time period here?

ND: Our time period here is 19… I want to say 1992 to 1997… [nods] somewhere right in there.

LM: So this is after you've had a law degree?

ND: No, this is still before.

LM: Oh, okay.

ND: And the—when I left *Press and Journal*, reluctantly, but it's small papers—they were a weekly paper—they don't have much of a budget, I mean, they really don't. I loved the job, but I was hoping, well, I could go onto something, a daily paper, and I got hired at the *York Record* in York, Pennsylvania. But, I worked there only—I think it was four months, and it had been bought out from some other company, and that's when all this was going on—newspapers were being bought, such that the eventual outcome was that newspapers were basically owned by a handful of companies, and I was let go along with a few other people who had just recently been hired. So, I'm back thinking now, what am I gonna do, you know? [laughs] And this takes me to—I'm looking at ads in the paper, and I saw this ad for the State… it just said the State House. They needed a writer. I thought, well, I'll apply for it, and I did, and I got hired, and it turned out to be the Republican House of Representatives. So, I worked there for five years, so 1996 to 2001. I worked at the House of Representatives, Republican caucus, which was interesting, since I myself am not a Republican. I am not proud to admit I did hurry up and change my registration, because I needed the job, and I didn't want to be let go, but…but it was difficult. It was very difficult writing—I had about ten lawmakers assigned to me, anywhere between ten and 12—each writer had about ten or 12 lawmakers assigned to you. You not only did their writing, their newsletters, you also coordinated setting up press conferences when they were introducing new legislation, you would write the press release, you would have press packets you would do to hand out to people who attended and explaining the law in hopefully plain English, so the average person could understand…

LM: So you weren't writing legislation?

ND: No, I apologize, I apologize if that's what you thought. No, writing… writing, not legislation, no.

LM: Mhmm. Public relations in sort of a broad way?

ND: Essentially, yeah. Public relations, yeah. [nodding] That would be a more accurate description of it. And it was from there that I ended up going to law school, because at that point, I was with a partner and she—the job had gotten so horrible, the last year of it, because then they were taking away any freedom we had to decide what to write for a lawmaker, even though the lawmaker would approve it. Instead, they were coming up with these canned things, and we were supposed to just change a few words so it would be specific to that lawmaker. Well, you can imagine how boring that was, and tedious. So, this friend of mine said, "You know, Nancy, you always loved law. You know, you keep telling me how you went to Mount Aloysius College and you had to take a couple law courses. You just loved it. Why don't you go to law school? You shouldn't let your age or the lack of money deter you." So, foolishly or [laughs] not foolishly, I jumped in, you know, and I—that's when I went to law school and Widener [University], and then took a semester off and transferred out to DuPaul [University].

LM: Mhm. So, I think we have here your work history and somewhat is here, don't we?

ND: Yes.

LM: And, were you ever married?

ND: No, I was engaged quite a few times, but never went through with it.

LM: Any children?

ND: No.

LM: I'm going to say you don't have any military background?

ND: That's correct.

LM: Memberships in community organizations? Professional organizations?

ND: Well, I'm a member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, Dauphin County Bar Association, and I'm a member of the LGBT Center.

LM: When did you first realize you were a lesbian?

ND: I probably really realized it when I was probably in eighth or ninth grade, 'cause I had such crushes on one or two girl friends, even though I was dating guys and going to the dances, and

looking forward to dancing with certain guys, I mean these crushes I had—and then I had a crush on one of the female teachers, and they were just so strong, but I never knew what it was, I mean… this little town that I came from—Bellwood [Pennsylvania], is on the outskirts of Altoona [Pennsylvania] and there were only 104 people in my graduating class. I, I would have no idea what it even was that I was feeling or how I could even go about finding out or anything, but I really think that somewhere inside, I knew, at that early age, because of that feeling I had towards female students and that female teacher just was nothing I ever felt with a guy.

LM: Mhm.

ND: No matter if I dated a guy and really liked him or not, I never had that feeling.

LM: So, then when did you come out?

ND: Well… in some ways, I would have to say… I'm not sure if I ever completely came out.

LM: Well, you certainly have.

ND: Well, I'm not sure if that were—if that's true. I have and haven't fully, though. What do I mean by that? The first time or the first person I met was in 1972, a woman, and this was in Altoona [Pennsylvania], and we dated, and we went to a gay bar there. I think it was called the La Pierre, and danced and so forth. And then when she and I broke up, I went there by myself, a couple times… and actually…

LM: And you're how old now?

ND: Now I'm 64.

LM: No, no, no [chuckling and then laughing]

ND: Oh, back then? [laughs] Yeah, back then I was not 64. Back then, I was young and wild. Let's see, I would have been about… [clicks tongue] well I was born in 1948, I would have been about my mid-20s, 25, 26, somewhere around there.

LM: Yeah.

ND: And so I—and I'm pretty shy, even to this day, I'm pretty shy, not as shy as I used to be, but I decided to go to that bar, because what was I going to do? We had broken up and I went out and I noticed how a lot of cute women were sitting in the booths, kinda by themselves, and in the back room there were two pool tables, there were other women congregating. And, I—I—I'm still very new to all of this lifestyle, even though I've dated and been with one woman, now, I'm still pretty green at everything. So, I don't know, then a song comes on the jukebox that I really liked and I went over and asked one of these cute girls in the booth to dance, and we danced. And then, I was sitting at a booth at the bar, and about ten minutes later, somebody is standing beside me, and they pound [slams fist on table] their fist down, and they said, "Look, you better make up your mind which you are, a fem or a butch. And don't you ever ask my girl to dance

again." I was scared shitless. I thought, oh my god. [laughs] You know, what am I gonna do here? You know, I mean, I just became totally horrified, because it was—I never had anybody say that to me before, and… so in some ways, even in the gay community and even when I moved to Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], after leaving—you know, being blacklisted by the Altoona Police—moved to Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] in 1977 and shared an apartment with two gay guys, started going to the gay bar up on Front Street, the D Gem. My hair was long. I liked it long, it was, you know, not long down my back [gestures at waist], but it was long here [gestures to shoulder] and my natural color is red. And I just liked it long, and started going to that bar. As soon as I got to that bar, I mean, there were people telling me, you're not gay. You—or, if anything, maybe you're bisexual, but you're not gay. So, I never really felt that embraced by the gay community, because I guess for some reason, I didn't fit into what they felt were the stereotypes that they—that had evolved in the gay community, and I didn't fit that, and therefore, in some ways, I felt discriminated against by my own community in some ways, because I constantly ran into this just—and it wasn't friendly, it was kinda nasty, you know. It wasn't out and out nasty like, "Oh, I'm gonna push you, take you out back, and beat the shit out of you 'cause you're just pretending to be gay," but it was, you know—I could tell I was being rejected.

LM: Mhm.

ND: And that was not fun. But…

LM: At this time, you're with a partner?

ND: No, at this time, I'm sharing expenses with two gay guys, and I'm single. [clears throat] And, I wasn't going to stop going to the bar, because I was hoping to meet someone. I'm only in my 20s.

LM: You want to hold?

ND: [nods]

[someone in the background speaks]

LM: What do you need?

Other person: Oh, I just wanted to say hi, I wanted to stop by and check out the gallery a little while ago… [mumbling]

LM: Well, I'm sure you'd be welcome. Step back and Pat, who is part of the staff here, is in the back room.

Other person: Oh! Great! Yeah, which direction is that?

ND: Straight back.

[video cuts]

LM: So, well, I don't know if you're answering this question.

ND: Yeah, I'm saying that I went to the gay bar here in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], and even felt rejected as I did in the bar in Altoona [Pennsylvania].

LM: Mhm.

ND: Because I didn't fit in to, I guess, what the gay community at that time considered their acceptable roles. R-O-L-E-S, not R-U-L-E-S, although I guess, it could have been both, really. So, I didn't have a real positive experience. Outside of the gay community or inside of it. But finally I did meet someone at that bar… it's kind of an interesting story. She was this little dark—long dark hair, blue-eyed girl, who often would be sitting up at the bar by herself, too, on a stool. And, she struck up a conversation with me, because I was sitting not that far away. And, so we were meeting there at the bar, and thinking, you know, that we were dating, essentially. 'Cause then we would go out into the parking lot and do whatever young, gay women do [laughing] in the parking lot of a bar. And then, kissing and carrying on [laughs] we didn't have too many places to go, you know. And then—

LM: Hold.

ND: [nods]

[someone walks by]

LM: Now, now we'll walk

[video cuts]

LM: So, you met somebody at the D Gem

ND: Yes, I and I—I thought we were dating, you know, and I just assumed she was single. She certainly presented herself as being single. And then, one time after about a month or so, she asked me if I wanted to come to her apartment, and share dinner with her and a friend—they share expenses. And I said, sure. So, I went and had dinner, and just to get to the short of it, that was not her friend, that was her partner. But the interesting thing is, and this is probably shocking to some, but I hope not, we ended up sort of having a threesome for about two months. But then, her partner and I fell in love, and so she had to leave. [nodding]

LM: Mmm. And then the two of you became partners and lived together and so forth?

ND: [nods] Yes, we were—at that time, she had an apartment in the basement of someone's house near Mechanicsburg [Pennsylvania], a gay woman owned the house. And, I had an apartment in Middletown [Pennsylvania], and we—right, we fell in love and got together, and then we started looked for a house, and we bought a house up in Middle-Paxton Township [Pennsylvania], right next to the river. It was beautiful, I mean because you could sit on your

porch and see the geese in the summertime, the Canada geese, the white egrets, everything, and I like to fish, so I would just go out fishing, and we bought a canoe, and we'd go out in a canoe. It was wonderful. We were together for about 20 years. [nods slowly] In fact…[reaches for something off screen]

LM: So, that was sort of your coming out then?

ND: Well, this is why I say I'm not sure I fully came out, because that was the time when I'm in the computer field, and I'm not letting anyone know I'm gay. It's only that professor who came to the house on a Sunday morning, screaming out my name when he was totally sober—can't even give him an excuse for being drunk—that he decided, yes, I was gay, because I lived with another woman, blah blah blah blah... My partner and I at that time—Rita—and she was born in Finland… had come to the United States through South America. Her parents had to go there first, because of the Finnish-Russian War, and her dad had to leave the country… for safety reasons, because he and some other soldiers were stashing arms after the war was cleared over, because they didn't believe the war was over. And so, they—he went to South America, got a job, saved some money, and sent for Rita, her sister, and the mother, and they had to stay there until they had so much more money so they could come to the United States through Ellis Island [New York]. So, she and I—as I said, we just fell totally in love, I just never felt about anyone the way I felt about her. I never had that feeling. In fact, we did—we're talking 19, what is it, 78—we actually, got married [pulls out document, shows to camera]. Well—it's a union, it's a "Certificate of Holy Union," and it was at the Metropolitan Community Church in Baltimore [Maryland]. And, we did have to go and meet with the minister and had to wait, like, six months and then go back, so this wasn't like they were just doing it, you know… and we had to show, like that we had an apartment together, utility bills, and so forth, and yes, then we got married. And we had a few pictures, these probably aren't going to show up too well, because I don't—I don't know if they're going to show up because of the glare on… glare on there [hands to interviewer]… but, and as you can see, it's probably about ten, twelve years later that the pictures got torn in half during a horrible [smiling] argument, but all couples argue, and I'm sure there are many, many heterosexual couples out there with pictures torn, maybe even burned to ashes. [laughs] But, clearly we felt strong enough to salvage them, and keep them.

LM: We can try to get some shots of this stuff.

ND: Okay.
[40:05]

LM: When we're finished. So, clearly had a big impact being—coming out had a big impact on your family life, and on your work life, and having been outted--

ND: Oh my god, on my work life… [nods] But you know, interestingly enough, my family life—my mother and dad did not at all reject me, in fact, I told my mother on a New Years—on a Christmas Eve. We had this family practice—ritual—every Christmas, we'd go and visit the relatives. It used to be they would come to our house, but my parents got older, we started going around to my different siblings and their family and other relatives. And so, I was helping her go up a flight of steps, 'cause she had arthritis pretty bad to go to the bathroom, you know to pee.

And, for some odd reason, that's when I told her. I—I know why now, [points finger] because she had given me such a hard time—I didn't want to go there, I didn't want to go, I wanted to spend Christmas Eve with my girlfriend, my—the first woman I was with, and she just, you know, "You're going—we've been doing this for years—just a blah blah blah—this is crazy," you know, "This is crazy, you're going." And so, I did go, and of course I was upset. But when I got her upstairs, and told her then, while she was on the bathroom [laughs] wizzing away, and I said, "Mom, you asked earlier, why did I want so much to spend the night with Shirley tonight, instead of coming out on this family ritual… because, I'm in love with Shirley." And my mother sat there, and she said, "You know, I've read about things like that in books, but I never knew anyone for real." [laughs] And I said, "Well, now you do." And she said, "Yes, now I do." She said, "Well, that's okay." [laughs and throws hands out] And that was it, and my father never said anything, either. He always was anxious to meet the women I was with, would shake their hand, and he just loved Rita, the person I was with for 20 years, I—he just adored her. So, it was interesting that I had no problem from my family, except the one sister who lived in Illinois, the only one who's alive, who had nothing to do with me. But, I had all these problems in employment, because of my sexual preference—tremendous problems. I can say all of these problems I encountered in employment set me back financially significantly, because I had to change. I had to essentially… [exhales] What's the word I'm looking for that caterpillars do… [hand motion] I had to morph into something else, or at least I felt I had to three different times in my life to escape careers where I had been blacklisted—been blacklisted from the criminal justice field by the Altoona Police Department. I then got blacklisted in the computer field by this professor over at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College], and it just—I continually had to—or felt that I had to reinvent myself in some other field to survive. And, that's why to this day, I have no—financially, I am not in a very good place being this close to retirement, because I could never stay anywhere long enough to build up, you know, pensions and so forth. So, it was very devastating to me employment-wise being gay.

LM: Has being gay affected your civil and political life?

ND: No, not really. I've never been real active in politics. I mean, I vote, but I've never done any campaign work. I—I take that back, I did some campaign work one time for a female candidate who was running for the House of Representatives, and she was a Democrat, and I can't remember her name. But I did do some political campaign work for her.

LM: How about your spiritual life?

ND: No, it didn't affect that, because I—by the time I was about eight or ten years old, my mother had divorced my dad. My dad was—came from a very strong Catholic family, and so my oldest sister and brother were raised Catholic. You know, he had been an altar boy, they had the communion, all that—we have—I have all the pictures from all that, you know, that I've saved. And, but the last three of us, there was like a seven year gap, and in the meantime, my mother and—I have a lot of respect for my mother doing this, because women didn't do this in 19… this would have been about 1956—she filed for divorce, because of the abuse. My father was physically abusive when he drank, and he was a binge drinker. When he wasn't drinking, he was okay, but he was a binge drinker, and almost every weekend, he would be—come home plastered, and she filed for divorce, and it was hard to watch this—I know I'm digressing a little

bit, but I feel I have to put this in here… because it also, I mean, anybody struggling for rights is important to our struggle. So, there she is, a woman who, in the mid-1950s, takes the initiative to file for divorce from an abusive husband. And, the world seems to turn against her. She—her own family wouldn't even help her anymore, financially, and so she had to work, and the only job she could get back then, even though she graduated with honors from high school—very high IQ. She could only get jobs like at a chicken factory or a shoe factory, and there were three of us to raise. And, it got really tough for her, to the point where you know, again, her family would not help her, would not speak to her… that she attempted suicide. And that has never, [shakes head] never left me, because she had—

LM: How old were you?

ND: —given me the note, you know, to—I didn't even know what it was. We were in an apartment, and we had gas— [camera adjusts] a gas stove, and she said, "Take this up to your grandmother's, and hurry." And my grandmother lived probably—I would say, about three miles away—I had to go up through some alleys, and I'd say at least two or three miles away. I even remember, even though I didn't know what was going on, I was running as fast as I could. And I apparently did get there in time. I gave the note to my grandmother, and I [places hand on chest] still didn't know what it said, and my grandmother and then my mother's brother and sister went down there, and got her, and she was going to kill herself, because she had been just pushed in a corner and left so alone, you know, when all she did was try to get a divorce from someone who was abusing her physically managing every way possible. And that's… I don't know, that just always stuck with me.

LM: Mhmm. What changes have you witnessed or participated in regard to the LGBT community in central PA [Pennsylvania]?

ND: Well, I don't know if it made any difference, but… in central Pennsylvania, I think Rita and I probably were the first people to file a lawsuit against neighbors who were harassing us, because of our gender—sexual—not our gender—because of our sexual preference. And when I say they harassed us, I mean it was relentless.

LM: This was when you were living near the river?

ND: [nods] This is when we lived near the river. It's like a one-way street, but cars pull over so another street can pass, [gestures with hands] kind of that kind of politeness on there, so it's a very narrow—and there are probably about [hums] maybe about 40 houses along there, and then there's this [motions with hands] little street and then [motions hands over] there are railroad tracks, and then there is 322, the highway. And, two women, the one was married—is married, and she is still alive, and her husband, and then her friend, who bought the house immediately next to her, and they had been lifelong friends, but according to them, just friends. But, the two of them decided to harass us, because they—we were two women living together. To give you some idea of how extensive it went, we both love to stay physically active, Rita and I. We did a lot of bike riding. We would bike ride a lot from where we live next to the river clear down to Shipoke [Pennsylvania]. So, we had to at one point get out on that highway, and before we got down on Front Street and can get on the bike path. They would wait for us down on a road close

to where they knew we would be getting on the highway, and it would be summertime, of course, not riding our bikes in the winter. And they would have their windows down, and—you know, a lot of people would have their windows down, and people had convertibles and whatever, not everybody had air conditioning on. And they would scream to the top of their lungs, "Pussy-eaters! Pussy-eaters!" And they would just continue that until we could finally get out on that bike path, and get away from them. They sent mail to Rita's place of employment that had a picture of a nude woman lying on a beach with long red hair, and Rita had a very, very good position. She was a registered architect. She worked for the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, and she had a type of position where, you know, there was a receptionist as a buffer. Well, the receptionist didn't know. This was just in a big, brown envelope. It wasn't marked confidential. She opened it like she would open anything else, and so saw this, and they wrote on there, "Does this look like your lesbian lover Nancy?" And, so she was outed at work by these people, and then the one woman… Emily, who is not married, she followed me in the morning on a weekday down Front Street. I was going to my job, and I was very worried about this. I didn't understand why in God's name she followed me. It was like seven-thirty in the morning. Why was she doing this? I mean, they're harassing us, but I [furrows eyebrows] didn't expect this, so I didn't want her to know where I worked, and I pulled in a parking lot of na insurance building on—way up on North Front Street. She pulls in, too. And, it's just her and I, because it's a little bit early in the mornings—workers—some workers aren't there yet. And, she takes a handgun out of her glove compartment and [makes shape of a gun with one hand] points in at me from her car to mine. At that time, someone pulled into work and they saw it, and so I filed a complaint with the District Justice. These people are very politically connected. She—we—they—she kept asking for a continuance for almost a year and a half before we actually had the hearing, and the witness though still remembered that, because how often do you pull into a parking lot and see someone pointing a gun at someone. You know, that's not something you'd forget. And, she still remembered it, and she still showed up for the hearing. She came, because she was going to testify what she saw. Well, Emily went to the District Justice first; we saw her car already there when we got there. Well, we went in and thought that we would get a chance to testify, and our witness was there. The magistrate said, "Well, it's my understanding that you and Rita Ucar [last name? ph] already have a civil suit you filed against Miss Sanford and some other people. Therefore, we're not going to hear this case. It can be handled by the civil suit. [Lonna coughs] Wouldn't even hear it, wouldn't even let us testify. Oh, I was so livid… so livid. But, yeah, we filed a lawsuit—civil lawsuit against them, clearly we weren't going to get anywhere criminally. They put up signs at the end of our—of the roadway [pulls out to show Lonna] up there—big white signs about as big as one of these pictures on the wall [points]. I think about this big, [leans back and taps specific painting] hung them at the end of each road, the entrance to that road where we live, and said, you know, "Two lesbians here, 12 River Road." They sent a letter—I don't even remember what was inside it—a piece of mail, we'll say to Rita and I through the regular United States Post system. It was addressed "Two lesbians, 12 River Road, Dauphin, Pennsylvania, 17018." [leans in] And it was delivered. Rita made an appointment to speak to the post master. At that time, the main office was in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], down on—not Walnut Street—but it was down in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], as opposed to where it's at now, out by the farm show building. Post master did nothing about it, and basically said, "Well, I'm sorry, it had the address on 12 River Road and so we were able to deliver it. There's nothing we can do about it." We also had to call [Lonna coughs] the state police on them, because they would do things like scratch and key our cars. They would throw and break eggs

[taking photos and showing Lonna] in front of our garage. The garage was detached from the house, so it was about 500 feet away from the house. They would throw dildos on our porch, and it just—all sorts of craziness. And so, the one time—I can't remember what they did—something, they threw something at the door or on the porch, and we called the State Police, because that was who—protects Middle Paxton Township. So now, we're in 19… 86, 87, and the response is not too different from the post master of the United States Post Office. Police officer comes in, and we tell him what happened, what they did, and he's standing in our kitchen, and he said, "Well, you can't prove it though, right? Do you have a picture that they did this?" Yeah, well obviously we didn't. We just had each other, and they're denying it, that they did it. That "we weren't down there, we weren't anywhere near them." And how it's concluded then is the state trooper says to us, "Well, don't you kinda expect this when two women living together?" So, you can see my experience with being gay has been very, very tough. Very tough. And sometimes that's why I'm hoping this project gets some of those interviews out there, and not just the ones where everything has gone smoothly, which I'm glad it has gone smoothly for some people, but I think the story needs to be told about the hell that some of us have gone through, because of our sexual preference. And I hope that story gets out there, because we need to remember that just like—just like as women, we need to remember the women's rights movement as minorities in women, we need to remember that civil rights movement. We all need to remember those who essentially were the—I hate to use the word "martyr," but we're the… sacrificial lambs, so to speak, of the movement, and who really suffered, financially and otherwise because of our sexual preference. Even though we weren't out out. We didn't have stickers on our cars back then or rainbows. We didn't have, you know, we didn't have any kind of stickers or rainbow shirts, we didn't do any of that, 'cause we were afraid to.

LM: [clears throat] How much were you aware of that—of the civil rights efforts that were going on and so forth? Even though you weren't participating?

ND: For the gay community?

LM: Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

ND: Yeah, I was very much aware of it. I, in fact… [smacks lips] one of my friends—female gay friends—sometimes would come down on me, because I wouldn't get involved with it, and I would try and remind her all that I have already been through, and couldn't she please understand why maybe, I just can't get—back in the arena again and take anymore, because maybe I've been beaten down enough already? I just can't—it's not that my heart's not there, and my spirit's not there, and I'll do volunteer work. I don't have a lot of money that I could donate, because I suffered financially, because of my sexual preference. But she was very hard on me, you know, and she to this day, I think she still thinks I should be more—you know, I should have done more during that time period, and I don't think she really understands what I went through, you know, because of my sexual preference.

LM: Mhm. What challenges do we still have, do you think, in central Pennsylvania?

ND: [exhales] I think, you know, we still have challenges in—I think we always will. I say this, because—I say it first of all, acknowledging that we've made tremendous progress, just even

having this center here, having the gay-straight alliances at schools so kids now can go somewhere… if you're feeling the things that I felt toward a female classmate, you know, those strong feelings, you can go somewhere and get some education and try and find out what's going on, why are you feeling this way. We've come a long way as far as some states allowing marriage, even though it's not recognized in other states nor recognized by the federal government, and course as we all know, sitting here, I think there are two cases right now before the Supreme Court where it'll be interesting to see how those are decided. We've made a lot of strides, but I guess I am cautiously optimistic, because where the bigotry still can be so obvious is on the internet, because you have the ability to be anonymous when you make comments. And, it's not just bigotry against us that's still alive, it's bigotry against minorities—that poor, young Mexican boy who sang the National Anthem the—last week at some sporting event, I believe. And people were writing comments—anonymous, again—you know, "How dare they," you know, "He's not—how dare he be allowed to sing our National Anthem, he's a Mexican." He was dressed in the attire, because he wanted to wear his attire from his country. But, if you pay attention to comments like on PennLive on different articles and everything, the bigotry—we have made advances, but you know what, we need to be careful, because that bigotry is still out there, and it's seething. It's seething, and where you see it is anonymous, because now some of them who hate minorities, gays and so forth, won't be obvious about it, because they're afraid they'll get arrested or whatever, but you see it now on anonymous posting.

[video ends and continues on second video file]

LM: You all set? Ready to go again?

ND: Mhm.

LM: This is the rest of our interview with Nancy Datres… part two. What—you may have given this to us, but let me look back and think if we've got what we need—what have been the most important events of your life?

ND: Most important? Well, I have to say the events kind of are what I've told you, and they aren't positive, unfortunately. They're negative ones. In fact, I even forgot one. The first woman I was with in Altoona [Pennsylvania], her aunt and uncle who lived in Camp Hill [Pennsylvania], and still do, if they're still alive, filed a lawsuit in Cumberland County Court and took away her four-year-old daughter, because of her being gay and took away and got custody. And this was an aunt and uncle. It wasn't even the grandparents.

LM: What year was that?

ND: That would have been 1974, somewhere around there. [nodding]

LM: I seem to remember that.

ND: And… yes, the court gave them custody, and all because of this. And…

LM: Because you were together? The two—?

ND: [nodding] Because we were together.

LM: Well, how was that working that—through that with your partner?

ND: [shaking head] That's hard, because you know what you always feel that you're to blame for her losing custody. I mean, yes, she could go visit once a month or however many visitations she was given, but it made me feel horrible, 'cause if I hadn't been with her, she—they probably wouldn't have done that, but of course if it hadn't been me, and it had been some other woman, they would have done it, too. But still, it was very hard, and I'm sure that's part of the reason we didn't last, because it was very hard for me, and I'm sure it had to be hard for her. She's this child's mother, and the child's taken away from her. So…

LM: How old was the child?

ND: Four, at the time. So, the important events, unfortunately are kind of the traumatic things I've experienced in life as a result of my sexual orientation.

LM: And would you say those are the turning points, too? Where things change?

ND: Yes, they are the turning points as well.

LM: I see you have some documents here. We'll try to make copies of those, those we might do that one of several ways, but…

ND: Alright. [nods]

LM: Is there anything missed—we missed? Anything else you want to add to the interview?

ND: I think the only thing that I'll probably add again is—or clarify… why I still don't consider myself fully "out. "Okay, well I think based on all this negative stuff that I've told you, you can kinda see where I never reached a point where I felt comfortable at any workplace, even after I got my law degree and worked for Mid Penn Legal Services, which is—has several gay employees—

LM: We haven't talked about that at all.

ND: No, we did not. I worked there for five years, and they have several employees who are openly gay. But I never, even though I was in that environment, I never ever came out to anyone. I never said, "Yes, I'm gay." I'm sure they speculated it, you know, because I don't—they don't see a boyfriend coming to take me out to lunch, or anything of that nature. They don't see any pictures in my office of a traditional heterosexual family pictures, but to this day, I mean you don't even see anything on my car. And, it's not because I'm not with the movement. I am with it. I guess I've just been hurt so badly so many times that I just, I just feel I can't do that, you know. And that's not a good feeling, because I want to be able to do that. I wish I could still feel free enough to put a picture in my office, if I were still working, of myself and my partner when

we were together. We're no longer together. I'm no longer in a relationship. But I never felt that comfort factor, despite the fact that we are now in 2013. But to me, that doesn't mean the comfort factor isn't there for people. To me, it is there, for a lot of people. It's not there for me, because of what I personally experienced. It has nothing to do with—we have made great advances in our movement and the fight for our rights, to be recognized as human beings. I just, because of my own personal experience, can't become comfortable with being completely out.

LM: What would that mean to you, being completely out?

ND: Well, it would mean I would feel the freedom to maybe have a little rainbow flag at my house, you know in my garden or something. You have something—that decal on my card—oh, on my car. And, be just more open about that and so forth. And I maybe, I'd like to believe I'll get there before I leave this world. I'd like to believe I will get there, because I am hoping to open up a solo practice through a website, mostly a virtual law office . I'm trying to look at that, and I know when I do that, I'm not going to hide that I'm gay. I'm not going to make a big… I'm not going you know, put a big rainbow on the website, but it's, I'm never going to deny anything about—and I'm going to certainly help non-traditional families with any legal issues they have.

LM: Did this—did being gay affect your life at legal services in any direct way?

ND: Although they have people there who are openly gay, I never sensed a welcoming about it. And I didn't know if that's because I'm older or is it because I'm not in a relationship with somebody, and that makes somebody—some people more uncomfortable? I don't know, but I never felt that comfort factor there, even though, like I said, there are some employees that are openly gay. I just never felt it.

LM: And there wasn't any direct problem?

ND: No, no.

LM: Did any legal issues come up that were really specific to gay people?

ND: No, unfortunately no. I say unfortunately for me, because I would have loved to have helped—

LM: To work with?

ND: [nodding and smiling] You know, work with people… right, exactly. Although, you know, when I look back on it, I believe—and I have to be careful here, because the attorney-client confidentiality—I know—I suspect—there were probably a couple foreclosure cases that I defended, that they may have been a gay couple, but just didn't disclose it as such.

LM: Mhm. Anything else you want to tell us? Or the world, for that matter?

ND: [laughs] The world for that matter? It's hard being single when you're this age, and I wonder if it's this hard for straight people. [laughs] You think it is? Yeah, maybe, I don't know,

maybe we all need to put our heads together and think of something we can do for older single gay people to help them meet people—friends, and if it becomes more than that, fine.

LM: I think that is somewhat being tried in some of the activities here.

ND: Yes, right.

LM: Do you have any recommendations for other people we should ask to interview?

ND: I still believe we should interview Marlene Kanuck. I think the only reason originally she said no to me, is because she was operating under that false premise that had gotten out there that we only wanted people who were in central Pennsylvania…

LM: From birth?

ND: [nodding] From birth or wherever. I think she would be a good one. I will ask my former partner.

LM: She's been real active, hasn't she?

ND: She—Marlene Kanuck has been extremely active and think she would be a great person to interview. I'm not sure if my partner would want to be or not, I can ask her, but definitely Marlene Kanuck would be a good person to start with, and she may have additional names, because she is so involved in the community.

LM: Okay. Well, thank you.

ND: You're welcome.

LM: Excellent interview.