

LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA

**Located at Dickinson College
Archives & Special Collections**

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

Documents Online

Title: LGBT Oral History: Paul Foltz

Date: March 20, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – Foltz, Paul – 036

Contact:

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

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Interviewee: Paul Foltz

Interviewer: Brian Pridgeon

Date of Interview: March 20, 2015

Location of Interview: Dickinson College

Transcriber: Brian Pridgeon

Proofreader: Katie McCauley (June 12, 2015)

Finalizer: Mary Libertin

Abstract

Paul Foltz grew up in Steelton in a very Catholic household, a background to which he attributes his unawareness of his sexuality until later in his college years. It wasn't until he went to England to complete his graduate-level theatre studies, though, that he encountered a strong and open LGBT community that was growing after the recent decriminalization of homosexual acts, which encouraged him to come out and become comfortable with himself. Upon his return to the U.S., he remained out and was generally met with acceptance. He became involved in Pennsylvania's LGBT community in helping to establish the Harrisburg Men's Chorus and Dignity Philadelphia, as well as directing a drag troupe to raise money for HIV support. In this interview, he discusses these events, as well as his work as a costume designer at Theatre Harrisburg and teaching at the Bradley Academy for the Visual Arts and at HACC, in addition to his experiences with being out and gay in central PA.

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1]

BP: What do I say in the beginning? All right, we're here with Paul Foltz, on March 20th, 2015, and we're in Denny [Hall at Dickinson College]. Just as formalities, if you could sign this consent form. And you can read the top, and it's just saying that you allow this interview to happen.

PF: [chuckles] Allow this to happen. Well, we have it on tape too, so there's no way around this one. I take it I'm the narrator; where do you need me to sign? Let's just do that, and I'll adjust it wherever. [hands paper to interviewer] Here we go.

BP: All right, thank you.

PF: Mhm.

BP: All righty. So, to start off this interview, I guess the first question would be, I guess, your history, like, your childhood, and, like, your family, and, like, your past and schooling. I guess if that involves, like, the religion, or if it involved military, and—just, I guess, a little backstory, I guess.

PF: [laughs] God, a story of me in five minutes. Actually, I'm from the area, I grew up in Steelton, which is downriver from here. Productive parochial education for 16 years. Did my undergraduate in New England, did my graduate work in—in England, in theatre studies. Spent quite a few years working here, hither and yon, and traveling around this country to work in different places. Eventually settled back in the area, 'cause I really just got tired of doing the—

the bus and truck thing of theatre. And established first my own business, and then actually was hired as the costume designer for Theatre Harrisburg, and I've been there for 30 years, plus? [laughs] But I've also designed for companies around the area and, you know, and teach part-time as well. I've taught for almost 20 years at Bradley Academy [Bradley Academy for the Visual Arts; later Art Institute of York] in York [Pennsylvania], and now I'm teaching at—over at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College], in the theatre department, as well. So it's kind of a focused existence.

BP: All right, I know—I guess that's not the military, which is not the—the—yeah.

PF: Didn't do any military service. [laughs]

BP: And I guess theatre's not seen as the most masculine area to be in. Was that—did you face any problems?

PF: No, if you're not gay in the theatre, everyone just assumes you are anyway, so...

BP: Was that—I mean, I guess—were your parents okay with that, or...?

PF: With the theatre part of it? Yeah! They were fine with that.

BP: So they were very accepting, I guess.

PF: Actually, yeah, I was very lucky. I had... See, I came out in—in the U.K., when—where I was living by myself, and had a couple years of—of being very open and very out and at that time, which was the early '70s in the U.K., they had just removed all the old—I forget what it was called—section something of the penal code, which basically decriminalized gay behavior, so I was living, at that time, in—in London. It was a very open society—I mean, everybody was more or less celebrating the fact that they could finally live openly. And then when I came back here, is—actually, I came back for a visit and they revoked my working papers. [laughs] So I—actually, I got stuck a little bit. But when I came back here with my family, because I had been living so openly for close to two years, I just figured, [laughing] “I'm not going back in the closet! God, no!” And I knew—my parents had separated when I was a child, so I was staying at—at the family home with my mother—and I knew that she was the type of person that if I left the information out for her to see and to absorb, when she was ready to deal with it, she'd ask me. Which is exactly what I did. Because when I came back, I was—I was a screaming activist. [laughs] I was—that was the year of consciousness-raising groups and—and all sorts of—of different organizations. So I just kept leaving literature around all over the place, and that's precisely what happened. One evening, bringing her home from work—'cause my mother worked for the state police, of all things—she just posed the question, and I said, “Yes!” And she's like, “Okay. I just want you to be happy, and be careful.” So that's as far as it went. My father and I never really talked about my sexual orientation—he knew, because I did not act any different around him than—than, you know, anybody else. The only—the only time we actually talked about it was when he met my first partner, and he—it took him about a year, but he eventually became very accepting of—of Michael. And shortly after that, he was diagnosed with—with prostate cancer, and that was—that's where—kind of when he finally came to the

point of the sort of live-and-let-live attitude, because he realized, very painfully, that life is just too short to worry about it. And it was a big step for him, because my father was—was raised very conservative. He was typical Lebanon County. My grandparents on that side of the family were—were plain people, like one step removed from Amish. In some instances, it was a small step. My father had kind of left the—the homestead-type thing and started working in the steel mills and whatnot at that time. So he was—he was pretty conservative, very blue-collar type person, so it was a pretty major step for him. But yeah, I was very lucky, given the time and the time period, my whole coming out thing was—was very [laughs] simple compared to a lot of people. You know, I mean, my best friend, who when his—when his family found out, they literally threw him out of the house. So, you know, by comparison, I had it really easy. [laughs]

BP: I know you said you were a teacher, and you owned your own business. Did you run into problems there, being gay and owning, or—teaching?

PF: No, because in all the instances where I taught, they were both, again, art schools. For Bradley Academy, I was teaching in the fashion marketing department and of course for HACC, I'm in the theatre department. And, again, I've always lived my life that you take me as you get me, and if they wanted to hire me—I may—I may not have said it out, you know—straight out to the headmaster of the school, you know, “Surprise, I'm gay,” but I also didn't try to hide anything either, and so there was never any real problem with it. There really wasn't. There's—educational institutions, especially among colleagues, tend to be much more open and—and easygoing with it. When you get into the high school, middle school—that type of area, it becomes—when you're dealing with school boards and those sorts of things, it becomes much more problematic for people. So again, I—I was very lucky! [chuckles]

BP: Yeah. I know you said you were—I guess when you came back, you were very “activist”-motivated. I guess, before that, did you realize your sexuality when you were in the U.S. or U.K., or...?

PF: I actually started coming to terms with it in my last year, year and a half of college. So I was somewhat late, but at the same time, you have to remember, that was the early '70s, so. And coming from a very Catholic background, the whole sexuality thing, it—you were late coming to in general. [laughs] Yeah, but around my last—end of my junior year, beginning of senior year in college I started to come to—basically an awareness of it. I really—again, being at a Catholic college, there weren't a whole lot of opportunities to—to sort of act out on it. I was also in New Hampshire—not a hotbed of—of gay lifestyle at that time. So, it took a while, and—and like I said, when I left for the U.K., after my graduation, it would, again—it was a sort of freeing experience 'cause I was on my own. I was—at that time I hadn't even turned 21 yet, 'cause—yeah, 'cause of school years, 'cause I turned 21, I think, in the U.K. I think I did. I don't really remember. So—but it was—it was a very, you know, sort of self—a time for—for self-awareness to, you know, happen.

BP: So I guess back to the activist point...

PF: Yeah.

BP: What were your proudest moments, or what did—what were—what were you—what were your—what were you fighting for?

PF: [laughs] Well, one thing I remember, which was very little, but it's very funny—anyone who knows—from this area who knows Steelton knows how blue-collar and redneck it can be. And of course, in the later '70s, when I was—when I was back here, it was actually very fashionable for men to start using shoulder bags again for the first time. But I also had this wonderful button that—it simply said, “How dare you presume I'm heterosexual.” You'd be amazed at the number of people, 'cause I kept it on the shoulder pad—you'd be amazed at the people that would look at it and go, “Oh.” [nods] And just—and just sort of bristle, like, “Oh, well, of course you're—no, wait a minute.” And they'd have to stop and think about it. You know, or I'd be downtown in Steelton, with the thing on my shoulder—and my mother would just be like, “Would you please put that away, because people are not going to understand.” [laughs] But yeah, we used to do all kinds of things. 'Cause like I said, the early—the '70s, you know, it was really learning about and developing a gay identity, because it was 1973 that—that the—homosexuality was removed from the canon of psychology—soci—psychologists—that it was—it was no longer considered a diagnosable disease, which was a huge turning point for us. And I came back here between—that happened right before I left for the U.K., when I came back, you know, several years later we were—it was pretty much in the throes of all that early post-Stonewall gay pride bubble that was going on. I was—I marched in one of the first gay pride Philadelphia parades, because of course, they didn't have one in Harrisburg. You know, I was—I was involved in the early stages of Dignity [Philadelphia], which was a gay organization for Catholics, gay Catholics. Glory be. Just—it's kind of like—anything and everything, it seemed like, at the time, including, by the late '80s, I was one of the founding members of the—the gay chorus here in—in central PA. Of course, they wouldn't call themselves “The Gay Chorus”; they said they called themselves “The [Harrisburg] Men's Chorus,” but, you know, we all knew. [laughs]

BP: So, I guess, religion's come up a lot, and—did it prevent you from coming out earlier, or...?

PF: Did it prevent me from coming out earlier? I—I don't think it necessarily prevented me from coming out, it—but it definitely led to a lot of confusion, you know, in terms of sexuality. Let's face it, the Catholic Church still has got a fairly medieval approach to sexuality in general. So, yeah, I don't think it prevented me, but it—you know, through high school and—and early college, it definitely was—between that, and also the time period. It was—it was this, that—you know, I graduated from high school in '69 and college in '73, and that's just at the beginning of the whole sexual revolution era. So you're coming out of a very naïve period of time, really. So there's lots of things that were playing into it.

BP: And the gay, Catholic—like, I guess, group, or...?

PF: Yeah, it was called Dignity. It still exists. It's really turned into an organization that's trying to change the Catholic Church from within, still, to more or less degree of success.

BP: And then the Men's Chorus, you said you were one of the founding—? What was that like, or...?

PF: It still exists. In fact, I still sing with the Men's Chorus. It was—it served a double purpose; it was—it was an outlet for gay men to—to socialize with each other outside of the bars, because at the time that's about the only place you had to go. You had no way, really, of meeting other people. And it was also, for a lot of us who had done music fairly consistently through high school and in college—it was a way to continue our music and performing. It served a dual purpose; I mean, it was always—always had an artistic end to it, but also had a strong social end as well. And it also created—the—the whole—the gay choral soci—movement has developed into an international one: GALA [Choruses], the Gay and—Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, and it's—it became about presenting a positive image and being affirming through music, to ourselves and to the rest of the communities at large, and it's—it's—it's—music can be—the arts can be very powerful, and it's a very powerful way of opening out to other people.

BP: Was—when you were creating that, did it—did you run into any problems or discrimination with that?

PF: Well, I can't, like I said—you know, instead of calling themselves “The Gay Men's Chorus,” they said—they called themselves “The Harrisburg Men's Chorus,” but yeah. I mean, there were times when we were not allowed to perform in certain places because of the nature of the group. We—even though we didn't keep “gay” in the name, we basically were fairly open with the fact that it's—it was open to all men, because it was a men's chorus, but you had to be either gay or gay-supportive, at least. And different—you know, we lost out on several churches that we used to perform in, you know, soon as they saw it, you know: “Well, the majority of you are gay, what's with...” you know, sort of thing. But that was—we had our share of controversy over the years of, you know, places that we were denied performance, concerts that weren't covered at the t—you know, at the time, getting sort of press notice in—in the Harrisburg area—there was a period of time where it was almost impossible. So it—it was—it—it served its purpose of, you know, like I said, creating music, but also creating a public awareness of—of the growing LGBT community.

BP: And, I guess, backtracking a little bit, what'd you do in the U.K., I guess? What was your...

PF: I was a student. That's where I was finishing my—my post-graduate work. So I said—I was—I was enrolled in theatre—a theatre program. I actually studied as an actor. [chuckles] But I also worked the whole time as a designer, and I started—I had about a 10-year period of working with three different designers, sort of in an apprenticeship-type situation, the first one of which was in the U.K. So I always had, like, a dual purpose to my career, and I ended up just getting more jobs as a designer, so I said, “Let's do that and pay the bills, as opposed to being a starving actor,” which—I still do the acting every now and then. It's—it's—now it's for fun.

BP: And you're—I know you're still involved in the community but in oth—do you know, like, what other ways, like, now, I guess? Besides the Men's Chorus.

PF: That's really my biggest involvement at the moment. I've been involved in, off and on over the years, I've—for, what, 12 years? I forget. No, more than that. I—I organized and directed a drag performance troupe, whose sole—sole purpose, really, was to raise money for HIV support

from the early '80s up to—I think we did our final show in the latter part of the '90s. So that—that kind of consumed an enormous amount of my life and time. And then, like I said, the—with the Chorus, and just various little projects here and there, and—back and forth. Now with the opening of the [LGBT Center] History Project, it's probably something I'm going to become more and more involved in as we go along.

BP: So you'd say, I guess, like, the arts world—really no problems being out and proud, and...?

PF: No. No, there really isn't. I mean, it's—like I said, if you aren't gay and you're involved in the arts, people just kind of assume that you are. I mean, it's probably harder to, you know, be a straight person. [laughs]

BP: Even in, I guess, central PA, there's really—I see this as a—you said it's a very, like, hick, redneck area?

PF: Can be. It can be. It—it's funny, I used to joke years ago that Theatre Harrisburg—at that time, was just Harrisburg Community Theatre—was the straightest theatre I had ever encountered in my life, because it was just so—not that people were—were prejudicial or anything—it's just, for some reason, the gay community didn't show up at the theater. And I was like, "How am I, like, the only one here doing this?" But it's also very—you know, when you're involved in the arts in any form, shape, or variety, it's always going to be fairly accepting and open and easygoing, as it were.

BP: So were there any important events in your life that really just changed anything, or changed your view of...?

PF: Oh, my. [laughs] I don't know if I've had earth-shattering events. My life has been much more of a gradual unfolding sort of thing. There was some—you know, way back when, when I was in college and whatnot, there were some changes—you know, in direction, which is typical for every college student, I think, of where you're going and what you're doing. And I think the opportunity to end up in the U.K. in school was probably one of the most influential aspects of my life. The rest of it has been kind of typical for anybody involved in theatre as a living. If anything, I have to say I was very—very fortunate because I've been able to have a career in theatre, doing costuming, in the arts, in an area which was really not known for it, you know? [laughs] Who'd have thought you'd be able to live in central PA and—and earn an income as theatre professional. Not a hotbed of the arts, you know, but I managed to do it, so!

BP: I guess, since you were young in the community when you realized, have you—have you seen a positive, progressive change, or...?

PF: Oh, yeah, I mean—it's—it's—oh, wow. We've come through quantum changes between when I was your age and—and what's happening now. There's light-years of difference, absolutely light-years of difference. Just from what is—what I find so hopeful right now—it's—is that society is so open for young LGBT people. They can—there was—again, when I was a teenager, there was no such thing as internet, or any of that sort of thing. You will commonly hear from people of my generation that, you know, when they—when they were a teenager, they

felt like they were the only gay person in the world because there was no way to know that there were other gay people in the world, you know? Because the only place you could encounter other gay people were either in the bars or in less—and much more seamy places to—to encounter people. So that you—it was very difficult to get a positive image of the LGBTQ lifestyle—there was no such thing as an LGBT life—LGBT lifestyle, outside of metropolitan areas, where you'd actually find enclaves of people like you, which is why so many from my generation would migrate to the cities. And today, you know, you—you're able to establish a life for yourself wherever you want, which is something that didn't seem possible back then. And some of us simply said, "The hell with it, we're going to settle where we want to settle and make the life we want to make for ourselves," and again, I was very lucky because I came along at a time where—when social mores were being challenged and changed. People that I know that are even 10 years older than I am would never have considered setting—you know, living their lives in—openly in an area like central PA. They just wouldn't, not because—simply because they wouldn't feel—they would feel that they couldn't do that. And—and I can't imagine the kind of—of trauma for—for young people today, I really can't. I know it's still difficult for people to come out, 'cause it's always difficult to come to an awareness of who you are, you know, and what you are, and the family dynamics still are not that different. You know, parents will assume that their children are going to be heterosexual. Some will take it well, some will just lose it. I—you know, I know students that I've worked with, and—in my educational background, who have still been thrown out of their houses. But the resources for them today are so much more, so much more.

BP: I guess—I guess, your students—would you say that you influenced them, or they would come to you to help better understand anything?

PF: I'd like to say that they do, I am—that I am, which is one of the reasons why I've always been as open as I am. And over the course of the years, I've never—because I've never made any—any attempt to be other than what I am, students have felt at ease to come to me. Or they—if they've gone to a different instructor, those instructors have—have felt comfortable enough to tell them—to contact me and say, "Would you be willing to talk to so-and-so?" And, you know, have I helped them over the years? I don't know for sure. I hope. They—most of them, you know, have moved on and have their lives going. So. Who knows.

BP: Did you have a similar outlet or, like, one person, or a group, maybe?

PF: No, I didn't actually. Because, again, it was the time period that I grew up in. You didn't—'til I came back from the U.K.—that's when there were actually—and—and of course, I was older then—that's when there were—there were groups forming. There were things like consciousness-raising groups and that sort of thing, so that you—you suddenly started finding out that, "Oh, I'm not the only one in the area. There are, like, a half a dozen others." Or, you know—or by that point, I was old enough to go to a bar, and all of a sudden, it's like, "Oh, there are lots of people here." But probably—if there was anybody who truly influenced me at all, it was someone who became quite a—a dear friend in the U.K., and he was—oh, let's see, if I was in my 20s—he was probably a good 15 years older than I—but James was—he was a professional dresser. In the theatre, that's—that's a person who's hired to simply assist the star—doing their costume changes, making sure the dressing room stays in order, and I mean,

it's—it's a—it's kind of like being a personal valet in the theatre. It's a well-paid position, it's—it's, you know—it's a very responsible position. And—and James had been doing this for—oh, good Lord—easily 10 years, and—I can't even remember how we met, 'cause in—something in relation with—with theatre school, but James was just a very open, easygoing—today, we would simply say he was a—he—he had a great deal of pride in himself, you know, and who he was, both as—as a gay man, and with what he does—was doing with his career, and—and all that. And if anybody had an enormous impact on me, it was probably him, because he—he simply was himself. And he didn't become anything different depending on what circumstances he was in. He acted no differently backstage, God knows, than he did out on the street, and it was—he was probably the first person like that that I ever knew, who was so completely at ease with himself and who he was and what he was, and so it was—it was—something I tried to emulate, you know, something I tried to learn, to simply accept myself. And—and—probably those—those couple years in the U.K., I did, which is what helped move me along the route when I came back here.

BP: And a little bit earlier, you were talking about the little groups and the bars—which do you think was more influential in your, I guess, self-discovery or just self-acceptance?

PF: Oh... [sighs] I never was heavily involved in the bars. I mean, you went to—to the bars primarily to hang out with friends. At least I did. Because that was—at the time, that was really the only place you could gather socially and be completely at ease, at—but there were always, you know—there were always, you know, groups and cliques and whatnot in—in the clubs, and if you were lucky, you were able to float from one to the next, you know, and that sort of thing, so. They didn't have an enormous impact with me. And then of course, once I started running the drag troupe [laughs] it felt like we were living in the bars, my God. 'Cause we would rehearse there and, you know, do the shows there, and then we were doing shows in—in hotel ballrooms and whatnot, and—you know, we took a very theatrical approach to the whole thing. I mean, when we did the hotel shows, we literally started at, like, 6:30 in the morning, moving sets and sound equipment and lighting equipment into—to the ballroom, setting it all up, rehearsing in the afternoon, being ready by 5:00, changing and doing the show, and then ripping it all down and tearing it out that night. So it was minor madness, but, you know, it was fun. [chuckles] And it served a good purpose.

BP: Was that widely—was that widely accepted, or...?

PF: Yeah, actually, we had—we had a fairly good following, and we did a fairly good job with fundraising on a—we ran the thing on a shoestring so that any—any income that did come in was able to be given over to the different—different organizations that we were trying to support. So. I've always been very lucky in that I've found other people who kind of shared my image—or my idea of—of how to do some things, or, you know, let's—it's kind of Mickey [Rooney] and Judy [Garland]: “Let's put on a show in my daddy's barn!” But of the people who would—who kind of bought into the whole concept, and they were extremely talented, you know, and willing to give of themselves tremendously, and—because otherwise, I—you know, I couldn't have done it myself. [laugh] It's as easy as that. So in that sense, I was always very fortunate over the years, particularly with the drag troupe. I had some tremendously talented people who were

just—wanted to help and wanted to do something and thought this was a great outlet to do it, a great way to do it, so they did. We did.

BP: So thankfully you—you had a very nice life and acceptance in that area. Is there a moment where you—I guess the hardest, I guess, non-accepting moment?

PF: [sighs] Oh dear. That I'd really have to think about. 'Cause like I said, I've been, essentially, very fortunate, and I tend to be a person that—if someone, you know, is not accepting or has a hard time dealing with me, I don't usually tend to get into people's faces about it. It's like, "Fine, if you can't handle it, then I'm perfectly okay with moving on." [laughs] That type thing. And so—you know, I've not had—there probably—there probably was, but I—darned if I could think of it right now.

BP: And I guess, do you have any hopes for the future for the community? Do you hope that, I guess, young LGBT kids grow up in a nice, accepting life like you did, or...?

PF: Oh, I would hope so. There would—you know--there's no reason that we should have to struggle so, that people should have to struggle so. And, you know, it's about simple acceptance, you know. Just allow people to be who and what they are. And as long as it's not somehow infringing upon the rights of everyone else, you know, why make a fuss? Why bother? Let them be who they want be. Let them—let them discover who they are. I—yeah, I—I have to say, I'm—I'm very—one of the lovely things about teaching, and why I don't want to ever quit until I absolutely have to, until I'm too old and dodderly to be of any use to anybody—because it's wonderful to see the change in the students over the years. And the wonderful shift in attitude—and maybe it's because primarily I'm dealing with theatre students, and we tend to be much—they, you know, tend to be much more open and whatever, but in recent years there's a much stronger support ethic among their peers, a willingness to accept who they are, how they are, whatever that—whatever approach that may be. And also the willingness to—to have their backs, you know, if they hit—if they hit a conflict point, even if it's just to stand there, you know, put their arm around their shoulder and say, "It's okay." There's a much stronger support structure for—for an open society among students today, I think, than there has been in the past, which I find very encouraging.

BP: It's been, I—clearly, a long road for the LGBT community for—to getting this amount of acceptance. Do you see a very long road in the future 'til you get...full...?

PF: I think it's an inevitable road. We're in an age where information is flying at people so fast and furiously that—it's—it's probably the best thing, or the best analogy, is: look at the progress that LG—gay marriage has made over, what, just two years? Really? The enormous shift in—in the acceptance numbers, if you look at the polls, or even over the last five years. And it's primarily because people are—are more aware today. They have news outlets coming at them, you know, off of their—their electronic devices, in, you know, in every direction imaginable—imaginable. So it's—it's almost impossible to live in—or to have a society, I think, anymore, where there's the underdogs and, you know, the people—the oppressors, because you can't help but be informed today. Even if you don't—even if you want to stay ignorant of something, it's being shot out there all over the place, so you would have to be an absolute ostrich, you know,

not to. Is there more work to do? Gods, yes. I mean, let's face it, we don't even have an anti-discrimination law in the state, let alone in the country. You know, the ironies—we may be able to get married in this—this state, but you still can be fired from your job. So yeah, there's always going to be more to do, and it's going to take, you know, a lot of dedication and work. But will we see the kind of ignorance and—and backlash that we had over—in the past? I certainly hope not, but I think—I also think today's—today's younger people are more equipped to deal with it than we were, you know. They're much more savvy than we were.

BP: Those were my questions, but do you—is there anything you're, I guess, dying to talk about, or something—something that really, I guess...influenced you...

PF: [laughs] I don't know, but I do have to take a break, 'cause my nose is, like, running like crazy.

BP: Oh, that's fine.

PF: [stands up] You should unplug this, 'cause if I blow my nose, it's gonna just blow it right up, and—

[END OF TAPE 1]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 2]

PF: ...Long ever since then, so. [laughs] I'm sat in my doctor's, and I said, "Do you have a frequent flyer's discount? I'm here, like, every three weeks, it's ridiculous." And I pan out. It's the sort of thing I desperately want to talk about. [laughs] Like I said, I don't—you know, I never realized—you know, figured out why anybody would want to interview me in the first place. You know, I've had a very—kind of focused, but ordinary life, you know. It's not over yet, at least I hope not. I've had some really good times, and some wonderful people along the way, and like I said, I've had a very easy time of it, as far as being a gay man in this area, for the most part.

BP: Do you think it's important for, I guess, younger people to know that if you're just yourself, acceptance will find you, and you can find your own place?

PF: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's the—that really—for me has always been the clue. And the other thing that's been important, I mean—everybody says my life is so focused, you know, I've always been in theatre. That's because that's what I wanted to do. One thing I always tell my students is: "Find where your passion is, for God's sake." I'll never forget, I had—years ago, when I was still teaching at Bradley, I had a senior come up to me, who was, like, a week away from graduation. She was borderline, you know, 4.0 student, you know, and she was like, "I don't know what I'm gonna do!" I'm like, "Well, what's wrong?" And she's like, "I've been working as a waitress for the past six months, and I love it! And I wanna do that, but I'm graduating, and I just spent all this money on this degree, and I don't know what—" And I said, "If you want to be a waitress, be a waitress. If you enjoy it—nobody says you have to be a waitress all your life. Go and have some—you know—do it as long as you want, and then go

onto something else.” If you pursue what your passion is, what you really love, you’ll—will you get rich? Maybe, maybe not. God knows I didn’t—work for a nonprofit all your life, and you won’t get rich. But you also don’t end up hating going into your job every day, you know? And generally speaking, if you’re—if you’re loving what you’re doing, you’re going to meet people that will enjoy doing it with you and helping you along the way, so. It’s kind of a—little bit of a Polyanna outlook, but that’s not necessarily completely bad.

BP: Awesome. Do you have any materials you’d like to donate to the project, or…?

PF: I’ve—I’ve—[laughs] I’ve been going through the attic, or trying to. ‘Cause a lot of—a lot of what is going to go into the project won’t be the—the—the ephemera from Lily White and Company, ‘cause like I said, we had—I forget—15, 18 years of fundraising, and there—there are programs and plaques and, you know, that kind of stuff. There’s one—for the exhibition that we’re doing, I have one piece of—of scenery that is still left, which—my favorite show that we always did every year—we always did a Christmas cabaret in the bar, and it was always a Lily White Christmas—one, two, three, four, however many we had—and—and one year, the—the guy who did the sets did this wonderful little cutout arch for that. It has little glitter letters on it, and all this, which—it’s just completely silly, but it was very fun, so I’ve always kept it, so that’ll probably end up being pulled out and given away. But yeah, I’m in the process of sorting through all that stuff to—[chuckles] boxes and things. You know. So yeah, you’re gonna get stuck with it. [both laugh]

BP: Do you know of anyone else we should interview that you really think would be influential to the project, or that (???)?

PF: Oh, goodness, lots of people. I mean, like, Eric Celty was very—very influential in the—in the community. He started the—a magazine at the time. He was also active with the Pride Festival. Tim Reinhart, who is at—who still works at Seven and Four, was one of my original Lily girls, but he was also, you know—gone into a lot of—of fundraising and donation work, and he used to work with Glenda—Glenn Wagner, who just passed away recently. Goodness, there’s so many good people out there that have just helped to make this area much more livable for all of us, you know? I’ll have to sit down and come up with a list.

BP: And, I guess, wrapping up, are you comfortable with using all this information we talked about?

PF: Sure! Why not.

BP: Is there anything you wanna—withhold?

PF: If it does any good, that’s great.

BP: Is there anything you wanna withhold from the interview?

PF: No, uh-uh. I don’t see any reason to.

BP: Awesome. And, I guess, just to sign that we can use this interview, is the “Deed of Gift.”
[both laugh]

PF: Make it official. I don’t have my glasses on, where’d it go—oh, there. [signs form, hands it to interviewer] There we go, then figure out the date, then.

BP: Awesome. Thank you so much!

PF: Sure! Thanks for doing this. I hope you guys weren’t too bored. [laughs]

BP: No, it’s very interesting. Thank you so much.

PF: Sure.

[END OF TAPE 2]