

# **LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA**

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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: MJ Dougherty

**Date:** November 22, 2014

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

717-245-1399

**[archives@dickinson.edu](mailto:archives@dickinson.edu)**

**Narrator: MJ Dougherty**

Interviewer: Marjorie Forster

Date: November 22, 2014

Place: Honey Brook, PA

Transcriber: Andrew Dietz

Proofreader: Taeya Viruet

Finalizer: Mary Libertin

Abstract:

MJ Dougherty was born on May 20, 1956 in Syracuse, New York. As a child of parents who traveled extensively for work, MJ had moved around quite a bit before settling into Williamsport, PA where she attended middle school and high school. Upon graduating from high school, MJ started her first job as a file clerk at Liberty Mutual Insurance. At the age of 24, MJ got married and was with her husband in Harrisburg for 19 years, but divorced as she addressed her true feelings as a lesbian woman. In this interview, MJ discusses the fact that at the day of her wedding she knew she was a lesbian, but that she wanted to follow the tradition of her Irish Catholic roots. She decided to free herself and claims that her marriage of 19 years is a testament to the lack of acceptance of LGBT in our society. She moved as far up the ladder as she could until she hit the glass ceiling. She quit and found a better job, at a fortune 100 company, Marsh and McLennan. MJ elaborates on her successful career path, which led her to a meeting at the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. She had dinner with some of the 290+ members of her company the night before the first plane directly hit their floor on 9/11. She provides a detailed narrative of her harrowing escape in a moving. But her return to work was worse because she was outed while coming home and her boss was enraged at her. Although she met and exceeded the company's goals she was given a poor evaluation, which she appealed. Because there was no anti-discrimination policy at the workplace, she could not even bring up the issue at the appeal hearings. She left the job and has had a few successes with job opportunities. Her partner that she married before the Supreme Court's ruling left her a month ago and MJ has just taken a job in Chester. MJ is a new member of Lesbians over 50, but still not out at work at her current job. She will check her company's orientation policy and follow up if it does not have one. She said she would be an activist. Her narrative concludes with her success at being able to look at her life from a positive vantage and her ability to move forward to new opportunities.

**MF- Marjorie Forster**

**MD- MJ Dougherty**

**BM- Barbara Miller (Camera Woman)**

\*Marjorie Forster and Barbara Miller spend some time testing the microphone\*

**Marjorie Forster:** Today, we're interviewing MJ Dougherty and it's November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. I'm Marg Forster and with me is—

**Barbara Miller:** Barbara Miller.

**MF:** And we're going to discuss the history of MJ. To start off, MJ, why don't you just tell me a little bit about yourself. State your name again and where you were born, when you were born.

**MJ Dougherty:** My name is MJ Dougherty. I was born on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1956. I turned 58 this past year. I was born in Syracuse, New York, but I did travel with my parents. My father's job took him to many places around the country. I eventually landed when I was about nine years old in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and that's where I spent most of my childhood. And where I went to high school.

In 1980, I got married and I moved to Harrisburg to be with my husband who had a job here and I was married to him for 19 years. On my wedding day, I will never forget it, standing in the back of the Catholic Church and with my father on my side, you know, on his arm thinking to myself, "What are you doing?"

I knew since I was probably ten years old that I was gay, but I grew up in a large, Irish Catholic family. I wanted to make my family happy and I wanted to do what I thought was the right thing—the traditional thing, and so I did it. I knew on my wedding day that it wasn't going to work, but I stayed in the marriage for 18 years and time passed. When I look back on it now, I can't believe how quickly time passed. My husband was very good to me. He was a good man. He struggled a lot with his work and his job. And I, on the other hand, was doing well in my work and really always have until about 2001. I think when he got fired from the fourth or fifth job, I just decided that it wasn't going to work, and I knew I was gay that whole time and I never wanted to have children. And I decided I was going to get a divorce and I had also met a woman. So, I filed for divorce and by the time it was all said and done, my husband had moved out of my house. And the weekend after my new partner moved in so ...

**MF:** What reason did you give your husband for the divorce?

**MD:** Just simply that I didn't love him anymore and quite honestly I never really loved him. Like I said, he was a good man. I have nothing bad to say about him at all. You know, it wasn't his fault the circumstances that he was in. You know, I just decided that at the age of 40 it was time for me to live true to myself. It was certainly a freeing declaration above all else. Of course I was madly in love with the first woman I had met and I was anxious to start a good life. A right life. A life where I could be true to myself and give myself to a person in a more natural sense.

**MF:** Were your parents still with you?

**MD:** Yes, my parents not only—were they—they still are. Both my mother and father. My father is 84 and my mother is 79. They—you know, of course, it was one of the most stressful times because they knew I was getting a divorce but they didn't know why and I actually wrote them a letter and told them that I was in love with another woman and that I planned to spend the rest of my life with her. It was funny because I sent the letter and I never heard from—and I thought I would hear from my mother. I knew I wouldn't hear from my father but I never heard from my mother—until about maybe a month later and I called her. I said, "did you get my letter?" and she said, "Yes, of course I got your letter". I said, "I was surprised I didn't hear from you." And

she said, “Why? I love you. We love you. You’re our daughter and we love you. We just want you to be happy.” So, they were very accepting. And it meant the world.

**MF:** Great. It does.

**MD:** And they said—she said, she made me laugh—“we kinda knew but that whole marriage thing really threw us off”. [laughs]

**MF:** [chuckles] Oh. They say a parent knows.

**MD:** Yeah. Yes. Absolutely.

**MF:** Do you have siblings?

**MD:** I do. I have five siblings. I have an older brother and three younger brothers and I have a younger sister. My older brother and I are what we call Irish twins. He is about ten months older than I am. I am the second one and everyone else goes down. We are all a year apart—a year and a half to two years apart. The first five and then my sister who is the youngest is five years apart from the next one up. She’s my best friend. She is—I call her my person. She is my person.

**MF:** [laughs] Everyone needs peeps.

**MD:** Yeah, everybody needs a person. I am her person and she is my person. We are very, very close even though we are almost 13 years apart.

**MF:** How close to you does she live?

**MD:** She still lives up in Lycoming County near Williamsport, PA. She has four children herself and I am the godparent of two of them and ... so we’re very, very close.

**MF:** Did your siblings have any trouble adjusting?

**MD:** I have just really one brother who didn’t have much of an appreciation for it. My parent are what I would call “Kennedy Democrats.” They were Catholic, of course, but they were “Kennedy Democrats.” They were liberal in their own right but conservative in the values, if you will. But I have one brother that married into a Republican and very, very conservative political family and so that’s his political orientation and he was not as accepting as the rest of them were. Most of them were like my parents. “We don’t care. You’re our sister and we love you.” He never said it although I think he felt it. We get along fine. We have no issues. We don’t talk about it very much. As a matter of fact we don’t talk about it at all, but all the rest of them are fine. Yeah, they are perfectly accepting and I am blessed beyond all measure because of it.

**MF:** What about your schooling? Did you go to a Catholic school as well?

**MD:** No, they wouldn’t take me. [Laughs]

**MF:** [laughs]

**MD:** My older brother, he did go to Catholic school and I don't know why but I just remembered my mother saying, "You're not going to that school. You're going to have to go to public school." And I never asked any questions nor did I really care because I don't think I really wanted to [laughs] go to Catholic school. Of course, I went through the traditional Catholic rituals, if you will. I went to, of course, baptism and communion and confirmation. Even for my marriage, I was married in the Catholic Church as well.

And I am grateful for the traditions and you know, the recognition that there was a spiritual being involved in my upbringing. I consider myself a Christian and have been since I was 19 years old when I wandered into the woods and asked God to accept me as one of his own and I accepted him for who I am and thanked him.

So—yeah my brothers and my family are all—and you know, my mother is one of eight children and of course, so there is gayness all through all sides of the family ... Cousins and so on and so forth. My whole family has always been very accepting. My grandparents were gone before I came out but the rest of my direct family has always been very accepting and loving.

**MF:** Wonderful. Maybe we should interview all of them too. [Laughs]

**MD:** That would be interesting. I may learn a lot. [Laughs]

**MF:** We may have to expand the project. You mentioned your job and how you've always been good at your job—do you want to talk about your career path?

**MD:** Sure, yeah. When I graduated from high school, I wanted to get into a program at the local community college which at the time Williamsport Area Community College. It's now known as the Pennsylvania College of Technology and Science. But at the time there was a program there for surgical technician, basically. It was an operating room technician where you worked in a hospital setting and they took 12 students.

I wasn't a great student in high school. I was just an okay student. I didn't make the honor roll. I got B's and C's. I struggled a lot—struggled a lot because of my sexuality. I was bullied a little bit throughout my high school years. I was a great athlete. I played a lot of sports. I played basketball and softball and all of those things. And so it was the stereotypical kind of bullying that happened in high school as it does today no doubt. I wanted to go into this program but they only took 12 students and I was 13<sup>th</sup> on the list, so I didn't get in. I was about to graduate from high school and I wasn't really sure what I was going to do with my life and my brother came home from college and said, "Let's go look for a job together." So we did. We went all around Williamsport looking for jobs everywhere. He finally got hired by my dad's company and I got hired by an insurance company called Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. Very well-known, the largest insurance company in the United States and I started there in 1974 as a file clerk and even while I was there I had more or less worked my way up into two different positions.

In 1980 when I got married I moved here and I got a job at an insurance company here in Harrisburg called Ohio Casualty and I worked for them for about seven years. I did well at my job. I worked very hard at it. I got a lot of additional education and I went back to school. I did mostly insurance education but stuff that was recognized in the industry—pretty regularly, and I got a degree and then when I was ready for the next promotion at a level up they told me that they don't promote women into those positions.

**MF:** Personnel told you that?

**MD:** No, my boss actually told me that. There was no personnel at the time. It was just, "Oh, we don't let women do that." Like anything. So right at that moment I decided, "Well then, I can't work there because I's gonna move up". So if they weren't going to do it, I was going somewhere else to go. And I did. I actually of all things, I'm sure he doesn't even remember this—but you know, Gene Vino, who is the Harrisburg School District's, I guess he is there financial czar right now. Gene Vino—is the person who is helping the Harrisburg City School District get through their financial crisis. He had a small ad in the newspaper on resumes and so I called the phone number. I didn't know it was Gene Vino at the time—he was commuting back and forth, I think, from Northwestern Pennsylvania. I told him my story that I wanted to move up and that they weren't going to let me and that they had already passed me over for one promotion. You know, he was a very calming—he had a very calming effect on me. He was supportive in every way and he taught me that other people don't define you. You define yourself. That was a lesson that I learned in that very moment, and I was able to get myself back on my feet 'cause I was really emotionally devastated by the fact that I had been with this company for seven years, I'd been passed over already and then they went on to tell me that a woman couldn't do that job.

So—Gene helped me put my resume together and I sent it to a company and they hired me for that next level position and I moved into that and my career just went up and up and up from there. I was very—I was successful at what I did and to the point where I was making a \$100,000 dollars a year and you know, pretty comfortable in my life. I worked for a Fortune 100 company here in Harrisburg. I worked for a company called Marsh and McLennan and they were a large insurance broker and I worked for them and traveled all over the country visiting other Marsh offices and so on and so forth. Loved the work, loved the people. I was the insurance services manager at the office here in Harrisburg and I also had a substantial book of clients that I also managed their insurance portfolio on. One of them was Bucknell University, that was one of my largest clients. So, I thought I was pretty darn good at what I did and I loved what I was doing and I loved meeting new people.

And I had gotten tapped to do some work in New York City and I was going back and forth between the Harrisburg branch office and the Philadelphia branch office doing some various work. I got tapped to do some country-wide work and some region work for Marsh in New York. And, so on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I had gotten on the train here in Harrisburg, gone to a meeting in Philadelphia and I was in Philadelphia until late in the afternoon and then took the train from Philadelphia up into New York and then took the path right into the World Trade Center site. That was the evening of Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. And I was there for a regional meeting. There were people there from all over the country. There were people there from Richmond, Virginia

and Boston, and Stamford, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, Pittsburgh. It was people from all over basically what was known as the mid-Atlantic region. We had gotten together that evening, that Monday evening, and went out for a nice dinner with some friends and drank a couple bottles of wine and had a wonderful, wonderful time.

And I ended up walking back over to the hotel which was the Marriott World Trade Center which was in the complex. Three. It was World Trade Center building three. So one was Tower 1 and two and was Tower 2 obviously and the hotel was World Trade Center 3. We had gone to the bar and had a few drinks and then we all adjourned and went up to our room and the last thing—I was on the elevator. And I was on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of the hotel and the last thing I remember was holding the elevator door leaning out and saying, “Are we meeting for breakfast tomorrow?”

My friend said, “Just come over to the meeting early, we’ll have continental breakfast there and then we can try to catch up too before the meeting starts”.

So, I said, “okay, see you in the morning!”

So that was the last time I saw her. She was killed. Along with many, many other colleagues—people from the meeting that were already upstairs, but I was ... that morning—I got up and my partner had called and we were chit-chatting. It’s funny—she says my life was saved by the fact that we were redoing our lawn [chuckles].

**MF:** [chuckles quietly]

**MD:** We were replanting our lawn. Basically what happened was that we had lost the whole thing so we decided to reseed it—so we reseeded it and every morning one of us would get up and go out to water the seed and that was at 5:30 in the morning and so I had that automatic alarm thing going on, where I was waking up, between 5:30 and 6:00, getting ready to go out and move the sprinklers around in the yard.

And that morning, I did wake up rather early and was supposed to meet in building one. My meeting was on the 99<sup>th</sup> floor at 9:45. And it was pushed back to 9:45, ironically enough, because it was Election Day in New York City. They were voting for a new mayor and it was the first day of school. So, they wanted all the local New Yorkers, who were coming into the meeting to be sure that they either got to vote or got their kids off to school for the first day so they pushed the meeting back to 9:45. So, I was up and dressed and ready to go and I was on the phone with my partner. Like, “I don’t know why they pushed this meeting back. Usually these meetings start at 8:00! You know.” So, she said, “Well, just whatever you do, be careful and I’ll see you tonight.” I was supposed to go home that night.

So I was wrapping up some stuff, I was standing at the desk. I had my laptop computer opened and I was doing some work and finishing up and all of sudden, I heard this tremendous explosion and then a second explosion. There were actually two explosions. I felt the building I was in literally rock off of its foundation. It just went sideways. I thought, “Oh my gosh, what was that?” I literally walked over to the window and looked down and I could see the people on the

street running away—running away from the building and then I saw this paper sort of floating down to the ground and then I saw big pieces, chunks of debris coming and crashing down on the street below. My immediate reaction was “Oh my gosh! Something must have happened above me.” Of course, not knowing what or where or anything like that.

Right at that moment the fire alarm in the building went off. I found out afterwards that the building started on fire immediately because of the way the first plane hit. Now at the time, I didn't know that it was an aircraft. I had no idea. So I just closed down my laptop and gathered up my things. The alarm in the hotel was going off and this was 8:45 a.m, this was like about an hour before the meeting. People were coming out of the hall ways asking “What was going on? What's going on?” And I just remembered looking at one lady who was just standing there in her curlers and her bathrobe saying, “That's the fire alarm get dressed and get out!”

I had a rolling carry on and a briefcase over my shoulder and down to the exit I went. I actually went down 19 floors and people in the lower floors were starting to come in and crowd the space so it was a very slow process. There were already fire fighters coming up and of course I didn't have any idea of what happened but when I got down to what was really the second floor which opened up to a large lobby that you could look down and see the main desk and so on, I could see firefighters and police officers all over in the hotel. I could look through the windows and see that there was fire out on the central area between the buildings. I had walked across that the night before. So I went down the steps and as I was going down the steps I could see through there that the entire place was filled with debris and was burning. And of course, people were scrambling around. The hotel staff, they were wonderful. They were like, “come this way!”. Down through the main lobby and out through the side door.” And as I walked past those lower doors, the main doors, that I had just passed through there was five feet of burning debris. I got out onto the side—went through the restaurant and bar who we'd hit the night before. Still had all my things with me, and out the door onto Liberty Street. Which is right at the corner of the West Side Highway, it's right where the hotel and Building Two were.

There was a police officer standing on the center of the sidewalk and he was telling people “Wait”. He would look up and say, “Okay, run!” And so, a group of people would then go and run across the street. As soon I as I got across the street, I turned around and looked up and was like, “Oh my gosh!” And, you know, I had no idea of what had happened. I knew that it was a fire and I thought in my mind that it must have been a boiler that exploded. I crossed the street and I started to walk away from the building and I just remembered looking back and then realizing that whatever happened it was on my floors. My company had 93 to 100 in Tower 1 and the first plane went right in at 95. So it went right into my floors.

I had been to New York many times before. I had certainly been to the world trade center. As a matter of fact, the July before that I had almost spent two weeks up there in a training class and I knew immediately that it was something horrible and that it was in my offices. I got about maybe half a block away and I really didn't know from an orientation stand point where I was. “Where am I? Which way do I go?” By this time there were thousands of people on the street and I heard a couple of people going, “Oh my gosh!” “Oh my goodness!” And I turned around and looked and I saw the first people starting to jump out the windows. The first one I saw, I just couldn't believe my eyes and I thought to myself, why? Why would they jump? Why don't they

wait for the firemen to come and rescue them? So I turned around and kept walking and then the last time I turn around I watch a couple, a man and a woman, come to the window holding hands and jump together. That was the last time I turned around. I knew at that point that I couldn't look back so I was just walking. Walking away. Lots of people on the street. Lots of debris.

**MF:** Could you breathe?

**MD:** Well, at that point the fire was just above us—so yes, I didn't have any trouble breathing. The only thing I had to watch for was the debris on the street because of the way the plane had come. It had come from north to south and I was now south of the towers. So, what happened was that I walked right into the middle of the debris field of the plane. I looked down at one point and some of it was—I couldn't even tell what it was, but I knew it was debris from the building. It was pipes and paper and files and dust—the white dust that everybody is so familiar with, all over the street. And the first thing I recognized was an aircraft window on the street and I immediately thought to myself, “Don't tell me that it was a plane.”

It was a beautiful, sunny, clear, warm day. How could a plane do that? And I kept walking and as I was walking—still in the debris field—maybe a block and a half or possible two blocks away by now on the West Side Highway—on the street—I was walking and I came across what I first did not recognize and then immediately realized that it was a part of the body. It was a human torso. That was when I said, “Okay, enough, I've had enough. I can't see anymore. I don't want to see anymore. I just want to figure out how to get home”. So I would ask people on the street and there were thousands of people on the streets: “How can I get back to Pennsylvania! How can I get to Pennsylvania?” Of course, no one was really coherent at that time. Everybody was in complete shock. There were a lot of people that were still watching the events and so on and so forth. I kept walking and I was walking south along the Battery, Battery Park and on the West Side Highway and I heard this tremendous noise. I thought, “What was that?” Then, I looked up and saw that it was the second plane. It was literally—it flew right over my head and I watched it disappear right into the tower and I knew—that was the moment that I knew, “Oh my gosh! This is bad. This is really, really bad.” When that second plane hit everyone panicked. Everybody on the street dropped everything they had and started running. I was still trying to carry my bag. I had my briefcase over my shoulder. I had my suitcase and I was running with my suitcase. People were falling and tripping and there were suitcases and briefcases and women's shoes. Women running right out of their shoes trying to get away from the building.

I stopped long enough to lean my rolling carry on up against a fence to keep on running and I stopped when I got the end of Battery Park. I didn't know I was at the end of Battery Park at the time, of course, but [sighs] milling around there still trying to ask people how I can get to Pennsylvania. I just wanted to go home. It was total shock for everybody, but I did see a payphone with a long line of people. I had my cellphone in my pocket and I had tried to use it a couple of times but it wasn't working. There was no reception whatsoever. I mean it was a busy signal as soon as you turned it on. I stood in line at the payphone. I got up to the payphone and the only number that I could remember was the 800 number to my office. So I dialed the 800 number and the receptionist in the office answered and ... “Where are you?” Her name was Bonnie Greene, a wonderful person. I said, “Bonnie, I don't know where I am.” She goes, “Jim told me to tell you that you have to get to corporate.”

And our corporate headquarters for the company was actually in Mid-Town Manhattan. It was on Avenue of the Americas. “Get to corporate! If we find her, make sure she gets to corporate!” I said, “which way is it?!” and she said, “Hold on, I’ll put you on to Jim”. And he asked me—the first thing he said to me was “Where are you?” and I said, “I don’t know, I’m in Manhattan.” And he said, “Get to corporate!” And as we were having this conversation, and I was saying to him, “which way do I go?” The first tower started to collapse. Which was the second building that got hit. In many cases, I think that from the video footage it looks like the building just came down, [gestures] collapsing on itself, but from where I saw it, it looked like it fell right over. I could see these big pieces of metal and steel and glass just falling over and I was horrified that it was going to fall and fall on me from where I was. At that moment the phone went dead. I was on the phone—I looked down the street and I saw the building fall down and that inevitable picture you see of people running away from the cloud of dust and debris and whatever else.

So again, it was an instant moment of complete and total panic of everyone on the street because they knew that there was nowhere else to go from where we were. We were at the point of Manhattan. It came right where the East River and the Hudson River came to a point. So everybody just started running and the only thing to run to was the Staten Island Ferry. The ferry had just pulled up into there I guess and just in the crowd, I got swept up with the crowd and onto the ferry. I will never forget this—I still vividly remember the captain who was on the bridge above me, and as people were pushing to get onto the ferry he had given somebody the signal to lift the gate and so he lifted the gate and there were still thousands of people trying to get on that boat behind me and get away from that dust cloud. I did not see anybody go into the water but I knew they must have because of the way they were running. Right into the water. And the boat pulled away.

**MF:** So you get to Staten Island...

**MD:** And the cloud of dust eventually does hit and it goes completely black. And you know, you see the worst and the best of humanity all within a 24 hour period because once we got inside that boat, the crew was telling everybody to put their life preservers on. “Put your life preserver on.” And there weren’t enough of ‘em. And so people started fighting and pulling and knocking people over trying to get the life preservers. I had one and I just sat down in the seat.

And I couldn’t—I mean, I just could see anymore. I couldn’t think anymore. I couldn’t look at another thing. I just sat there. And I remember specifically just staring and having no idea where I was going or where I was going to end up or how I was going to get home. Of course, I ended up in Staten Island and at the ferry station. Of course, everything had closed down by that time. The bridges were all closed and the ferries had stopped running and the subways weren’t going. None of the PATH trains, nothing. So there I was. I was just on Staten Island and there was no way to get off.

And so I stayed in the ferry station for a while. I finally went outside and all I could hear was the F-16’s, the F-16’s that had been dispatched coming up and down the river. I just remember hunkering down afraid that there was going to be another plane or another attack or something like that. And I um ... very scared and really not knowing what to do. I finally talked to a police

officer and I said, “I need to get to Pennsylvania” and he said “Go out the door here, get on the local bus and go to the Staten Island Mall and when you get to the mall, there will be a Red Cross Station there and they will help you get home”. So I said, “okay.” [sighs] And I did that. I got on the local bus and I didn’t realize that Staten Island was such a big island because it took a long time to get to the Staten Island mall on that bus. When I got to the Staten Island Mall and the bus let me out, the mall was closed. All the metal gates were down. There was no Red Cross Station. The mall wasn’t open. There was nowhere to go. You were out at the end of Staten Island, at the mall. And no way to get back anywhere. So I ended up walking over. I hadn’t had anything to eat or drink, all day. I hadn’t even gone to the bathroom. I ended up walking into a store and asking to use the restroom and they were like “No, it’s not a public restroom” and I was like, “You don’t understand. I need to use the bathroom and I need to do it now.” So, I went in and, you know, I just looked myself in the mirror and I just could believe all the dust and dirt and the dishevelment and “who are you?” kind of thing.

I ended up walking back to the bus station and I waited for a bus to come. And I got back on the bus and I said to the driver, “Is there a hotel here?” He told me that there was one hotel and he’d take me to it. I was the only one on the bus. So he took me to the Staten Island Hotel and I walked into the lobby and of course, by this time it was the late afternoon and the lobby was crowded with people and I walked up to the main desk and ... “Is there a room?” They were like, “Oh no, there’s no rooms. We have 100 people on the waiting list.”

I found a chair in the lobby and I sat down. I still had my cellphone with me and a woman came up to me and she said, “Do you have a room?” I said “I didn’t even put my name on the list. I thought I would just sleep here.” And there were people lined up sitting on the walls. There was a small restaurant and they were doing everything they could to keep people with food and water and so on. She said “Well, I have a room and it has two double beds and I’d be happy to share it with you”. So I did. Her name was Rose—Rosemary Flick and she invited me up and of course, I didn’t have anything with me except for my cellphone and I had some cash and a credit card in my pocket. And I spent the night there and, uh, watched, from where we were, the towers smolder and burn all night. Of course, the police and fire department were right across the street from the hotel and they ran all night too, so it was literally 24 and then 48 hours with absolutely no sleep.

MF: So, you partner still hasn’t heard from you again?

MD: Well—that is where the story gets interesting because ... she was—she is a salesperson and she was driving down to her sales territory which is in southern Pennsylvania, the Gettysburg area. She was listening to the radio and we had just spoken. She hears this ... the report that a plane had flown into the World Trade Center. At first, she said that she thought it was joke so she changed the channel on the radio and that channel was streaming this visual of what was happening—that the first plane had hit the World Trade Center and that people were evacuating the building. And she stopped her car and she turned around on Route 15 and went back north to come home and the whole time she was calling me but of course my phone wasn’t working at all. She was calling me and leaving me messages and then my mother was calling her.

Ironically—normally my mother would never know where I am because I flew all over the country and I was always gone somewhere. I was always traveling, and um. But that Monday night before I went down to dinner, my cellphone had rang and it was my mother. She asked me where I was and I told her I was in New York. She asked what I was doing over there and I told her that I was there for a meeting in the World Trade Center. So my mother also knew – yep .... So she and my partner had been communicating. Neither one had heard from me. I know that they were able to get into the office and get confirmation that I wasn't in the building. The office reporter to my partner that I was somewhere in Manhattan on the run and trying to get home. So they knew that I wasn't in the meeting. They did know that much but they didn't know what had happened to me after the first tower collapsed.

It wasn't until I got to that hotel that I was able to get through to my mother and to my partner to tell them that I was in Staten Island and I was just trying to find a way to get home. Of course, by this time, my entire family had gathered at my parents' house and said, "Let's just go get her." Well—nobody was going to go anywhere near New York City. But, they hatched a couple good plans. [chuckles].

So I stayed with Rosemary in the hotel that night, and the next morning we got up and the plan was for her to take me over to New Jersey across the Goethals Bridge and then she would take me to where she worked in Raleigh, New Jersey and drop me off there. And then, my family would come and pick me up. My partner and my brothers.

When we got to the company where she worked they wouldn't let me in because of course, they were in lock down. The entire world was in lock down that next day. Nobody was working and they weren't allowing anybody that wasn't an employee into the building at all. So she ended up dropping me off at a McDonald's in Raleigh, New Jersey.[nods] I was the McDonald's for the better part of—most of the day actually waiting for somebody to come and get me and trying to work through the logistics of how to get over to Raleigh, New Jersey. Of course they were telling everyone: "Don't go and try to get anywhere near New York, you'll be turned around and—".

So, I asked one of the clerks, "Is there a cab company in town?" "Yup". He gives me the number and I call a taxi cab. I had with me \$104 dollars in my pocket and I had also a credit card and my cell phone. And I said to him, "I need to get to Princeton Junction train station and I'm in Raleigh, how much does that cost?" He said, "That'll cost you \$17." I said, "Okay, come and get me."

I wanted to get back on the Amtrak train at Princeton Junction and get the hell home [chuckles]. So as I was talking to him and working out the logistics I said, "how much it would cost to get me closer to Pennsylvania like maybe to Newark?" He said "I could get you to Newark for \$79". OK. So I said, "I have \$104 dollars in my pocket. How close to Pennsylvania can you get me for \$104 dollars?" He said, "For that, I can get you all the way to Philipsburg, New Jersey." And he came and picked me up—it was a van, a minivan--and they took me to Philipsburg, New Jersey. And as I was getting off the New Jersey turnpike, my partner was coming up on the exit on the other side and she met me at the Howard Johnsons there.

Until that point, I had no emotional reaction whatsoever. As soon as I got into that car I just fell apart. I knew that anybody who was already up there was gone. It turned out that it was myself and one other person from Richmond, Virginia were the only ones that survived. Everyone that we had dinner with the night before and everyone else in the meeting had gotten killed by the first plane. So, and—the company lost 295 employees that day that were in the tower.

MF: Sorry--for that great loss.

MD: It was tremendous loss and it was very hard. Very, very hard. [sighs] So I got home.

MF: I'm glad you did.

MD: [nods, sighs] But the story got worse.

MF: I thought so—tell me what happened next.

MD: Well—the company itself was wonderful. They offered and wanted to put psychologists and psychiatrists in every office across the company because they knew that the loss was going to be unbearable and that everyone in the company—all 50,000 employees at the time would know someone that had gotten killed that day and certainly that was the case.

So there were 63 offices in the United States and another 70 offices in Europe. But in the United States they put trained staff to be available for any employee to walk in to and talk to anytime they wanted to. But the head of office here in Harrisburg, he wanted no part of it. He didn't want anybody to come in and, ah, when I got back I realized—someone had told me that he had raged in the office that day. Pacing back and forth, “Where is she, where is she, why hasn't she called.”

Of course, I was not out in my office and I certainly wasn't out to him, but when my partner heard that news on the radio the first call she made was to him and said, “Have you heard from her?” And he said, “Who are you?” She said, “I'm Christy and I am MJ's partner.” He said, “Well, we haven't heard from her! We're trying to figure out where she is!” He was short and abrupt and essentially hung up and any information my partner got after that was from my family—from my mother and father. So it was definitely a turning point for him. And, uh, I had been outed. Not by any of my own doing and certainly not any maliciousness just out of love and compassion and concern. And, um, it was never the same after that.

I worked for a wonderful company who had pushed me ahead in my career and given me several promotions and as I said, I was making very good money. When I did get back to the office—I wasn't hurt. Now, by that I meant—I wasn't hurt physically. Of course, I was bruised and tired, but I wasn't hurt physically. Mentally was a whole 'nother story. Um, and the company adopted a mantra called “business as usual.” It just wanted everybody to get back to business. This was a crisis time and we had to take care of our clients, after all, many of them were going to have insurance losses as a result of the attacks. And so they adopted the mantra of “business as usual.”

MF: They actually said that?

MD: “Business as usual.” Yeah, yeah. “Let’s take care of our customers.” “We’ll grieve the losses of our staff and our company as it comes.” Well—weeks went by, weeks went by before we knew who made it and who didn’t make it. Who was alive and who wasn’t. I understand that because my name was registered as a visitor in the office that day that my office got something in the neighborhood of 12 phone calls confirming whether or not I was dead or alive. That went across in every office in the country for anybody who had been a registered visitor in the tower that day’s was going to get a call.

MF: Describe how you were treated then. You’re not allowed to mourn in the office. You’re not allowed to have the counselors in your office. Did you try to appeal that to someone higher up outside the Harrisburg office?

MF: I didn’t because my own mental state didn’t allow me to have that thought process where this was wrong. But there was no question in my mind that people in the office were traumatized. They were not only traumatized by what had happened and what they saw, as everyone in the United States and perhaps even the world was, to some level anyways. They were traumatized because they knew I was there. They knew that I had—they didn’t know for a long time if I was dead or alive and they knew it was going to be a tough go when they found out that I was.

So the staff was very kind and very compassionate ... although—it’s funny when you have an event like that—you know, there isn’t a lot of patience for it. “Hey, in a way—it’s been a month. Get over it.” That’s a pretty natural reaction for anybody. No matter what kind of crisis they face in their lives. You can’t just keep carrying it along and carrying it along. You know, at some point or another you have to resolve it in whatever way you can and then put one foot in front of the other. That sort of becomes a mantra after a while—we’re just putting one foot in front of the other and perhaps we’re just going through the motions but we still having to put one foot in front of the other. There is no alternative. So, I struggled. I struggled for a full—a good year, but the good news was that I got into therapy immediately. I mean I got back on a Wednesday and I think on Friday, I had my first appointment with the therapist, who was absolutely wonderful helping me get through, and get through my diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. So I know all about that. I am well educated. She also adapted a very—a couple of very important lessons. One was, “Hey, you have to assume a normal routine.”

So in the office it was “business as usual” but in my personal life it was “assume a normal routine.” So there were two things that said: you had to keep putting one foot in front of the other and there’s no curling up in the fetal position. It’s not an option. You have to assume a normal routine. So every morning I would get up and I would “assume a normal routine” and I would get dressed and I would go to work like everybody else and I was not functioning. I was just sitting there. I was not working. I was not able to focus. My phone would ring incessantly because people knew that I was there and “what happened?”, “what did you see?”. You know, so it was this process of--

MF: So they kept having you relive it?

MD: Reliving it every day. But the good news was—personally, my therapist said to me—and it was the best advice she ever gave me. “Okay, you are now on a 100% news blackout. You are

not allowed to watch the news, watch television, watch any coverage of the events, no newspapers, no magazines, no reading any stories about it. I want a total news blackout.” And it was so effective to the point that I was in the office about two years after the events and somebody mentioned the word “anthrax” to me. I looked at them and asked what is anthrax? I had no idea what had happened with the whole anthrax thing and the powder and, you know, the Senate and the House and the post office. I had missed that completely because of this news blackout. My therapist was like, “If something happens and you need to know about it—you’ll know it. The rest of it, you don’t need to know. Is there any possibility whatsoever that you don’t know what happened on 9/11?” I’m like, “No, I know exactly what happened on 9/11 because I saw it with my own two eyes.” And she said, “There—that is enough. You don’t need to know anything else.”

MF: Now your boss was—you were outed to him. Was he treating you differently during this team?

MD: Uh huh. Yup. Yeah, our relationship completely fell apart after that. We had always had a very good relationship. All kinds of reviews and very positive interactions—gotten promoted. Was now at vice president at the company and had been very successful and we always had a very compatible relationship and the office was very successful. And, um, in that year afterwards it was a grind for me but I still did that whole “put one foot in front of the other” and went to work every day—perhaps not as effectively as I could have been or should have been, but I was still doing the best that I could under the circumstances. But in 2002, I sat down to have my performance review with him and all, of a sudden I was no longer in good standing with the firm. I just sat in his office when he told me that I was completely ineffective at my job. I was unsuccessful. I was dragging everyone down and I was dragging myself down too and I failed as a leader and as a professional.

So he put me on a written, a written performance improvement plan and he did not give me my bonus that year, and I didn’t get a raise that year. Yet, most of the measurements for my success in the office were all numbers driven. You know, grow revenue. Certain scores on certain metrics and so on and so forth and all of those metrics were met. Most of them were exceeded and his review I found to be very subjective and not objective and simply didn’t merit that criticism just by the way the evaluation was structured in terms of numbers and so on and so forth. It was just ridiculous.

And so I appealed and I appealed through the company, and up through the chain of command, and his boss asked me what I wanted. I said that I wanted to be put back in good standing with the firm. I didn’t think that it was too much to ask considering everything I had been through in the year before. He was very kind and compassionate and he understood but he was still not going to override the head of the office. It was a political decision more than anything else. Um, and when I wrote my rebuttal to the performance review I exposed a lot of issues that had not been exposed before. I am sure he was made very uncomfortable in terms of the things that I had told him about. I was able to refute most of the criticism just by doing the examination of what was expected in the numbers and what the results were.

And then to criticize him back because the things that he said were mostly subjective things that couldn't be measured. And I had always been under the assumption that success was measured by these key ratios and key numbers that were given to me in the year before, and those numbers were all met or exceeded so I don't know why he could say that I was not doing my job and that I was failing to lead and that I was unsuccessful.

MF: So the other officer did not come down on your director?

MD: No.

MF: What happened next?

MD: They refused. They refused my appeal. So I was still not—no longer in good standing with the firm so I filed a lawsuit against the company with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. I got a lawyer and I told the director above my boss that I was going to do so and that I didn't want to, but I felt as if I was being treated unfairly—and of course, as soon as you do that in a Fortune 100 company, you are on their radar for sure. So my lawyer was absolutely stunned. He, of course, thought that I had an excellent case, but what I was asking for was simply to be—I wasn't asking for money. I didn't want money. What I wanted was to be made back in good standing with the firm. I wanted my bonus and I wanted the raise that I was expecting. That's all. I didn't want a \$100,000 dollars or anything like that. Of course, they had refused and they got a lawyer from New York to come and defend and we went to this hearing and of course, my lawyer at these Human Relations Commission Hearings they're not allowed to speak. It's just the parties involved that are allowed to speak. And so I had an investigator who did not—who actually—it was funny because I found out later that he had been talking back and forth with our Human Resources department—he never spoke to me. All he did was read the report—the complaint, which was basically what I had written. He had never spoken to me about what had happened or what my feeling were. He had the whole time had been on the phone with both my boss and the Human Resources person in New York and they both showed up at the meeting. He had called a couple of witnesses—people in my office who I classified as ladder climbers. They were trying to climb up at the expense of someone else—me, I thought. They also testified. But anyway the results of the hearing were that I had failed to prove my prima facie case. And the reason why was because what I needed to prove was that I was treated differently from somebody else that was similarly situated, okay?

Well, there were three offices in Pennsylvania—Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. In my job, the office in Harrisburg, I was the only one, it was unique to the job with the company, so there was no one to compare me to. There was no one in Philadelphia who had my job and there was no one in Pittsburgh that had my job and we are talking about the PHRC here, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. So I failed to prove my case because I couldn't prove that I was treated differently than someone that was similarly situated.

MF: Was your orientation ever brought up?

MD: It was not.

MF: Was it ever brought up with your director? Did that ever surface?

MD: No.

BM: And that was not the basis of your suit?

MD: No, it was not because it is not protected. It is a not a protected class in Pennsylvania. And I had told my lawyer that I was gay and I thought really what came right down to this whole situation was that I was gay! That's the reason why all of a sudden I was on the outside and it was as simple as that. What else could it have been? Why else wouldn't I have warranted some compassion on his part after everything I had seen and done? [She raises a hand] You know—he sat at that meeting and said that he never knew what happened to me. He said he never knew what happened to me. I'm like, that is the most ridiculous and absurd lie I have ever heard. He certainly knew what happened to me. Not only did he know, I had written it down and he had read it. Because I had written a story throughout the whole year of recovery. Every month or so I would sit down and try to remember everything that happened because I wanted to be able to tell people what had happened. "Here's what happened. Here's what I saw." And he read it and he knew what happened and he told the investigator and the lawyers that he said, he didn't know that my diagnosis was PTSD. That was a lie. That was a flat out lie but I had no way of proving it. And I could not go back and say to them, "I know why this happened. Because he found out on September 11<sup>th</sup> that I was gay." It was as simple as that. That's why everything went downhill from there. [shrugs her shoulders]

MF: So did you continue to work there?

MD: I did. The director—his boss, saved me. He came back to me and asked me what I wanted and I said that I wanted to be in good standing with the company and I want my raise and I want my bonus. At the time, you know, it wasn't really about the money. I mean the bonus was substantial. It was probably \$20,000 or 25,000 dollars but I didn't even care so much about that. I had never in my entire career—not only did I have a negative comment on any review that I had ever had for any job that I had ever been in, but I never had been found no longer in good standing with any company that I have ever worked for. This was the first time in my whole career. I had always been successful. I have always worked hard. I had always gotten the education and done everything I needed to do to be successful at the job I was in. Now all of a sudden I am no longer in good standing?

And, you know, when you are under the effects of PTSD there is just something about your brain that doesn't quite engage. You are not in a place where you can adequately defend yourself. You have to be able to articulate how it is that you are feeling and why it is that you feel wronged. And then the whole issue of that fact that I thought he was being prejudiced because I was a lesbian and it was as simple as that. I knew it. He knew it too. He knew it too. But of course, not being a protected class in Pennsylvania there is absolutely nothing you can do and my lawyer said to me, "You can't even make that a point in this. You can't even bring it up in the hearing—because it's not protected."

What we had to do—we had to make it more about the PTSD. We had to make it—are you protected by the Americans with Disability Act, the ADA. In the hearing of course, they found yes. Yes, you are a protected class as someone protected under ADA because of the diagnosis with PTSD. That is how it was approached, but it was never approached that—yes, she is gay and that is why he did what he did.

MF: So the other office above you, reinstated you? Then, how did things go after that?

MD: Yes, they did and then I started working in Philadelphia for the whole year following. I worked directly for him [that director] and another woman.

MF: Oh, so you left the Harrisburg office?

MD: Yes. I was working in the Harrisburg office one or two days a week and then I would take the train to Philadelphia. So I was working in the Philadelphia office as well. I had restored myself. I had restored my reputation and my standing with the company. I had got the biggest bonus I ever had that following year. But then the company was indicted by Eliot Spitzer of all people and the company ended up having to lay off a number of people. I think I made it through one or two rounds of the layoffs and then on the third round I got hit. So they had to let me go.

MF: Were they indicted because of anything related to your case?

MD: No, they were indicted for price fixing and things like that as part of Eliot Spitzer's investigation.

MF: Okay. So what did you do next? I mean, in terms of— you know, I assume you landed on your feet career-wise—

MD: Yes. Yup.

MF: --as you're such a skilled person.

MD: Right. I did. I got a job.

MF: You ended up – You stayed in Harrisburg area?

MD: I did. I actually found a job in York [Pennsylvania] and I stayed here in Harrisburg, commuted back and forth to York. I got a job working for a startup company and it turned out that that guy was a crook [chuckles as man yells in background]. He stole a lot of money from a lot of people and he was being chased after. [man continues yelling] I came into work one day—there was only three of us at the company—and I got an email that said “gone to London, not sure when I'll be back”. He wasn't an American. He was an Australian and he never came back. The next day the IRS was knocking on the door. It turned out that he really embezzled a lot of money, absconded, and put every bank on the hook in York. He was quite the talker and quite the entrepreneur and it turned out that he was just a crook.

MF: So you are still with your partner at this point?

MD: No, my partner and I just separated after 15 years.

MF: Prior to the New York job?

MD: No, no, no. We had just separated in the last month or two.

MF: Oh no. I'm sorry about that.

MD: Yea, after 9/11 the job situation got worse and worse and you know I found a couple jobs and then I would last there for a little while. The guy that went to London, that company folded and then I got a job at another company and it went out of business. And then I got another job and they had to downsize people. It was for a good 10 years that I struggled back and forth with trying to find work. And the head at the office at Marsh was also working on my reputation at the time as well. He had told a lot of people that I was gay and I had heard that from various people. So I had really—where I once had a great reputation that I could have gotten a job anywhere, I was now tainted because of the things he was saying about me and some of the things that had happened. It was a lot of bitterness and resentment on his part because of putting him under the microscope with the answer and my rebuttal to the performance reviews and so on and so forth.

MF: Now you recently moved to Chester? How recently did you move?

MD: I recently sold my house here—that I have lived in for 28 years, and I couldn't find a job here anywhere. I had sent out over 60 resumes and letter and applied. I sent one resume outside the area and I thought "well, maybe that it's time for me to expand my search". Within three days that company called me and I went through a very arduous interview process. I had nine interviews and they offered me the position. You know, at that point I realized that there was no point of me staying here in Harrisburg and my partner and I had struggled for many, many years because of the job situation and the financial situation and she decided that she didn't want to do it anymore so she walked away from the relationship. Which was okay. I understood that. It was fine. So, I moved. I moved to—I commuted back and forth to King of Prussia from July until the end of October and then I found a place down there and moved and sold my home. 28 years.

MF: Wow—that is a lot of change. [grimaces]

MD: Indeed.

MF: And after a lot of upset.

MD: Yeah—yeah.

MF: So how are you settling in? How are you involved with the community there? Are you an activist in any way? What's going on?

MD: Well—I am just getting into the community there. I just recently joined a group, Bucks County Lesbians over 50. (Laughs) So I haven't had the opportunity to really attend any of their events yet but I will eventually. I'm still—I mean I just moved into the house on October 28<sup>th</sup>, so I haven't even been in there for a month. I'm still getting settled. I am just working through all of those things and learning my way around and getting familiar with the area. But, and I am not really looking for a relationship right now. I am just looking to meet good people that, you know, want to do things that I like to do and have fun, so.

MF: Are you finding the community welcoming?

MD: I am not out at my work. I didn't see any reason to do that. And I learned a hard lesson a long time ago and that was let people know you first and know who you are as a person and then when you feel comfortable don't be afraid to tell.

MF: It's a private thing. We don't go around announcing our sexuality.

MD: Exactly. So I don't feel the need to ever do that in any point of time. I tell my closest friends. Most—all, of my closest friends know now of course, but the new people that I am working with I have chosen not to say anything. Yet, but eventually I very likely will. So ...

MF: So in your lifetime can you pinpoint some significant changes in terms of acceptance? What are you observing from your vantage point?

MD: [chuckles] Well—obviously gay marriage. The fact that it even passed in Pennsylvania on my birthday. [chuckles]

MF: Oh, Happy Birthday! [laughs]

MD: It was the best birthday present I have ever received for sure. Just generally—I work with a group of wonderful, young people who I know are accepting. I can tell by listening that they could care less and that of course is a significant change from when I was in high school and certainly through my younger years. The fact that I lived in the closet for, you know ... and was married to a man for 19 years, is a direct reflection of how society views gay people and what the expectation was for an Irish Catholic woman—young woman. So I am finding this to be a very exciting time for us.

I get excited when I hear about things like the state of Montana has now [chuckles] legalized gay marriage and I am really waiting and hoping, hoping for the Supreme Court to finally step in and really say, “Yes. We have to do this. Anything else is just bad law.” And, you know, they have been sort of fence sitting for a while and it is time for them to get off the fence and I am sure that that will come, it will just be in a matter of time. And I have friends in many states—for one thing, we always thought that Pennsylvania would be the last state to approve gay marriage. Let's face it—in a million years we never would have thought that Pennsylvania being the red state that it is would ever, would ever approve gay marriage. We always knew that it would very likely come through the court system and not the through the electoral system so very, very happy to see that kind of change. And so many friends now that have been together, partners,

maybe for 25 to 35 to 40 years, and they are now getting married. They are not getting married for the reason that you would think. “Oh, I can do it now. I should.” Now they are getting married to protect their assets. Now they are getting married to do the things they need to do to protect their partner’s interest in the things that they have built together as a couple all of these many, many years.

MF: Right.

MD: It is just wonderful to see. It’s is wonderful to see them happy and secure. Secure—we needed this for security.

MF: As you have pointed out— this work protection—is still...

MD: It’s still not here. It’s still not here. And, you know, I think at some point in time I will get to the point where I will want to be an activist. It’s funny because I just read this week—I thought to myself, “I wonder if the company I am working for—and I probably should have looked this up before—has sexual orientation protections in their policies?” I checked and they don’t. So that would be my first step of activism. I will go to my personnel department, personnel development, and say to them that it’s time for them to update the employee manual to include sexual orientation protections.

MF: And if they say, “Why?”

MD: I will tell them. I will 100% tell them. Not just because of me, because for everybody.

MF: Are you afraid that you would be risking your job?

MD: No, not at all. If I am, then I don’t care, if I am that means that I don’t belong there. They should accept me for who I am. It is as simple as that.

MF: Well, I want to thank you for sharing your stories. Is there anything that we’ve missed? Anything else that you would like to add?

MD: No. I am happy and healthy and blessed in more ways than I could count. So nothing else. [smiles]

MF: Okay— well, thank you again.

MD: It’s been an honor and a pleasure.

MF: It’s been a pleasure to hear your story as sad as parts of it were.

MD: Yes, I’m sorry.

MF: I’ve heard the stories but not your vantage point. As close as I’ve come. Thank you.

MD: Thank you.