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Title: LGBT Oral History: Sam Deetz

Date: October 27, 2013

Location: LGBT Oral History – Deetz, Sam – 025

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Interviewee: Sam Deetz

Interviewer: Lonna Malmshemer

Date of Interview: October 27, 2013

Location of Interview: Community Studies Center at Dickinson College

Transcriber: Deborah A. Troutman

Finalized by: Mary Libertin

Abstract:

Samuel Deetz was born in Quakertown (Pennsylvania), in 1951, on April 21 and was one of eight children. Sam's father became a minister, which allowed his family to move from place to place over Sam's young life. Sam's family wanted him to continue into the Christian faith, but as Sam continued through Christian schools, he realized he was different. He became a strong advocate in the Susquehanna Valley Gays United (SGVU), worked along Harrisburg Pennsylvania Council members, Senators, and Representatives to form other gay and lesbian groups. He was also instrumental in organizing and arranging meetings in order for other gay and lesbians groups to blossom within their own communities. Sam was influential in creating a social media site and continues to keep blogs current and updated for well-known gay and lesbian advocates to share their experience, strength and hope. He met the love of his life Jim, thirty-seven years ago, and because of the passing of the Marriage Equality Bill in Delaware was able to marry his best friend and confidante.

LM: Okay...I won't go into a whole lot of the project. The project of course is to collect Central PA. LGBT history and I at least didn't know there was so much of it [*laugh*] but there is.

SD: Right.

LM: and this is, this is it, October 27. We are at the Community Study Center at Dickinson College talking with Sam Deetz. (Lonna Malmshemer, interviewer) This just says to get on the tape. So, do I have your permission to do the interview and video tape it?

SD: Yes.

LM: Good, so give me your basics? Your name, your date of birth, your background, your family background, your parent's occupations...that kinds of stuff.

SD: My name is Samuel Deetz. I most often go by Sam Deetz. I was born in Quakertown (Pennsylvania), in 1951 on April 21st, and I was the eighth child of my parents who were also from that area. My father was born in nearby Montgomery County in a small town named Tylersport (Pennsylvania), and my mother also was born in Quakertown (Pennsylvania). All of my older seven siblings were also born in that area. My father had recently become a minister, maybe just a few years before my birth. My parents had converted from the Lutheran faith to a very strict fundamentalist group and that's how they were endeavoring to raise their children and their family. And shortly after I was born, we moved from Coopersburg (Pennsylvania), which is near Quakertown (Pennsylvania), and moved in to Allentown (Pennsylvania). My first memories are of living at the corner of 7th and St. John's Street in Allentown (Pennsylvania) in a small

house next to ... A white church was on the corner there, and I probably have memories from as early three years of age, but I didn't live there long. Born in 1951, as I say, and having moved to Allentown (Pennsylvania), shortly thereafter. We again moved and this is the beginning of my Dad's many travels, because from there on I moved hither and yon mostly throughout Pennsylvania, but also a couple times out of state for brief periods of time. We moved, my first move, I remember was in 1955, so I was four years old. I just ...

LM: You remember it?

SD: Yes, I remember things well and always have had a pretty good, sharp memory for names and places. So, we moved into an apartment building first in Snyder County (Pennsylvania), which is not far from Sunbury (Pennsylvania), Selinsgrove (Pennsylvania), and Lewisburg (Pennsylvania). We—my Dad had taken over the pastorate of the largest church in the denomination which was then about 150 to 175 people in the congregation. We were there only two years and I remember starting first grade at the small elementary school there near Middleburg, (Pennsylvania) outside of Beavertown (Pennsylvania). My Dad did—was not given a recall for that church. He had a two-year term, and so he had to take another assignment. And after I had finished about one week of first grade, we moved to Clearfield County (Pennsylvania), a small town named Mahaffey (Pennsylvania). And that's where I spent the next four years, finished out first grade and up the through fourth. And we felt that we were—it was time to move again, as it was a feeling of my parents or at least of my father. And he was looking around, searching around, and we ended up moving to Dauphin County, North of Harrisburg (Pennsylvania), a small community near Halifax (Pennsylvania). We were there one year and then moved to Williamsport (Pennsylvania) and the South Williamsport (Pennsylvania) and ah ... I won't go on and on, but I went to twelve different schools before I graduated from high school. In 10th grade, our church denomination called "God's Missionary Church," started a Christian school for first through 11th grades. And I was in 10th grade at that time and being raised in the church and wanting to participate with other kids I knew through the summer and church meetings and so forth. I decided to attend there, so it was a daily trip of about 25 miles. A load of us went in the car each day and I had classes there. Everything was very primitive because there were no real accommodations at that time for classrooms or anything, but it was kind of make-do situation. At the end of 10th grade...

LM: Hold one minute. I want to try something. I'm still worried about what we're not seeing... [Pause] definitely back ... now we're in 10th grade?

SD: Yes, at the end of 10th grade that was the first year that the school existed. My Dad found a church and called him in Colorado. So, we picked up and by that time I was the only one living at home. My older brothers and sisters had all either married or were on their own or in the process of finding their own careers and lives. So, Mom and I, Dad and I, packed up, put everything in a U-Haul trailer and towed the U-Haul trailer out to Greeley (Colorado), and I loved it. My Dad loved it, because...

LM: Great trip, huh?

SD: We were excited about it and it was just—we loved Colorado. We had visited my one older brother had lived there with his family for a couple years. We had grown to love the area and it was exciting. But that didn't last long both [laughs] and we, my mother could not take the high altitude. I started the 11th grade and attended the Greeley Central High school for about three weeks, perhaps. Loved it, but the doctor said, “Reverend Deetz, if you care about your wife's health you probably better move back to a lower altitude.” So, without any destination, we packed up [laughs] again, and sadly came back to Pennsylvania. There was no assignment available because it was kind of not the time when churches were being relocated and resigned. So, eventually there was a new church in Salisbury (Maryland) that was starting up and we went there and we lived with one of the church families for about a month or so and found an apartment that we rented. And we were there one year, and then my Dad was again—was not reassigned and we came back to Pennsylvania. I re-enrolled in the Bible School, Christian School, that I had been in in 10th grade and finished my high school there. But, right here is the juncture of my life, where somewhere around age 16, while we were moving to Colorado and then to Maryland, and then, I was taking correspondence courses that year in Maryland for my Junior year, I became aware that I really had some, some differences that would going to affect my life...

LM: Mm-hmmm.

SD: and of course, you probably already know what I am going to say. I realized that I was attracted to men and had absolutely no attraction to girls and so there was a lot of moves. I went to—I lived with my sister and her husband for a while, while finishing high school, and by that time...

LM: Was that a problem? Had you come out or was that a problem?

SD: I wrote, uh, a term paper for my, uh, for my Problems of Democracy class [POD]...

LM: POD!

SD: POD! In twelfth grade at the active Christian school, and I, I mentioned that there was a situation in my family that would be very important that I had to determine how to handle, and it would have to be soon, but I didn't come out and name it. But I made it very clear. I'm sure that my instructor at that time probably wonders well what could this be, but we never could talk about it.

LM: Oh? And, why not?

SD: ...and I went on and graduated. Well, it just, I was already in a position where I was ... I was—our church believed in going forward at the end of the service and committing yourself, being what they called “born-again,” and I had ... my father claimed that I was “born again” at age three, and often would mention that in his sermons and as an illustration of I guess how young you could be to accept your—a personal relationship with Christ. But, it really was not that at all. I was simply—I knew right along and was embarrassed whenever I'd hear that illustration in the sermons because I knew right and feel kind of guilty [doorbell rings] because I

knew that it was pretense. So I, I just kept going and I cringed and ... but at that point I started praying silently and screaming in my own mind, "God help me. God somehow solve this problem. Take this away." But, the way it had to—habit in our church of going around and praying with folks who, who had gone forward...

LM: I grew up in a similar church.

SD: So, you know people would, would pray with me, but I couldn't, I couldn't let them in on my secret.

LM: Right.

SD: So, after struggling with, with this situation for the next couple of years, we would ... Meanwhile I got back in the groove with my parents, spent a few months with my sister, then a few months with a brother the Allentown, Pennsylvania area. Had disagreement with my sister-in-law, and was more or less rude and had to move out of there [*laughs*]. So, moved back—my parents were ready to move to the Pittsburgh area, so I moved along to Murrysville (Pennsylvania, which is near Monroeville (Pennsylvania)—Pittsburgh and Monroeville (Pennsylvania) ...

LM: ... I grew up in Trenton. [*Laughing*] Okay.

SD: Yes, Trenton [*Laughing*]. Well, it was very close to New Kensington ... Trenton (New Jersey) ... I got a job working at the University of Pittsburgh. It was my first real full-time job. That kind of indicated what my career was going to be. Somebody, there was a connection, somebody from another church knew that we had moved into the area and wanted to help, and knew that I was looking for a job and really hadn't started college yet. And she hired me for an accounting position at the business office of the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, which is one of the teaching hospitals of the University of Pittsburgh, and that was really a big blessing. I got my start in the accounting profession. I did general ledger accounting and also did cashier work and accounts receivable and billing and was really learning fast and loved my job, loved the University of Pitt atmosphere and the community. But soon my Dad moved again and this time it was to ... my mother and Dad moved up to Mercer County and I decided to keep my job and got an apartment and moved into Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) near Oakland between Oakland and Shadyside (Pennsylvania). But, all this time, I was living a life that was very secret because even though I was living with my family and even for a while was attending church regularly, I started dropping off going to church for any little excuse. My parents really didn't fight me about it. I think I was—being their last child, they were just glad I was just home and kind of let go of a lot of stringent rules we had all had adhered to earlier. So, I was going to different places, seeking some sort of community. Some sort of feeling of belonging. Some acceptance. And so I was going to bath houses, and things like this, and ran into some problems there and, shortly after my parents moved on to Mercer County, I couldn't handle living alone in the city, even though I enjoyed the night life, and the cruising and all that ... just too—really was getting on my nerves living alone and not having somebody that I really knew well to depend on. So, I moved up to with them into near Grove City (Pennsylvania), a small place called Jackson Center (Pennsylvania), and started attending church again with my parents in a small church of the

Westland Methodist connection there, and got a job and found some friends that—couples, two married couples—that worked at Larry's I-80 truck stop, and got to running around with them on the weekends. They kind of had fun. The five of us would go and I don't know what they perceived or ... but they were very friendly group. I lived there eight months and it was kind ... While I was there, I was always running around, still going down to Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) on weekends, days off, still traveling back and forth on Route 80 finding contacts—and at the end of 1970, I decided to move back to Central Pennsylvania and I got a job at a new hotel that had just opened, the Sheraton Motor Inn in Danville along I-80 in Central Pennsylvania. That's along the North branch of the Susquehanna River. And I worked there about two years, and while I was working there, I made a lot of changes. I no longer lived with my parents and was living alone. I had my weekends or my days off and traveled to Harrisburg went to the bars in Harrisburg, particularly at that time the Neptune and the Silhouette, and did a lot of dancing. Met a lot of local people who were gay men and some gay women. And I—by that time, I was convinced because of an incident that perhaps mainly because of my religious upbringing and the sharp contrast that I found of what my life was really about—and it seemed like it was an answer ... and the answer came—that all the prayers that I had gone through for the past seven or eight years there was no answer. My answer, if it came from God or whatever—it was you are what you are and...

LM: So had you been praying for something different? Or did you change?

SD: I was hoping that God would take remove my, my desire for homosexual contact. I was hoping that whatever it was, if it was a growing up factor or whatever ... as people said that I would get over it and find a way to love the opposite sex and get married and raise a family like the rest of my siblings.

LM: Like everybody else.

SD: Right. The, the normal. And not have to worry about it. But I soon ... as they say, the answer came. It was, it was like you are what you are and make the best of it. Do you ... and then started questioning: well why do you really think what was the reason you couldn't—you couldn't watch TV, and you couldn't wear jewelry, and you couldn't—you couldn't do a lot of things. You couldn't go to the movies. Was there any real reasoning for that? And I kind of came ... I use that as an excuse that ... okay, well that whole religion was very wrong. And in the ensuing years, I went through the stages of thinking ... well, I don't want to say they were wrong. I want to show the best side of me and be good natured about it and get along with these people and put on the good best face. I came out shortly after that. Then, I was following politics and knew that there had been an uprising at Stonewall in 1969, was listening to a lot of talk radio, was following the news accounts, was aware of the changes in the—the psychiatric meanings and their stance on issues of homosexuality. Met a lot of other people. Found out that they were really nice people and there was—I felt comfortable with them. I liked the people I met. So along about this time we had Governor Shape, and boy did my family hate him for when he was first elected.

LM: I forget was he a Democrat?

SD: Governor Shape was a Democrat. I believe he was first elected Governor in 1970 and again re-elected in 1974, but the further his administration went along and the more I got to know people who admired him, the more I perked up and paid attention. He was doing things like making proclamations stating that henceforth state employees in the state of Pennsylvania would no longer be discriminated against for their orientation. And then not long after that he said, well he said he was going to investigate some sort of a task force to accommodate the needs and assess the situation for the gay and lesbian population. By that time, I had decided I was going to find all these people in the Sunbury, Snyder, Union, Northumberland County area (Pennsylvania) that I knew and get them together and see if we couldn't form a group. Where I was, where I was wrong and I found out quickly, is they were interested in a group, but they weren't interested in politics. But, I went ahead anyway and I started traveling down to Philadelphia and I heard about Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), and I, I found out where their meetings were and some-how I believe I might have gotten in contact with Mark Seagull. At that time, I read his name, somewhere heard about him, knew that he was involved in GAA, and it was told I was welcome to come down, so I traveled down there to a couple GAA meetings. Talked to several people there. Got my group together in Sunbury. Started writing letters and making phone calls. Got in contact with some other people. By this time, gay rights task force meetings were starting to take place in the Governor's office in the Capitol in Harrisburg and there were no assigned positions. This was a task force in the gay and the lesbian community. Friends, people who were interested, were invited into the Governor's office. He had a huge conference room that was probably as long as this building. The table had to be a quarter of a football field long, I believe. And there were chairs probably 30 chairs, maybe 35-40 chairs seated around this big, long table. And the table extended the length of the room. But the room would get so crowded with the participants and the people who were assigned to assess this gathering that people would come and stand along and line the walls. So, we were coming from every part of the state and this gave me even more opportunity to meet even people from all the rural areas. I started meeting people from the Lehigh Ho Group in Allentown and from GCS (Gay Community Switchboard) Reading, and GCS Harrisburg (Pennsylvania), and the Lancaster Group called Gays United Lancaster or (GUL). People from colleges and some of the state members were starting to show they already had more or less had been picked. Like, Dr. Walter Lear was the Representative for the State Department of Health; Barry Khan and Earl Greensburg were there as attorneys; and the State Department or the Attorney's Office, Attorney General's Office ... and Elizabeth Shuster was there, and a woman from the Department of Education. I can't think of her name, but anyway, different people from the state were starting to show up and we started getting to know them, and there were a lot of discussions. These meetings would usually go on for a couple hours in the afternoon and then we'd gather down in the lunchroom in the basement of the Capitol and, and have refreshments together. So, we got to mingle. Eventually in 1975, sometime around the midsummer, Mark Seagull and a friend of his who I knew as Bill Way came to Northumberland to help me with an organization meeting ... and there were probably between 25 and 30 people, all gathered in my small apartment above the state liquor store on the third floor in Northumberland (Pennsylvania). And that's where our organization meeting occurred.

LM: How convenient.

SD: [*Laughs*] Right. It was exciting and Mark and Bill Way stayed overnight. One of them stayed in my apartment and another member of the group invited the other one to stay and we more or less had it put together by that time. There was still nothing on paper that stated the organization. So, a few weeks later Jerry Brennen (ph) was notified and I think Mark asked him to, to come for a follow-up meeting with us and of course, I had invited them, and so Jerry came up and we completed the organization such as it was that night. Decided on a format. There was a President and a Vice President elected, and I think a Secretary and Treasurer and they elected me President. But it was pretty clear that already that this group was not real interested in politics. We had discussed when Mark and Bill were up and then again with Jerry. We had discussed what the group wanted to do and they were very careful in I think it was a real, a good move on their part to determine what the feeling of the group was. So, I was the stand out only person who was really interested at that time in the political end of it. There were a few that I thought were reluctant, but might have been interested. So, we went ahead and started and form as mainly as a social group, but the one thing they did agree on was that, if as President I wished to speak out publicly and take some political moves as long as they didn't mention any other names, and as long there was no, no harm done to any other members as far as their personal privacy was concerned that it would be okay. So, that exactly...

LM: Was this? Was this a gay activist alliance group?

SD: We named the group at the first meeting. We liked what Lancaster had done. We, we tried to stay away from the more old-fashioned terms. I was already a move ahead. So, I didn't want anything like homophiles in the group name and I liked the united thing. So, we kind of caught the Gays United of Lancaster, but we switched it around and called it Susquehanna Valley Gays United. And we did have monthly meetings. We had a few social gatherings. As time went on I kind of sought out people that were more political so that I would have a core group that I could, work with. So, eventually I did. I had contacted a young woman who was Ruth Stack and she was introduced to me by a person, a radio personality on WKOK radio in Sunbury, (Pennsylvania) whose name was Than Mitchell. Than Mitchell, I believe is in his 90's now and as far as I know he is still living. But, he had a talk radio show on WKOK, and he was probably the most progressive talk radio host in the whole Central Pennsylvania area...North...

LM: Who wouldn't be real... [*Laughs*]

SD: ...North, right. North of Harrisburg at least. So, I became acquainted with him and he was very interested. He didn't, he didn't have to seem any problems talking about our issues and acknowledging that there needed to be a change and I remember one of the, one of the things he often said is well, this area is usually 10 years behind New York and so forth [*laughs*] and there were really more than that, but [*laughs*] but so, I contacted him and used him as a sounding board, and I, and he, he would allow me to call and he knew who I was and he and I'd call into the radio show and join conversations that—whenever anything that came up—

LM: That's cool...

SD: ... that came anywhere's near a sexual orientation, gay or lesbian. I would call in and make my comments and there were often people who would call afterwards and usually just disagree

pretty strongly, but what I did is I found—Than Mitchell introduced me to Bruce Stack who had been in a community service organization with him and also her lover at the time was Jeanine Brouse. And the two of these women—Ruth was a very intelligent young woman, not much difference in age. Jeanine was probably 15 years or so older and was very well grounded. They also had some younger friends. A couple of young women who lived across the hall from me. I met a gentleman named Sam Edmiston, who was active in the gay community, but had gone through some horrible problems with the discharge from the service.

LM: Oh, dear...

SD: and definitely had a leaning on doing something about it. And a gentleman from Williamsport (Pennsylvania) named Dan Maneval contacted me and he wanted to he had heard about the group and wanted to attend and I invited him to our meetings. And I met with him privately a couple of times and he was very enthusiastic. So, I started. By this time, I had Ruth and Jeanine and Sherry and Laurie, and I had met Marcella Bon Jovi and I had Sam Edmiston and Dan Maneval and I another gentleman from Bloomsburg who had moved from the Lehigh Valley and had heard about ... and he had been a member of Le-Hi-Ho. And so by now I had close to two hands full of people who were behind me and the other 25 people were still social and we still met. But, it didn't work out too well for too long. Eventually, the people that were interested in the "social" only, didn't attend as many meetings, and meetings became more the core group. So, it spurred me on more to ... during the winter, you know every opportunity I had, I'd write a press release and, you know, tell the Sunbury Daily Item that we were having our monthly meeting, the Susquehanna Gays United, and they asked questions and I told them we had elected officers and, you know, and we covered—we had members from three or four counties, and couldn't name names. But, we had opened a bank account at, at the North, Northern Bank, Northern Central Bank and this got in the newspaper somehow. They had misnamed us and I don't know if it was a joke or if someone had a typo, but our bank statement started coming to us uh, Susquehanna Valley Gays Unlimited... (*Laughs*)

LM: [*laughs*] Alright!

SD: [*laughs*] and of course Mark Seagull was keeping an eye on this and he picked this up in the gay news and the gay ... at that time there was a paper in Lancaster that circulated to the rural areas mainly called the Lancaster Gay Era and eventually they dropped Lancaster and became the Gay Era. They picked it up. We went around to meeting to meeting. Meanwhile, the Governor's Council was appointed and I was, I, I had put in my name as to be a community member and the selection was made and I was selected mainly because, and I don't doubt this, one bit. I am not being modest. I think it was because I lived in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. The other folks that had applied were from at least some size of city and I think I did ... you know, people like me. I was enthusiastic and so forth, but they wanted to include me and I was very, very proud and so it was time to tell my parents and...

LM: Now this, which organization is this?

SD: This was...the Governor had...

LM: Oh, oh.

SD: ...made his proclamation that he was appointing a council for sexual minorities called officially called the Governor's Council for Sexual Minorities. And the whole, the whole constitution, if you will, of the sexual minority's council, was already written and studied and the members, the community members were selected, and the state department members were selected and we started meeting. Meanwhile, the people who had gathered around the edges of the conference room who wanted to participate ... And they weren't, they weren't, they didn't give up and hang up their bags and go back home because there was a limited amount of seats on the council. Even before the council members were named, we started a rural group because Philadelphia had their organizations, Pittsburgh had their organizations ... and there were lots of us, and between who we now knew each other, and the connections had been made and the ball was rolling and we got together and decide to and have meetings we formed the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus. And I think that was started, as far as I know, sometime in the late summer—or early Autumn of 1975 is when we first met and probably officially the first meetings were held after Governor's Gay Rights Task Force meetings. The rural people would sort of huddle together and start conversations. So, we met and traveled from city to city around Pennsylvania and I thought that was terrific and of course I was at every meeting I could get to. And I know Sam Edmiston and Wayne Rawl, another young friend who was in our group at SVGU and was our Treasurer for a while, they'd go with me and Dan Maneval started going with me. Ruth Stack and Jeanine were attending a few of our meetings, and so we had an organization, and by this time we had decided to have a lobby day. One of the first major steps that the rural caucus took was to say we've got to do something to educate the legislators here who didn't know anything and were calling us all sorts of names and making sorts of comments. We've got to do something. So I volunteered to help. So, I think Joe Burns who was in charge of the caucus and the formal setting at that time ... and he with more or less unanimous agreement of those who attending at that meeting. He appointed myself and a woman named Lynn—and I can't think what her last name is—and she was from Wilkes-Barre and was also attending that meeting. We were to be the co-chairs and there were other people who raised their hands and they were our first lobby day committee members. Well, I remember we started holding meetings weekly. From probably October when that first was decided until March, I believe it was March 18th or 23rd, one of those two dates; it's in our notes somewhere. It's when lobby day was held and we held meetings weekly. Almost weekly, if not every week and got together and started devising ways to let everybody know and invite Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), invite Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) and planned buses, plan times, plan what we were going to use, how we were going to identify ourselves, where we were going to meet, what subjects we wanted people to discuss, what, how we wanted to approach in pairs. Planning tags. We did a pink triangle. We loved the pink triangle. A lot of us really took that to heart. We had all read about the situation in Germany before WWII and just kind of felt a kinship with that, this symbol. So, we chose that unfortunately we didn't study hard enough. We had the pink triangle the wrong way.

LM: [*Laughs*]

SD: [*laughs*] but, nevertheless, we made our badges. We ended up all gathering and by this time I was appointed to the council. It was going to be in all public dailies in the state and I, I did my business and came out to my parents and my family. And it was, it was ... I was immature. I

didn't exactly know the best way to do this, but I knew I had to do it. I had known I had to do this since my 12th grade POD term paper.

LM: Now, how old were you when you came out to your parents?

SD: Now, at this point I was 24.

LM: Okay.

SD: It was 1975.

LM: Okay.

SD: So, I was 24 approaching 25. Is that right? (*Thinking*) Yeah, it had to be about 24, age 24 and...and uh...

LM: How did that go for you?

SD: [*laughs*] It was timely. Well, a lot of crying. A lot of stunned silence on the part of my family. I had my brother at the time. My eldest brother was the Assistant President at the Ten View Bible Institute in which I graduated from. I had nieces and nephews and cousins attending there. I knew the bulk of their churches were in the Central Pennsylvania area and Sunbury (Pennsylvania) was like a hub. There were churches of the denomination all over so everybody knew who I was. So, I had one nephew that said you know he was embarrassed because somebody at work said, "are you related to that guy who was on the front page of the Sunbury Daily Item?" and I don't know what my nephew said ... but, apparently, he wasn't happy about it because later he moved to Florida and told me how embarrassed he was, and what a hard time it gave him on the job. I had a couple calls from relatives with hang ups and ... Actually, they never, they never completely—they were shocked, they were stunned, but they didn't want to stop our relationship. So, it was, it continued and we did. Jim and I. I met Jim shortly after that when a friend moved to, from Lancaster to Sunbury (Pennsylvania) and Jim was, and Jim drove his rental truck unit to pick, to take furniture from Lancaster to Sunbury. And I came to help my friend Ray Stickle move in. He had met Wayne, who was a member of the Susquehanna Valley Gays United and they had decided to move in together. And Wayne wasn't about to leave Sunbury at that time. It had been his home and Ray had no qualms about leaving wherever—he moved to Sunbury and I help move and that's how I met Jim and I have been with Jim ever since that day. And July ninth, 1976 ... and my family, my parents, decided after a lot of crying and a lot of praying—and a lot of my sister running them around and keeping them busy and encouraging them to go on and to somehow deal with it—and I don't know what all. When on, in the, in the other, in the behind-my-back sense I guess, they did, they did want to retain a relationship and, and we did. And they loved, they loved me, and still loved Jim. But with rest of my family there was really, especially with, you know other than my siblings—some of my siblings I had a real hard time with for a while. But most of my extended family never truly accepted it and they came—even though I had explicitly had come out as gay, they wanted to narrow that down to ... and eventually I would hear rumors. They won't do this. Jim and Sam

don't do that. They're just good friends that live together [*laughs*]. So, all my efforts to be honest and educate, I just didn't know how to really do it. So, to this day, the relationships are there but there's a gulf. I work the best I can with it. Jim and I were together for 37 years. On July ninth ... and after working at it for many years as an accountant and manufacturing, hotel industry, and retail, and some other supply industry jobs ... the economic down turn of 2008 ... and did my job that I held for 20 years at a book manufacturing company. And after that Jim had retired—8 years ... Earlier in 2008 [*thinking*], not 8 years. He, he had retired in 2008 which is now you know five years ago. So, he was retired and I lost my job and I said well, now's a good time to take a look and we decided to move to Delaware, and just a change of scenery. And one of Jim's family members, his sister and her husband, had just moved there. And we were looking around and decided it was time to try something different. So we moved to Seaford, Delaware, in 2012. Unbeknown to us, Delaware was about to become a marriage equality state.

LM: [*Laughs*]

SD: And I had no idea. I vaguely knew which states were progressing and I guess I knew that there were several unions, but I still did not think that marriage was that close, so it never dawned on me. We moved in a few months later. There was an announcement that came out that equality Delaware was planning an effort to engage the legislators in discussions on a Marriage Equality Bill. So, we went to the meeting in Rehoboth (Delaware) and decided that if this happened that it might be advantageous for us, even though we were together almost 37 years by that time. We decided everybody knew our status. It really wasn't going to change anything in that sense, but if we would accrue benefits that were denied to us for all these years ... If we could gain the respectability of recognition, it would be worth it. So, we helped, we helped out as much as we could on that effort. And lo and behold, sometime in May of 2013, the legislators did pass the Marriage Equality Bill and we were still holding on. We were still going back and forth. Well, if we can file our state income tax and be recognized by Delaware, what good does that really do us? So, we were waiting for the Supreme Court decision. When the Supreme Court decision came across [*gets choked up*], we knew, it was time to, it was time to make it official [*teary*]. The recognition and hard work that we had done all those years, to keep our relationship together, it was finally here, an opportunity [*teary*] to give us some pride. Something that I had been working for so many years and had hoped for, which would have thought, would have never happened. So, we are now married. About that time earlier in this year ... I am going back and forth here and I, I apologize for that...

LM: Ah, It's alright.

SD: but, about that time, we heard that the ... I heard, mainly ... the History Project starting here. I was very excited about it and that's how I came to take part in this interview and help celebrate with the friends that I had made so many years ago.

LM: Ah, yeah.

SD: So many of us had become close friends and we had long periods of separation where ... but I think we all still treasure those days of first recognizing that we weren't the only people who had this situation, so we were experiencing. We weren't the only people who feared job

discrimination. We weren't the only people who were had to be afraid of neighbors calling us names and if we went out that people would be waiting for us to lurk and prey on us, to rob us, to harass us, to whatever. So, after those all those years and pretty much we lived a normal life for all these 37 years plus. We were just like any other family.

LM: These two guys--

SD: We were we were two men with, who were gainfully occupied and employed all our lives. We had the same good times and bad times. The same up turns and down turns, the same financial types of problems, the same family type of problems, the same decisions to make. We went on vacations. We enjoyed visiting all 50 states. We met a lot of people. We never, ever shut anybody out. We were never afraid to mix with the general community. We made friends. Our closest friends for many years were some of Jim's professional associates from the high school he taught in, but it did—some of the circumstance did limit—for a good period of time—the type of activism that I was doing ... So, because in those days if a public-school teacher was found to be in a relationship of the type of that we were in, living together and associating with other gay people and belonging to gay organizations—and that became a problem with—that could somehow seep into the school student union, student body or into the organization, the administrative organization ... It could endanger the person's job. So, I mean we even had, by that time...

LM: Why is that do you think?

SD: Well, there were a lot of states that actually had prohibitions. I remember the breaks, and then California where they actually had to vote it up or down. Because a legislator named Breaks, I believe it was John Breaks back in the 70's, as early as the 70's, had tried to legislate that California schools could not hire, employ, or use gay or lesbian instructors and many states used other laws to do, to have the same effect. In Pennsylvania, I think the main problem was laws that were vague and more or less spoke about the wrong type of influences non-traditional influences on family life of students. You know anything that could tarnish the name of the school by bringing attention to a teacher who was associated with an unacceptable lifestyle. So, it was vaguer laws, but the teachers were very aware of this because those situations had indeed risen and they all knew other teachers either in their home district or in neighboring district who had really had lost their jobs, and I knew several of them that I could think of where the teacher actually did no wrong, but by being in the wrong place at the wrong time...

LM: So...

SD: ...they did not quite as mindful of who knew who their friends were. Something like that and were brought before sections of administrators and, and released or were given choices of you know, resign or find another job, you know, whatever that situation was. So, we knew by that time we knew of many other teachers right in our, right in Jim's own school district, who we, we were afraid to be friends with ...

LM: Well...

SD: We just did...we just...

LM: They were afraid of you?

SD: They were afraid of us and we were afraid of them and in a sense ... and I wouldn't have been, but I had to be careful that Jim did, that I didn't put Jim in a position where he would be put through that type of ringer.

LM: Got you.

SD: So, we met friends since and who became close friends of us and we'd known them for 37 years because they taught in the same building and respected each other as good educators. But, we made friends with the crowd who would accept us ... who were heterosexual couples who were married and possibly raising children. They were dear friends. They were a great support system for us. I—also during that period of time, I joined NOW, and was active in the Lancaster NOW Chapter. Later on, I became a Democratic committee person in the democratic committee of Lancaster and I was always outspoken in those venues. So.

LM: Good for you.

SD: I was always, I was always available for rallies and that type of thing. But, at that, at some point there, I realized that I couldn't commit to spending work days in Harrisburg attending meetings and that type of thing. So, I had to relinquish my, my council appointment and go to other areas where I could be effective without those responsibilities being sacrificed.

LM: Yeah.

SD: So anyway, we—I, I,— I contacted Barry. When I heard about the History Project and volunteered information and I volunteered to, to share what I could and I'm very, very pleased about where we're headed and hopeful that Pennsylvania legislatures will soon make the eternal so... [*Laughs*] But having dealt with Pennsylvania legislators for all those years I really, I felt pretty hopeless about it when I left Pennsylvania and moved to Delaware. I thought well, you know Pennsylvania has got a-ways to go, but hard telling where the ball is rolling now. We've got a...

LM: Well, it may happen through the law.

SD: ...and, I think that possibly the courts will, would decide.

LM: Clerk who has issued something like 250 licenses

SD: Montgomery County...My father's birth town [*laughs*]. I'm proud of that [*laughs*]

LM: Do you recall any outstanding moments in this process? In your activism? In your personal life?

SD: Well, let's, let's try to divide that up. In activism, the two most important milestones for me they were kind of personal successes that gave me encouragement to continue and work harder. That was helping to see the first lobby day take place in Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) and get noticed. It was pretty well picked up by the news media across the state in March of 1976, when 125, somewhere between 125 and 150 people came on bus and by car from all parts of the state and wore our little pink triangle badges and went to legislators' offices and—even though a lot of them laughed at us and joked about it and made fun of it—it got, it got the start. People all across the state knew that there was a group of people who was concerned about something that maybe some of them didn't even had the faintness idea, was going to have...

LM: ...and who vote.

SD: ...and who vote. So, that was the first. The most, the happiest moment is the day we went to Harrisburg and we gathered, I think, down on State Street at a church down there. If I recall correctly, it could have been, it was Friends Meeting House I believe. Not on State Street, but Friends Meeting House. We gathered all 125 of us. We registered. We walked to the Capitol when we paired up in groups of two and we had the list of, of legislators, senators and representatives and we paired up two by two and when districts weren't covered they, ... neighboring districts, a couple from that district would try to cover. And I think we did a pretty good job that day and we had announced a news conference after the lobbying hours were over, and the Harrisburg media, some of the affiliates of the major networks at that time, were there. Daily papers from Sunbury, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Allentown (Pennsylvania) pretty much wherever there were community members that were directly involved. I think The Sunbury Daily had a reporter there mainly because they had received notice ahead of time that the one of the co-chairs of the lobby day committee was from their town. So, it was on the front page of the paper and it was a momentous moment. It was when I picked up that paper and I read the first paragraph and it went something like “have you taken a look around lately. Are there ten people nearby? According to Sam Deetz of Northumberland (Pennsylvania), one out of ten of those people was probably a gay or lesbian person.” At that time, we believed that that figure was correct. Since then there have been modifications.

LM: It's not very clear.

SD: It's not very clear. There's a long route to go before we know who might come out of the closet. But,

LM: Yeah but...There is still a very big closet.

SD: There still is a very big closet and so that was the beginning of the lead in paragraph and it kind of grabbed people's attention and then the article went on to explain why we were in Harrisburg. What we were doing. What our concerns were at that time and the main concern at that time was not marriage. It wasn't employment non-discrimination. It was the sodomy statue...

LM: This was before ...

SD: This was before the courts struck down sodomy statute. There were states that had legislatures that were rescinding it, but Pennsylvania was not to be one of them. The Pennsylvania sodomy statute or, to be more specific, the voluntary deviate sexual intercourse law was a name that was very familiar with us. Very much at the top of our minds. Because by law, just by the act of being loving to another person of the same sex, we were in a criminal category. So, that was one of the ... of course, we already had the employment and housing situations on our list, but the top of our list was repeal of the sodomy statute.

LM: Well, it was so much connected with that ... I mean ... It, it, it informed so many other discriminations.

SD: Sure. It allowed—the sodomy statute being in existence allowed organizations to classify us as...

LM: Criminals?

SD: Unworthy. Criminal. A fringe factor. An unsavory group. Unwelcomed. And allowed employers to use excuses for discriminating. It allowed apartment owners and real estate people to discriminate in housing accommodations. It allowed virtually any type of organization ... to a good excuse if nothing else ... to stay away from us. To avoid us. To, to not allow us to participate. So, we had our eyes on that, but above all was the—this statute that marked us as a criminal segment. The sexual outlaws if you will. So, that was, you know, when I talked to the legislators about that. That was the first thing I brought up, and they really didn't have any answer. Their best answer usually was "well, we don't have the votes for that. Most of our, the legislators are elected by people who, who feel that that is wrong. That is contrary to God's work." There pops up in the first paragraph—comes another obstacle to our humanity. Our full acceptance as a segment. Our rightful place. The, the church, the Christian church for sure. Most other religions have historically caused our people to be powerless. To not be accepted. To be outlaws, God's forsaken.

LM: But, most sodomy laws come out of religion tradition.

SD: Sure. So, the other point I was very proud of was being appointed to the Governor's Council. Even though I couldn't remain on there, I was so proud that I got to work with people like Captain Rodriguez of the Pennsylvania State Police. He was one of my contacts. I met with him. He allowed me office space and the State Police headquarters here in the Capitol in Harrisburg. Gave me access to phone lines and fax machines...

LM: What year are we talking about here?

SD: This was 1976.

LM: Okay

SD: One of the assignments that I had as a member of the Governor's Council was a selected steering committee, and that committee was to more or less be a facilitator of that portion. The

state departments were broken up into as much as could be closely related segments—so education, then health might have been together. I don't know that as a fact, at this point. Law and enforcement probably were grouped together. You know, there were different groupings we had. I think there was the Department of Welfare. You know other similar departments that took care of social programs and that type of different of different departments of state. As they grouped facilitators, steering committee members, one of the organizations that I had close contact with was the State Police and Captain Rodriguez, Rodriguez was, State Police top tier person who was appointed to be our contact. So, all contacts, the Governor had decreed that all contacts under the governor's office would participate, would provide a department high leveled department member to be a member of the council as a State official to communicate and articulate their—you know, their departments ... what their department could do to accommodate what our needs were.

LM: He was pretty determined, huh?

SD: So, he was determined and every state Department did have a contact and they are listed on the paper work. That will be donated to the History project.

LM: So, do, are you actually donating to the project?

SD: I do have a scrap book. A lot of the things that I had collected I had sent to a good friend. Some years ago, when I was moving and I had boxes and boxes of this stuff and I no longer was in a position to, to use it. It was just stored and I wanted the information from the 70's to the to have a home where it would be safe and so I send it by parcel post to Roger Beatty, who had moved from Central Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), and I had come to, ah, highly respect Roger, and he was a friend of mine. We wrote letters back and forth for a long time. Exchanged cards at holidays and birthdays and so forth, and I knew that he was pretty well established in his position ... and Pittsburgh by that time ... and I asked him to take it and donate somewhere where he would find fit. Unfortunately, Roger had an untimely death...

LM: Aww...

SD: A few years ago, and I don't know what became of it. So, what little we have is a scrap book and my appointment to the council. Which was on a certificate that was given to each member and a few other things that I brought with me or will find in and donate to the project.

LM: I'm wondering if the other materials are trackable at all?

SD: I tried to, to look it up, and just kind of coming across a dead end. But, somebody that I met just the other night also knew Roger and had asked about things that they felt that Roger had collected. I don't know if that included the things.

LM: I bet it did...

SD: That he had taken from me and you know and had volunteered and had taken from me which he had meant to make sure was placed in a place where it could be used, but according to

what I heard, the family had just gone and in removed everything from his home and discarded of it. So, I'm not too hopeful. So, that's why I'm double glad that Joe Burns has kept so much of his.

LM: Have we missed anything?

SD: On the, your, other, your last question you posed, important things or personally or in the activism. Personally, I continued to encounter situations that were difficult and dealt with them as they came upon. I still had a lot of a long ways to go to learn the best way to negotiate things. I became, ah, established professionally in my accounting positions. Gained a lot of friends. Eventually, I got on social media and I have a group on social media that has a between three to 400 members and we get daily breaking news alerts from all over the world. There's, ah, contributors on there that are authors, artists, philosophers, theologians—two or three contacts in ... particularly, one is one of the bloggers on Purple Unions and he shares a lot of his news blogs with us. So, this one place...

LM: So, what's your organization?

SD: The group's name is Equality—our name, our goal. And there are members from many states, from California to Maine and Florida and in between. A lot of activists. A lot of people who may not quite be activists, but they are very interested in following what's happening, and also international members. People from the Philippines, Indonesia, African nations, Russia...a good number of people from the United Kingdom. I am hoping to be established as a place on Facebook, social media, that many people can go to on a daily basis and find out whether Pennsylvania has made any progress in the court decisions that are now making their way through the court system in the state. Or the legislative material has been introduced in the Pennsylvania legislature by, by legislator Simms. Or by Utah, you know the court case there, or in New Mexico ... was going to happen because New Mexico is a case of all its own...

SD: That really doesn't have any law that...

LM: That's interesting...

SD: ... that prohibits marriage. What is the court there going to do? This type of issue, they go down through the list of states. And on the one blog that, that services our group. And they list all the daily news, breaking news, for each place that is—that has—some activity. Not only in the United States but worldwide.

LM: Is this mainly gay men or is it both?

SD: It's both. I have ... a woman from Ohio is a very large contributor. Her name is Ashley Stevens.

LM: I may sign up.

SD: I have Alvin McEwen, who is a black male gay activist from South Carolina who is extremely dynamic. He is the author of a book called "How They See Us."

LM: I think I have seen it.

SD: He has spent, he has spent years studying and writing about how the, uh, right wing (bell rings) and groups of people who are anti-gay or homophobic have pictured us and seen us and published portraits of us for their people in order to, to fire up the..

LM: Get money.

SD: Yes, get money and fire up their constituents.

LM: It's the professional anti-grays.

SD: and Alvin McEwen also has a blog called...

LM: I'm checking this cause we have about four minutes on this tape. We will have to change it...

SD: Holy Police and Holy Police and religious terrorists. He sometimes shares portions of that. Another author, a theologian named Ronald Getz who has taken a lot of scripture and has run in back into the face of the fundamentalists and some of the material is just astounding. Say, what you get is a blurb that includes a link to the larger articles that would lead you to all this type information on a daily basis.

LM: Cool. And you work on this every day, huh?

SD: I've taken to welcoming people and commenting and don't often ... unless, or something like this History project I intend to put on first hand. If there is something happening in Delaware that affects me personally, I post it. But, otherwise I try to keep the people who are my regular contributors who are interested and encouraged.

LM: Very good stuff.

SD: ...and make comments and find people who are looking for this type of information to get them in the group so that they can keep informed.

LM: Cool, very cool.

SD: [*Sam nods*]. Thank you.

LM: Anything else?

SD: That's just about all I can think of right now.

LM: Okay. Well, ask ... Now that you know what you've said, if you will sign a release to us.

SD: Okay. [*Signs release document*] Let's see, this is October 27th.

Interview ends.