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Interviewees: Jon Johnson and Charles Maser

Interviewer: Mary Merriman and Mark Stoner

Date of Interview: May 8, 2014

Location of Interview: Jon and Charles's home in Lancaster, PA

Transcriber: Megan Murphy

Proofreader: Lillian Sweeney

Abstract:

Jon Johnson was born in Southern Lancaster county, Pennsylvania and lived on his family's farm in his early life. Charles (Charlie) Maser was born in Brownstown in Lancaster County Pennsylvania. Jon spent most of his life in Pennsylvania. He went to the York Academy of Arts in York, Pennsylvania and then worked in the Bon Ton department store doing store displays and visual merchandising. Charlie attended dental school in Washington D.C. and then enlisted in the Air Force. He was stationed in Charleston, North Carolina and then later on in Germany, and finally in Madrid. Jon and Charlie met in July of 1975 at a bar called the Fiddler when they were introduced through a mutual friend. In this interview they discuss what it was like to come out in rural Pennsylvania in the 70's and the challenges of living in an area that was very religious. Charlie also discusses his experience being gay in the military and how surprisingly he did not face much prejudice as a result of his sexuality, especially while in Europe. The couple also reflects on the difficulty of losing friends to AIDS in the 80's and the type of activism they became involved with during that crisis. In conclusion, Jon and Charlie express that they felt lucky that they had not faced a lot of prejudice in their lives, because of their relationship, and discuss how they feel that there are not a lot of differences between their relationship and a relationship between a straight couple.

MS: Okay, this is May 8th, 2014 and Mary Merriman and Mark Stoner are conducting the interview. So, Jon and Charlie, Jon, could you kinda give me just your name and the date you were born?

JJ: Well, my name is Jon L. Johnson, I was born August 14, 1951. I lived in Southern Lancaster County [Pennsylvania], I was born in Southern Lancaster county.

MS: And your parents' names and then any siblings, or?

JJ: My father was Frank Johnson, my mother was Dorris Johnson, and I have a brother Lance who lives in Maryland and a sister Judy who lives in Elizabethtown [Pennsylvania], they're both older than I am. I'm the baby of the family. [laughs]

MS: And-wha-you said you grew up in Southern Lancaster County and...

JJ: Yeah, close to the Maryland line, between – kinda between Quarryville and Oxford in that area.

MS: Okay

JJ: Yeah. My father was a, my father was a...

MS: [interrupts] On a farm?

JJ: Yeah, he was a farmer. When I was born- we had a- my father worked on his, his parents farm and when I was first born we had a house nearby, but then when I was a teenager, Dad bought a farm and we moved to a farm- another farm adjoining my grandparents' farm, they both joined into each other, so, I lived there in my mid-teens 'til I left-sc-left home to go to school.

MS: Okay.

JJ: So...

MS: And then, this is your partner Charlie [Charles Maser], correct?

[JJ and CM nod]

CM: My-yes-mine is...

MS: So, give your full name, date of birth...

CM: Mine is Charles H. Maser, I was born in Lancaster, but I lived in- near- Brownstown (?), near the Log Cabin Restaurant, actually.

MS: Okay.

CM: My dad's name was Jack Maser, my mom was Helen, there were four kids, I'm the third, my oldest sister is Carol, my older brother is Jack, and my younger sister is Joy.

MS: Okay, so how 'bout your early childhood, like where did you each go to school? And kind of religious background if you have any?

JJ: Okay, well I went to Little Britain Elementary School, the little town-the little village I lived in- the first house was- the little village was called little Britain and I went to Little Britain Elementary School, which was right up the street from our house and I went there until sixth grade [thinking] I guess sixth grade- from first to sixth and then from seven to 12 I went to Slanko (ph.) High School in Quarryville and I was the crossing-guard for a while at Little Britain, at the elementary school. [laughing]

MS: [Laughing]

JJ: [Laughing] I had one of the...

[Video briefly dims, cuts off?]

MS: Safety patrol!

JJ: Yeah, safety patrol, yeah, 'cause I remember the blue metal policeman that would- was standing along the street. [laughing]

MS: [Laughing]

JJ: And-I-well-I guess [looks at Charlie]

MS: Well, from high school, did you have any education after that?

JJ: Yeah, I went to- I- after high school I worked for a little while in a clothing store in Oxford (ph.) and then I went to York Academy of Arts in York [Pennsylvania] and that was in 1969 and I went there- that was a three year school at the time and I graduated in '72. And then I worked at the Bon Ton department store doing visual merchandising and I worked out of the main store in York on-on West Market Street and I was there for about three-three years I guess, something like that. And I stayed in the main store for a while and I used to travel to the different store, helping with the store displays, the visual merchandising aspect of it and so I was there until, you know-I met- in '75 and I moved back to Lancaster.

MS: Okay, now how 'bout you Charlie?

CM: And I went to elementary school at Brownstown Elementary School and then onto junior high and high school at Conestoga Valley, graduated in 1966. After that I went to a technical school down in Washington D.C. called career academy school of dental technology. After that I enlisted into the Air Force, where I received four more years in dental technology, serving at Charleston Air Force Base for one year and then I get orders I'm going to Germany, so I was there -in- for two years and they closed that base and I went to Spain, right outside Madrid for my last year.

MS: And what years would have that been?

CM: That would have been '68 to '72.

MS: So right in the Vietnam era?

CM: Right in the Viet- during the Vietnam war and I decided to enlist in the air force for four years, rather than getting drafted into the army, because my chances of not going to Vietnam were much better and I-I'm not [laughing] I'm not ashamed to admit that.

[All laughing]

MS: And so then after the military?

CM: Then after the military I came back to Lancaster and I had been working locally in different laboratories since '72 and I retire in two weeks.

[All laughing]

MS: Congratulations.

CM: On my birthday, on my 66th birthday, on May 23rd

JJ: What a way to start off the Memorial Day weekend, right?

MS: [mhmm]

CM: Oh and I also-during that time I also had my certification in dental laboratory work for-since -'75, as long as we've been together, until the present time.

MS: So how did you two meet?

JJ: We- I came out when I was in- while I lived in York I came out, that was 1972 I guess and I-my parents lived- at that time they had sold- well no they sold the farm a little bit later than that, but I would come down to Lancaster on weekends and I had a gay friend that I knew in Oxford where I used to work and he and I would get together on weekends and go out, it was just a social thing, and we'd go to different clubs and things and he introduced me to Charlie...

CM: In Lancaster.

JJ: In Lancaster, the-what was the bar?

CM: Called the Fiddler.

JJ: The Fiddler on Prince Street on July 6th 1975 and the reason we remember that date is because something was written in my mom's diary that had something- not- indirectly- I knew that it was the same day, you know when I read- 'cause she always kept a diary of things and-but George- our- my friend George -from- well mutual friend- George McMichael from Oxford introduced Charlie and I- that night.

CM: George McMichael's.

JJ: Yeah.

MS: So, why don't you go back a little bit and say how f-first started realizing you were gay or what things were like?

JJ: Oh...we-well I- ever since I was very young I knew something was different and of course you didn't know- I didn't know what it was. I was probably, honestly probably like five or so when I started being aware that things weren't the same [truck passing in background] and I lived in a pretty not- I don't wanna say a redneck area, but [laughs] a very, you know...

MS: [interrupts] Well, it was southern Lancaster county [laughing]

JJ: Yeah, yeah it was, yes it was. And my parents were very, they weren't strict- they were very religious as far as going to all the, you know, the Sunday morning services, Sunday evening services, the training union on Wednesday nights and then vacation bible school and all that stuff and my father taught some in a- an-and I just- I dated different, you know, girls just you know, casual type of dating situation and I just knew something wasn't right and I didn't know enough about what went on other places to even realize what it was and I just kinda felt that, okay, one day I'm gonna wake up and everything is gonna be the way I think "normal" is and, you know, I'm gonna meet somebody and have a house with a white picket fence and a couple children all that stuff that just never, you know, it didn't work out that way and I'm glad it didn't. But I-I-I think when I was in art school I had a girlfriend there and then when- let's see. I guess I-I actually I had a- I came out because-I met a- or I had a- a friend of mine had an apartment in York on East King Street and he had a room available and I lived around different times when I was in York and he had a room available in his apartment and I rented that room and he decided to move out, so I took the whole apartment, and then I realized I needed somebody else to help pay the rent. So when I worked for the Bon Ton there was a guy who worked in one of the Bon Ton stores in the shoe department I think it was, and he needed a room, so I rented the extra room to him and then he- I wasn't really out at the time, but he kinda tried to get on that side of me and I- he wasn't my type at all. So I kind of, you know, said no to that, but then he wanted to introduce me to someone in York- someone wanted to meet me in York, and it was a schoolteacher in York, and that's when I came out. You know, that's my first experience and then I had- then I met- I-I was with a guy for a little- not very long really, and then I met somebody who was- worked for a nursery in York, because they used to, the Bon Ton, used to have this big flower shows every spring, Spring Flower Show, and I met this guy through the nursery that provided all the flowers and then- and then there were a couple of other people I dated, and then he [Charlie] and I met in '75 and we've been together ever since.

MS: And just to retract a little- or go back a little...

JJ: Yeah.

MS: You mentioned your parents, what religious affiliation did they have or...

JJ: [Interrupts] Oh, they were Southern Baptist. And I came out to them- I- they knew Charlie- I brought Charlie down to see them, you know, just when we were together, just we stopped in for a little bit or something like that and, so they knew Charlie, but then, like I say I used to have to travel for the Bon Ton and I-I came home one weekend, I was having some back issues and I came home one weekend and then I was gonna leave from my parents' house to go down to, I think it was a store in West Virginia and we had a snowstorm and I couldn't go and my back was bothering me a lot and my dad took me to a doc- to the doctor's and he gave me some Valium or something for a bad back and [MS chuckles] I kinda- that- that one night- I was sayin- I just kinda suddenly told my parents that I was gay...

MS: And what year would've this been?

JJ: That was...

MS: Approximately.

JJ: Well...

CM: 70...?

JJ: We met in '75, so it might have been '76 or something like that?

MS: Okay.

JJ: Not too long, maybe a few months after he and I met. And my father started preaching kind of and then he suddenly clammed up and he wouldn't say anything and then my mom went upstairs, so I went up and talked to her for a while, and they said, "Well we'll get you help if you want therapy" and all that stuff, and I, you know, I didn't really want that. But then the next day I left to go- on my- to work in West Virginia, so I left them for several days, you know I didn't- I mean I didn't live in- with them, except on weekends, and-. So I was away for a while to just to let them kind of sort things out and it bothered my dad quite a bit, even though he's not demonstrative- he wasn't demonstrative or that type of person. It really kind of bothered him and he went to see a doctor, my mom said, about- for his stomach and everything- and- and we di- Mom said she- she said it would probably be a good idea if I didn't bring Charlie around for a while, just 'til they kinda got used to the idea...

CM: [Interrupts] They did like me! [Laughing]

MS: [chuckling]

JJ: They did like him! Yeah, and they knew him, so it wasn't, you know, they knew him, so we would- we kinda made it a habit- if like he and I were together on a weekend we would stop in there for-just to visit them on our way to someplace else, you know, just pop in for a few minutes and say hi and that kind of thing. And now- you know- 'cause I understand- h-how- I certainly don't feel that- you know- I didn't expect them to welcome the situation with open arms- and that- and I think they kind of thought- or maybe Mom did, that maybe I was [gay], but they weren't really- you know they kind of thought about- I guess they put it out of their mind, but, you know, after-after the initial bumpy road, I guess, you know, they just, all accepted- both our families accepted us completely and I just- there was so much hypocrisy in the Southern Baptist- or at least in our Southern Baptist church, and I went to church from the time I was born until I left home and- there was just so much and everybody was very religious at church and then you found out the choir director was having an affair with the pianist, the organist, or whatever, and you know, all these things were going on and I just- I- and my mother told me later on that she didn't like Southern Baptists, becau-. But my father's parents were Southern Baptists and they almost insisted that when Mom and Dad got married that she join the church, so- but we had a situation, I don't know how much you want me to get into things, but we had a situation where we were- our church was interviewing a new- for a new minister and the minister was down south someplace- and the husband- the minister himself, his family didn't come up, but my parents hosted him to stay while he was being interviewed for the church and he made a play for my mother and my brother who was older stopped it, but this was a big guy and I didn't know

that until sometime later that that actually happened, 'cause I was- my brother was older than I was and that really, you know- and they actually- he actually got the job, he was the minister at our church, for I don't know how many years, in fact he married my brother and his fiancé, he was the minister at their wedding, but it's just like, it's something like that, you know just, you hear- later on when you go back and think about all these things you think, wow, you know, it's [laughing] I just, I couldn't believe that when I found out about that.

MS: And so you- not really practicing?

JJ: No, I- no- I kind of- my- not to get off on a different tangent, but I have- my feeling is that there's so many religions that want you to think that theirs is the right way of doing things and everybody else is not right and I don't- the organized part of it I don't like because people in third world countries who know nothing about "the Bible" and, you know, all that, it's almost like saying, well they're, you know- because they don't know of organized religion, they're not right an-and so, as a result of that I don't have any kind of a strong affiliation with a particular ch- I believe there is something, you know, and like I say, I was in church from the time I was born, 'til I was probably 19 or so, and- I just, I don't, you know, I just don't- there's something there, but I don't know what it is [CM chuckles] I'm not atheist, I'm just agnostic or something. Is that right? [Laughing]

MS: So, Charlie, how 'bout, now we covered quite a bit there [laughing].

JJ: Yeah.

CM: My answer won't be as long!

MS: [laughing] But, starting kind of with your childhood, before you met, and kind of how you first started to come out or what your journey was there.

CM: I think- when I was young I think I knew I was gay, but again I didn't quite understand it and going through high school I had some girlfriends, and then when I went down to school in D.C. and then in the service I-I had girlfriends. I dated a German girl for a while and then I think I realized then that this isn't the path I should be on, so I had also been experimenting in high school and in D.C. and in the service, so I kind of knew where I should be headed. So then I came back and met Jon in '75 and we've been together. But I did date a German girl, fortunately nothing...

JJ: Every once in a while he reminds me of that German girl he used to date! [laughing]

CM: And, as far as religious affiliation, our parents- my parents took the family-took the family to the United Church of Christ in Layola [Maryland] [mumbles inaudible], and we went there faithfully 'til I graduated from high school and then when I left the area that pretty much was the end of organized religion for me.

[Cell phone beep]

MS: Back to other relationships or anything d-d-did either of you have significant relationships with either...

JJ: With other?

MS: I mean you mentioned a girlfriend- before the two of you met or...

CM: Before I met Jon, I think I dated- I dated a guy for just a few months and that was the only- that was, I mean just- very short time.

MS: And so...

JJ: [starts] Yeah...

MS: Oh, go ahead.

JJ: No, well I don't- I didn't have any- I didn't have any significant long term relationship with anybody before I met, I might have been with- the guy I knew before him I might have been with a couple months, I not su- I can't even remember the timeframe there, but it wasn't a long period of time. When you just come out it's- I-I think there's such a huge relief when you finally do come out that it's almost like you-you- I don't know you lost track of time or something- I mean it's just like after all these years of not really knowing, you know, what was going on...and...

CM: And not understanding.

JJ: And not understanding why you feel the way you do and thinking that there's nobody else that feels that way. And- but like- you know, it's kind of like the first person you're ever with- 'cause I never experimented until I was- until I met this guy that I told you about that was a schoolteacher in York, so I had never had any kind of a sexual experience with men. And I never had a real sexual experience with any women, I dated several women when I was younger, you know, and I- there was one girl I was kind of serious about who was couple years younger than me, but her brother- or her father forbade me to see her, because of my brother's reputation, he thought I was gonna be the same as my brother. [CM and MS laughing] And then I had- when I was outsi- a girl I went to art school with- I dated her and, but we didn't do anything physical until one night- my sister- after my sister and her husband had a baby-we- Joanne (ph.) and I babysat at the house, so that my sister and brother-in-law could go out for New Year's Eve and it just didn't work. [JJ and MS laughing] And the next morning Joanne left to go back to Philadelphia to her parents' place and then I had breakfast with my sister and brother-in-law and nephew, and my brother-in-law said to me, "Well, Jon, you know I always thought you were probably gay, but since Joanne was here I guess you're not!" [laughing] and it's- and you know I had never really done anything at that time.

MS: Right.

JJ: And then when I told- when I-I-I was actually kind of with Joanne when I did come out- or when I had my first experience and then when I went to tell Joanne I thought she would be very

emotional and cry and all this stuff, and then she said, “Well that figures, everybody I go out with ends up being gay” [JJ and MS laughing]. She just took it as a matter of fact! So, you know, that was my only somewhat sexual experience with a woman. But I just never- I didn’t like-I-I didn’t experiment-I was terrified in school, you know, the opportunity never- I didn’t see it as, you know, not an experimental phase at all, I was you know, in gym class and everything I would just-so it was all kind of like, really kind of scary in a way, for me anyway.

MS: Mhmm, so- and, Charlie, you didn’t really get into yet, the relationship with your family and- what if you came out to them, or when or?

CM: Well, I really didn’t. I told my brother...

MS: [Interrupts] And this would’ve been when? Just to give a...

CM: When I was in the service, I guess, I think I called- Yes I- ‘cause I- actually the German girl that I was dating, I broke up with her, so I called him [brother], I thought, someone in the family, I need to tell somebody in the family. And he- I thought- he being older than me and being and- he was also in the service and he had gone to school, I thought he would understand better, ‘cause he been exposed to more situations than my parents or my- I couldn’t tell my sister so...

JJ: He’s more worldly.

CM: More w-worldly, so I wrote a letter and I explained it to him, came out to him. And he was fine, he sort of guessed that anyway, so- but I never did come out to my parents, but I realized after we [Jon and Charlie] met that they just understood. Whether my brother told them or they just realized it, I’m not sure. But I just never really came out to them directly. Maybe I took the cowardly way [laughing] I don’t know.

MS: That was a very common way, I think [laughing].

CM: But everybody...

JJ: [Interrupts] It just kind of gradually became known, without you sitting down and telling them specifically, yeah.

CM: But, our families and extended families have accepted...

JJ: Yeah, I mean ever since oh for years, both our families have- you know we get together on Christmas Eve here and, you know, we’re just a big family- now it’s never, even my parents, as a- my father was always a very quiet man and my mom was the more sociable one, but she would always ask how Charlie was doing, you know, if I talked to her on the phone and... They were in Willow Valley Retirement Community, before they both passed away, but, you know, she always- when she was of sound mind she would always say, “Now, tell Charlie ‘hi!’”, or you know, if he would go see ‘em- sh-she knew- there toward the end she didn’t know anyb-who anybody was, but they were very, very accepting of the whole thing and as it turns out I have a couple nephews that are gay. And, you know, it’s kind of interesting, because my brother, my

older brother, who- it's probably well, [laughing] he was kind of a run-around when he was younger and his- one of his sons- and my brother had a lot of trouble when I came out with it, even though my brother was kind of, got in a lot of trouble when he was younger. And my sister was fine with it, but my brother-my- his wife at the time told me that he had a lot of trouble accepting it, and he was, like I say, he ran around so much when he was young, it's- I thought of all people he would probably understand it more, but he- she said he had a lot of trouble with it.

MS: Now are either of your parents living, Charlie?

CM: No, they're both deceased.

MS: Okay.

JJ: Yeah, we're both orphans now...

CM: [Interrupts] I knew that they accepted Jon when they started sending a birthday card with a five dollar bill in, like they did with everybody else. [All laughing] I thought, okay they've accepted him, so. And my dad continued that even after my mother passed away, so, for him to do that, I knew he accepted it.

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: It's interesting how people, like-like they'll accept it in their own-you know like my dad, like I say, wasn't real communicative with his feelings or anything, but, you know, it's-it's nice how they all accepted in their own way, and, you know, and I-I never expected them to completely accept the whole thing. I mean, I think some people might- when they tell their families, if they're not welcome with open arms completely, I think they think that their parents should-or you know they just don't-I just-I can understand how it would be difficult for, you know, and I didn't expect them to accept everything whole-heartedly to begin with, but, you know, so...

CM: They did.

JJ: Yeah, in fact-we-Charlie and I went to Canada about ten or twelve years ago, our first time to Canada, my mother asked my sister if she thought that Charlie and I went there to get married [laughs] and...

CM: So, we thought that was kind of interesting...

JJ: [Interrupts] Yeah, that sh-sh-she just matter-of-factly to my sister said, "Judy, do you think Jon and Charlie were gonna get married in Canada?"

CM: We weren't even thinking about that at the time, so. [laughing]

MS: Well, now, how 'bout now, do you think about it more these days and just...

CM: We do, yeah...

MS: And, just, in context, Pennsylvania, it's still illegal to marry, but a lot of our surrounding states, you can get married.

CM: Right, right.

JJ: Yeah, now we've been talking about it, yeah.

CM: We probably will. I'm kind of waiting until Pennsylvania gets onboard, just 'cause I think they will.

MS: Mhmm.

CM: And...

MS: And you want- wanna do it at home, huh?

CM: Well! That'd be nice. [laughing]

JJ: Well, I mean, we know people that are getting- that have gotten married in Maryland or other states and we're not sure financially how it's helping them or, you know, we just – but we're- there's things we have to do now that we're both retired, going to be retired, we're gonna get some of these things done, yes. [laughs]

MS: When-how has the idea of marriage, or like back when you guys met was that even anything you thought of? Or, what was the...

JJ: [Interrupts] Well for ourselves?

MS: What was your view of marriage then, maybe that's...

JJ: I mean as far as the gay-g-gay couples getting married, or just marriage in general or our feelings of...

MS: I would say gay couples getting married or how you define relationships then, or what a gay relationship was?

CM: Well when we-when we met there was no gay marriage, so it wasn't really on our- on my radar, I thought, yeah, just live together and do the legal part that you can.

MS: What-how soon after you met did you decide to live together?

JJ: Well we-are you gonna?

CM: Well we-we were living together... [looks at Jon]

JJ: Well, I lived in York when we met and then not too long after we met, I moved to Lancaster.

CM: We each owned a house in the city, so were either at his house or at my house. And we thought, well this is crazy, you know, let's sell them both and buy one, so we did, that's what we did, but it was six years 'til we bought this house, but we really-t- living together...

JJ: Yeah, we were only about nine blocks away from each other in the city, and we...

CM: I think I was in the process of buying my house.

JJ: Well, you had your apartment when I first met you...

CM: Yeah, but...[cross talk with JJ inaudible]

JJ: [Interrupts] And then I moved-I moved back to Lancaster after we met. I left the Bon Ton in York and we went to Lancaster to work at Plastino and Owens (ph.), which was a design firm on Oregon Pike and lived with my parents for a couple months, 'cause I was gonna look for a house and then I found a big house that needed an awful lot of work and- and then he found a house at- course he had an apartment when we first met and then- so we would both kind of work on these two houses and then...

CM: But it was at the time when, it was fashionable to move into the city and the houses really inexpensive, so we thought, well let's do this and get something cheap, each of us, and then, actually then just a few years later we sold them both and we made a nice profit.

JJ: Yeah, we just thought we wanted to buy one together, rather than moving into one or the other.

CM: Mine was too small, his needed too much work.

JJ: Yeah. Ye-Yeah, mine was in horrible shape, it hadn't had anything done for years and I worked on it and then I was sick for a while and stayed with my parents and then when I came back to Lancaster, I just decided that- I just- it was just too much work, you know, and since we had been together that point, five years or something like that.

CM: Six.

JJ: Six years. We just decided to get something together sell them both. And we didn't have any trouble selling our houses at all back then.

CM: It made economic sense to.

JJ: Yeah, so this was the- was this the second house we looked at or the first one?

CM: This was the first.

JJ: The first one, yeah. So we bought this one in 1981, been here ever since. I thought we'd be here five years maybe, then move to another one [laughs] and 30 something years later we're still here.

CM: I talked him out of it.

MS: Well you kept making this one nicer and nicer.

CM: What's that?

MS: I said, "You kept making this one nicer and nicer".

CM: Oh well we- yeah- we have done a lot here.

JJ: And we-it's-we both have a lot of- it's nice because there- we have a lot of strong similarities as far as interests goes, but yet we do each have our own personality and sometimes we get on each other's nerves. [laughing]

CM: Yeah we do [laughing].

MS: So, you said you met at the Fiddler and that was like on Prince Street at Stephen's house, wasn't it?

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MS: That predates me.

JJ: Oh does it- oh okay. No, it was a restaurant during the week, but [to Charlie] what was it called? I mean during the day time it was called...

CM: It was called- I think it was called the Frog Restaurant. It was a nice restaurant and then when they closed that at like 10, then it became the Fiddler.

JJ: It was a disco.

CM: It was a disco.

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: And they had a DJ.

CM: And they were only there for maybe, at the most, four years. Four or five years, I'm not sure.

JJ: I don't know how long it was there before I started going there.

CM: But, then there was two places you could go to, the Tallyho or the Fiddler, at the time. And there was only like a block.

JJ: Or the Railroad House in Marietta [Pennsylvania].

CM: Well, that's yeah. That's outside.

JJ: Yeah. [laughing]

[MS laughing]

JJ: And we did used to go out a lot then, it-it was- I think it was more on my- I think when you come out you kind of come out with a bang or something, and you know, you wanna be with people like yourself, so much, and I mean, I don't know, you know, for other people I'm not sure what it was really like, but back then it was just like "Holy mackerel, you know this a whole new world for me" and like I say...

CM: This was pre-AIDS, so it was...

MS: Mhmm

JJ: Yeah.

CM: You didn't have those worries about anything.

JJ: Yeah, but it was so nice to be around people that you could be yourself with.

CM: So we went to, we went to Harrisburg and on occasion we would go to Philly and Baltimore.

JJ: [Interrupts] when I could stay awake past ten o'clock.

[long pause]

CM: And to the Shore.

MS: And where is- is the shore?

JJ: Rehoboth Beach [Delaware] mostly, Atlantic City, we scheduled Atlantic City.

CM: It started out in Atlantic City, when I- before I knew him I went there for vacation, but.

JJ: Mostly Rehoboth Beach and Atlantic City and we've been to, like, Fire Island, but that was later on.

MS: So, socially you met people mostly through the bars and things, or were there other organizations you got involved with, or social things?

CM: No, more through just friends of friends.

JJ: Yeah, back then, I yeah, I don't think there was- that was probably not the only avenue, I guess, but we liked to dance and all that stuff and I guess we just kind of gravitated more toward that [crosstalk with CM inaudible] and then we met, yeah, we met people through there that we felt re-you know, friendships with.

CM: But then, in the late 70's right as AIDS was hitting, a whole group of our friends locally, moved out to San Francisco.

JJ: California, yeah, like '78 or '79.

CM: And there was like maybe ten people that we knew that moved away and we almost decided that we would do that, too, but then, I'm not sure we just decided not to do that, but [cross talk with JJ inaudible] almost the whole group that moved out...

JJ: Died, yeah.

CM: Have since passed away.

JJ: So, we lost...

CM: So we lost a lot of good friends.

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: We lost, really, the majority of our close friends in those years.

CM: Yes.

JJ: Yeah.

MS: And so they would have moved out just prior to the AIDS epi...

CM: They started moving out like maybe...

JJ: Late 70's.

CM: '78, '79. And then that's when it started out there.

JJ: And we knew, we knew people that had died, I mean since then we know of people that had died and then at the time they didn't know what it was, necessarily, or they- or else they would-somebody would say well he died of something, but they didn't say that it was, you know, they

didn't say it was AIDS at the time, they just said well he had some kind of cancer or something. But, it was just very – it was a difficult time.

CM: That was a hard-that was turning point, sort of, losing all those friends.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

CM: Alright [waves hand].

JJ: A lot of close- we-yeah I mean most of our, most of our really close friends at the time we lost, actually, because I guess we all kinda ran around a lot and I mean not, you know.

CM: I always thought if we had moved out there then we would probably on that same list.

JJ: Yeah.

MS: Mhmm.

CM: So. We're still here. [laughs]

MS: And then did that affect any organizations and things that you got involved in, I know there were...

CM: We-Yes. Then we got within locally, there was the AIDS project, Lancaster AIDS project and...

JJ: Betty Finney House.

CM: Betty Finney, so we got involved in, in AIDS auctions.

MS: And why don't you just say what both of those organizations were, just so we- Lancaster AIDS Project is...

CM: It was a- it was an organization to support people that became ill and to look for help to find the cure and help them financially and...

MS: And the Betty Finney house?

CM: And the Betty Finney house was pretty much the same. As I understand it. Now both of them have morphed into other organizations.

JJ: We have a – we have a good friend, she doesn't live here anymore, but she was very instrumental in getting donations from celebrities. She-she was the type of woman that could-she'd go into Broadway, into New York City and knock on backdoors in theatres and she had the kind of personality that she could get celebrities to give her signed photographs and playbills and

she got some incredible stuff from celebrities, she had the kind of personality that she could do that where, you know, a lot of people...

CM: She built a- she built a good relationship with a lot of people in that genre that she would just contact them and then they would send stuff to her- they would almost be waiting for her to call and year to year...

JJ: [interrupts] Yeah, yeah, she had such a great personality they would- that she would send them like thank you notes, you know, whereas a lot of people wouldn't maybe do that.

CM: But it was all handwritten.

JJ: Yeah and she really...

CM: Made a big deal.

JJ: She really- she was involved with Paul Newman's, that camp. [to Charlie] What was the camp called that he was?

CM: I don't know, I'm not sure.

JJ: And so a lot of celebrities were involved with that. But she met a lot of celebrities through [to Charlie] I forget the name, it was a, like a children's camp, but Paul Newman was...

CM: Yeah, I don't remember the name

JJ: Yeah, but she met a lot of celebrities through that too, who donated things. [crosstalk with CM inaudible]...yeah.

CM: Very good friend.

JJ: For the record, very good

MS: Right, and for years she kind of spearheaded some of those auctions and things for both organizations, right?

JJ: For several years

CM: Yes, she was on the committee and she got both of us involved in doing that.

JJ: And then we went to some of the marches in Washington and we were down there for when the AIDS quilt was- part of the AIDS quilt was shown, I don't remember the years for all that.

CM: And we helped sponsor a panel for...

JJ: Yeah, yeah I designed a panel for our friend Michael Wiggins (ph.) who died and I did a portrait of him and then a woman we know who quilts, so she-she made the patch, she quilted the-sewed the patch, and we went down for that.

CM: And other friends of his donated a panel, she put them all together in one bigger panel for the quilt.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MS: Are there any other organizations you remember locally like at that time or even in the 70's before?

CM: Not, not gay-related.

JJ: No, I mean just no, just like the social things, just like the men's potluck thing, but as far as directly related to AIDS, I can't think of anything.

CM: We're involved with a lot of organizations locally, but like arts organizations or historical organizations.

MS: Any special ones that- or...

CM: Well, we're both...

JJ: Well, Demuth, Demuth.

CM: Involved with the Demuth foundation, museum.

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: And the Folton.

CM: The Folton.

JJ: And the Lancaster history.org right across the street.

CM: The Lancaster.org right across the street. We started reservation trust.

JJ: And...

MS: Have you seen any changes in any of those organizations with their comfort level or-of homosexual...

JJ: [Interrupts] Oh well the fo-yeah the Folton and the Demuth-Yeah, they're-they're both...

CM: Demuth was gay anyway, so.

MS: Folton may have been, too. [laughs]

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MS: He was at least bi [sexual]!

JJ: But then no, I-I think...

CM: There's a lot of people that are on the- on different boards who are, you know, who are gay or were gay or, so they...

JJ: I mean it's-it's talked about so much more now, which is so good that, it's just a very comfortable- I think it's a very comfortable conversation that people are having now, even locally, you know, and people, like at the Demuth, we belong to the Demuth Foundation Museum, since the 80's, I guess [to Charlie] Right?

CM: Since it started.

JJ: Yeah, and we, you know, belonged there as a couple and, so everybody- and there, I mean there are some gay people that belong there, but not a lot of gay-no there's not a lot- there are, I mean there's probably more than I think there are, I guess, but it's very- yeah and the Folton, I mean the shows they're putting on now, it's very, it's become a much more progressive area, I think, an accepting area.

CM: We've never had any problems being accepted.

JJ: Yeah, we never had any altercations with anybody.

CM: On this block, this block is very...

JJ: Yeah our block when we moved here, we were the boys on the corner [laughs] and 'cause when we moved here most of the people were very old on this street and we were the boys on the corner.

CM: We were young.

JJ: We were in our thirties.

MS: Such a catch, right? [laughs]

JJ: Yeah, really.

CM: And several of our neighbors are, yeah.

JJ: Yeah, we have s-you know, we have two folks this way and one over here.

MS: So, one of the things, well like with the Demuth Foundation, did you not just the treatment of you, but the treatment of the subject of Charles Demuth or his homosexuality, has that changed in your lifespan, since you've seen?

JJ: Well it's discussed...

CM: Well I think they- they exhibit more of his gay art now than when they first opened.

MS: Mhmm.

CM: They'd be more hesitant.

JJ: They were, yeah, they were more discrete.

CM: Of course they didn't own any at the time. Now they have it.

JJ: And they, yeah, they will show them during some of the exhibits when they put his things up, they'll show them.

CM: Yeah, I think...

MS: Right, the first time I remember was a little sketch of a sailor urinating...

JJ: Oh, yeah.

MS: ...and it had a description something like, "It's a little understood aspect of Demuth's personality" or something like. [laughing]

JJ: Well some of the, some of the older, some of the older books that talk about Demuth kind of allude to that, they don't come out and say it, but they kind of refer to that, but no they discuss, they discuss that during like if we go to, like a board meeting..

MS: Right.

JJ: ...or something, you know, they will discuss, they will discuss that.

MS: Did it change at all, though? That's kind of what I was-in the-if you've been involved a long time.

CM: Well there, there are more-it's more prominent display, I mean before it was kind of...

JJ: [Interrupts] You mean the subject of his homosexuality?

MS: Yeah.

JJ: Y-Yeah, I think it's, it's changed more, it's more-yeah it's more talked about now than it was, I would say.

CM: Plus more, more people know who he is, than they did.

JJ: And nobody, nobody that we know has any problem, you know?

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: Nobody that we know that belongs to that has any kind of problem with that whatsoever. But I think, yeah. At the Folton, the shows they put on at the Folton now, I think that's much more-of course I don't-how many years-I didn't go to the Folton that much when you and I first got together, did I?

CM: Yeah.

JJ: You-you belonged there for a long time but...

CM: The theatre is always gays [laughs].

JJ: Yeah, yeah [laughs].

MS: As far as politically, or like kind of how you dealt with gay rights or has that changed for you over time or- well how- what was it like when you first met, how's that changed. Or has it?

CM: Well I don't that it's- personally I don't know that it's changed that much for me.

JJ: Yeah personally, I guess- I can't put-I-Well, I mean there-just from what you, you know what you hear about and read about. It's-It's good that it's becoming discussed so much more in more mainstream situations, like TV and things, and but I don't- since we never really had a problem with-you know, I don't know that it's really changed for us personally too much.

MS: You were ahead of your time.

JJ: Well, now I- it's just-I'm not strong- we were more politically involved, I guess, years ago, I guess probably when the AIDS-especially because of the AIDS [crosstalk with CM inaudible] we were much more involved back then.

CM: But then we did it more 'cause other people were doing it, we just went along with them.

JJ: Well, and it because it started when so many people that we knew were dying, that was probably the most political that-that we've been involved with anything that's related to being gay, you know specifically, gay issues. I'm not political to begin with, so. [chuckles] He's [looks at CM] a little more political than I am.

CM: Well, yeah, yeah.

MS: But, obviously like you said that-the whole AIDS crisis was a big turning point.

JJ: Yeah.

CM: Right.

MS: For you.

CM: Right, and now it's not-well it's not as prominent...

JJ: [Interrupts] But people are still getting, no, but young people are still getting sick.

CM: It's not as prominent- doesn't seem to be as prominent, because it's not as severe or deadly as it used to be.

MS: Well, right.

CM: So, it's...

JJ: Yeah, but younger people are getting it, 'cause there-they don't-there are so many young people that weren't around at the time, don't understand...

CM: What happened.

JJ: The power of that when that happened and they're not being as careful as they should, so.

MS: Are there challenges you still see remaining, or things you hope for-well you mentioned marriage in Pennsylvania.

CM: Well, that would be-yeah, I'm sure it's gonna happen. I'm surprised how fast it is happening throughout the country, I thought it would take a lot longer and a lot more set-backs, step forward and then three steps back, but it seems to be moving forward at a really good pace.

JJ: I think because that conversation is going on so much, whether it's somebody that's for gay marriage or somebody that's against gay marriage, the fact that the conversation is going on, it's being discussed is really good, like I say, even if it is pro or con, just because people are talking it about more and I think the more, you know, in the next coming-the next several years, the more gay- the more issues like that, that are brought up and discussed, I think it-it'll make things easier. And I know for some people it wouldn't be, I think we were probably lucky that we didn't have any, kind of repercussions, or anything serious to deal with, as far as coming out goes, you know we were never bothered by anybody or, so, you know, I guess that if somebody was really had a lot of trouble when they came out they would view things differently. I was k-not really bullied in high school, but I-not, bullied's not the right word, but just I was picked on some, because I was kind of quiet and everything and school developed these cliques and- but never-never from a gay perspective I would say, 'cause I-I didn't even know what that meant at the

time. I was just kind of quiet and more inward, I was- even as a kid I would-I'm the type of person that kind of observe what's going-I kind of felt like I was kind of outside observing things going on, rather than being- I had friends in school, but I- school was not particularly a good time for me, especially high school, I guess, just because there was so many things going in my head that I couldn't understand. [laughs]

CM: I think for a lot of young people they're much more accepting of gays and it's not even gonna be an issue as the- a younger generation comes-comes along, I think it's gonna be totally accepted and separate from the older people.

MS: Do you have different expectations now than you would have had 30 years ago as far as those types of things?

CM: I expect- yeah, I do I think it's gonna be so much more accepted and I didn't expect that to happen so quickly.

JJ: I think, well like, when I-when I first came out, back in the 70's it was the disco thing and everything and, like I say, I kind of came out gangbusters, and so I was around so much, I mean we both were I guess, but my life kind of revolved around that life-style in a way, because I didn't know how- it's not like I'd build up to that kind of a way, you know, I just kind of- when I came out I just- and at the time, you know, I didn't know how else it do it, it seemed like everybody was, back in- back in those days everybody was dancing.

MS: So, who's the better dancer?

CM: W- [laughs]

JJ: We haven't-we don't dance that much

CM: No, we haven't dance in a while.

[all laughing]

MS: So who was though? [laughing]

CM: I think, it was me. It was me.

MS: Is that a..

JJ: No it wasn't.

[all laughing]

MS: Are there any stories you remember about going out back then or, just what a typical night would be like or?

JJ: Well we wouldn't start getting- everybody back then, you wouldn't start getting ready 'til about 11 o'clock at night on a Saturday night.

CM: You wouldn't even take your shower!

JJ: You wouldn't even get read- thinking going out until 11 o'clock usually and then you'd get ready and go out and back-back then we used to stay out 'til 3 or 4 in the morning, maybe on Sunday mornings then we'd go have breakfast at a local- [to Charlie] what was that restaurant called? Denny's or something?

CM: Dempseys? (ph)

JJ: Dempseys. And a lot of people did that back then.

CM: Yeah, we would do that every—

JJ: We'd stay-now it was-you know it's st-stay out late and then you go to bed and sleep until 2 o'clock on Sunday afternoon something like that.

CM: Now we're more practical.

JJ: Now we're in bed by 9 o'clock.

CM: We go to a restaurant, have a couple of drinks and we're home by 10 [laughs]

JJ: And if we're out- we don't really go out that much locally, as far as-some place like a stron (ph)—like a gay bar or anything like that too much, we'll-if we're traveling some place we'll go a little more.

CM: Yeah, we tend to go out when we go on vacation, locally [Mary Merriman speaking softly in background]

MS: Okay, going way back again. [JJ laughs] How 'bout Charlie, your experience being gay in the military and what that was like back then?

CM: Well, like I said, I was dating the German girl, but I was also keeping my eyes open for whatever, and I had some experiences, always good, never bad, but it was just, it wasn't with any particular person for any amount of time. Plus, being in Europe, it was much more open then, so when I would travel to different cities, [Mary Merriman speaking softly in background] I would meet people, it was just a fun thing, it wasn't...

MS: Well, and would you meet them by going out somewhere or just other military people or?

CM: Some other military people, yeah. I mean there's, there certainly was gays in the military all the time, you know, it wasn't something that didn't exist, plus, you know, just people, citizens, just regular citizens.

MS: And where all were you stationed, like, just in...

CM: Well, the first year at Charleston, South Carolina at the big air force base in Charleston and then I went to Germany and I was stationed in a very small air base called OAF (ph?) Air Station, which was at the time in the east German/west German/Czech border up in that little corner [gestures upward to the right] and we were pretty much- it was an air force station, but we were pretty much a support facility for an even smaller army contingent (??) that was also stationed there, but they also had what they called the Site and we never could get to the Site, that was always kind of off-limits for most of us, of the people that were at the air station, you had to have a clearance to get into that, so we always assumed 'cause they called it the Site and we were up at the east German/west German/Czech border that it was some kind of surveillance, some kind of spy, you never knew, but it was the army that would handle that part of it, and then as, I guess, the Cold war-war-the Cold War was winding down, they determined they didn't need to have this facility open, so they closed the whole base. It was just a very small base. I was the only dental technician, there were two dentists, two assistants, and myself on this little air station. So, they closed that and then I had the option of going to England or going to Spain, and I had been to England on vacation, but I had not been to Spain, so, this was right outside of Madrid, so I went there and then I came back to- I shipped a- I had bought a Volkswagen bug when I was in Spain, not in Germany, but in Spain and because I was a staff sergeant I had the opportunity to ship a car home, so I had this little bug shipped back to the states and I picked it up at the [truck passing in background] Charleston in South Carolina and drove it back home and had that for like 11 years.

[all laughing]

MS: So, what was your highest rank, what?

CM: Staff sergeant.

MS: Okay. And wh-when you were moving to different bases was there any difference as far as in the different countries, beliefs as far as homosexuality, or? Did you...

CM: No, it was pretty open, especially in Europe. Charleston, South Carolina, when I went there [phone ringing] When I went to Charleston there was a [phone continues ringing]- an interracial marriage at- a guy and his wife was transferred [ringing] to Charleston later-

MS: Did you wanna?

JJ: What?

MM: Just get the microphone

MS: We can stop for a second.

[phone ringing]

CM: They were transferred to Charleston, South Carolina and at the time [answering machine in the background]

[JJ laughing]

MS: Let's just wait a second and if you wanna answer...

JJ: Nah, no it's probably just a sales call thing.

MS: Okay.

CM: At the time, this would have been '68, at the time Charleston didn't accept interracial marriages, so this couple had to be transferred to another state, because it was illegal for them to be there, married. So, it was that kind of situation at Charleston, but as far as the gay life, there would have been people in the base, but I don't remember anything really specifically.

MS: Uh-huh.

CM: But then out of the blue I get orders I'm going to Germany and I thought, "Wow" [laughs] "this is pretty good!", I never knew anybody that even left the country at that time.

MS: So you were excited about that move, huh?

CM: I was excited and it ended up being a- a three year vacation in Europe, pretty much. Now I did have a little bit of guilt, given that, I'm over here having a good time in Europe and there- people are in Vietnam, so there was.

MS: Was there anything else that you think we've missed that you wanted to say or talk...

JJ: I don't know, we-I just wanted to say we-well we met in '75, for our 10th year anniversary in '85 we went to Greece and spent two weeks there and then we- what was it, '85- we went to Italy with 2 other friends and then back in the late 80's, early 90's, something like that, but we were kind of- on our 20th anniversary we spent 2 weeks in Amsterdam and for our 30th we went to- did I miss something here? - [to Charlie] Spain was the 30th?

CM: And then Germany was...

JJ: Germany was about...

CM: Four years ago.

JJ: Four years ago, yeah, something like that. We kinda started this thing about every 10 years some place, but when we- and we wanna hopefully [MS whispering something]

CM: Continue some more travel.

JJ: And I think everybody should go to another country

MS: [Interrupts] Well and you're gonna have your, what, 40th coming up, right? No 50?

JJ: Next year, next year will be 40.

MS: 40.

JJ: 2015 will be our 40th.

CM: We haven't talked about- I wanna get used to being retired before I make any plans, even for this year, so.

MM: I have to switch to a plug I guess, 'cause it suddenly went down to a minute on the battery.

MS: Okay. Well, well are we-let's just switch quick. Let's just- Do you have a plug [Video cuts off].

MS: You got?- Okay? Alright, we'll start again, and Charlie, you started to talk a little bit about the length of time you've been together and how...

CM: Yes, yes. When we-when you meet somebody, or at least when we met back in '75, you just- you like the person and you stay with them for a while and you really don't really plan on thinking, "Well, I want to stay with him for 50 years" or whatever, you just-we didn't think about that, we just went day by day by day and soon-soon you realize we've been together for 10 years and then it was 20 years and now it's close to 40, so you don't really plan, or we didn't plan it just-it just kind of happens and then you realize after so many years that, well yeah we are gonna be together forever, you know. We don't even give it a thought that we won't be together.

JJ: Yeah, well I don't think because...

CM: [interrupts] But you don't really plan it.

JJ: Yeah, when I c-I didn't know anything about [makes air-quotes with fingers] "the gay lifestyle", I guess you'd say, but not that I think there is a particular gay life-style, but back then things- people were more, it was more of a casual – sex

CM: [interrupts] You didn't know a lot of...

JJ: And a casual dating situation and I don't think you- I don't think you necessarily met somebody with the idea that you're going to grow a close relationship, necessarily, like- yeah if a man and wo..

CM: [At same time] Right away.

JJ: Yeah, right away, it's more- while I guess it's that way with straight couples too, there's more of a physical thing at first or physical attraction at first.

CM: And we never knew anybody back then that had been together for any length of time.

JJ: And I think because you don't- back then nobody ever talked about a more-like going through dating and becoming engaged and planning a wedding and all that stuff- I don't, we di- you di-you didn't really look at it that way back then, because that wasn't even feasible, I guess- it wasn't on the radar, especially in this area, you know maybe if you were in a bigger city people talked some more about that time of thing, but you just kind- yeah, you didn't look at it that way and I think...

CM: 'Cause then if you stayed together then you share experiences like losing our parents and...

JJ: Yeah but, you, yeah but you like- it's a like a- it's like a married couple in that you do financially, you involve, you know we're both involved with, you know, buying the house, buying the things for the house and paying the bills and everything and it just kinda...

CM: Our phone number is 299-5050, 'cause we bought the house after [MS laughing].

JJ: And our- a gay friend of ours worked at the phone company and he got us that phone number [MS laughing] Terry Gable (ph.) Do you remember, Terry Gable? He worked for the phone company.

CM: [At the same time as JJ] So, we don't wanna give up our landline, because that- we like that number, everybody knows it.

JJ: But, yeah it-it wasn't- back then you didn't look at it the same way that a straight couple would look at developing a relationship, necessarily long-term relationship.

CM: [At the same time as JJ] But, we're not planning a family, it's just the two of us.

MS: When did it change for you, I mean 'cause obviously when you bought the house together you must've had some kind of expect...

JJ: But, you know.

CM: Well, bought it together, because it was an economical way to do it-

JJ: [Interrupts] Well, it just made sense because we had two houses, nine blocks away from each other, it was just was kinda stupid.

CM: But then we thought, "Well, you know, this is working, so, I guess we're gonna be together" [laughs] and then we realized that, yeah we are gonna be together, you know there's, you know.

MS: So, when do you think that changed?

CM: Oh, well.

JJ: W-well- h-we-we had an attorney...

CM: Very slowly.

MS: Mhmm.

JJ: How many- we had an attorney- four or five years ago draw up some paperwork for us, you know, wills.

CM: [indiscernible]

JJ: What? Longer than that. But- and we realized now that we have to do some more specific- make some more specific plans in that respect, and we've started to talk somewhat about how much longer we can stay in this house, because it's a lot of upkeep, financially and physically, just all the work that's- in an older house you're always fixing something or- but we're- I think we've just in the past couple years started to realize more that we need to be better prepared...

CM: [Interrupts] I think when our-when we lost our parents

JJ: For what, yeah, better prepared for what will happen eventually, and because we don't have children that would take care of us, you have to think about, you know that-where we would- who would end up- where we would end up going and, so we're actually, in the past couple years our eyes have been open a little bit more to all of that, and then because of all the- people talking about the gay marriage and everything- and it's-it's coming-it's- a-and like, yeah as you get older and your parents are passing away and everything you kinda realize, you know, we really do need to do something, because even though our families- our families that are still living family members would- neither- none of them would give either one of us any problem with, you know, that aspect of things like when one of us is gone, obviously legally we have to work things out. And, but we haven't really...

CM: We're in pretty good shape that way.

JJ: Yeah, but I mean I think there's, we probably need to be a little bit- and we're- you know, we start kinda thinking 'bout selling- downsizing somewhat- possessions and things like that and trying to do with a little bit less than we have now.

CM: But that's not an urgent situation.

JJ: No, it's not an urgent thing, but you never know what can happen, you know, so it's a little more in the forefront, 'cause I dealt with my parents- my sister and I- I only work- I've been working part time for the past four years and I'm basically retired now, completely, but my sister and I dealt a lot with my parents when they moved to Willow Valley and their health issues and

Dad had Alzheimer's and Mom had dementia so I'm- I'm there's a lot of men in my family that had Alzheimer's and so, you start thinking about all these things especially when you go to a place like that and you're dealing with your parents plus the other residents, you start thinking about all these things, you know, and they, my parents, were very well prepared- they prepared- they were well prepared to make that step, you know, they didn't leave us in the lurch, or anything they- financially they were well-prepared for all that and- and- but my sister and I spent a lot of time, a lot of stressful time dealing with them trying to get them both to a point, when it's at the same time and getting them in the car at the same time and that was very stressful and to lose your parents that way, where you can't even really talk to them for a couple years, you know, before they're gone, it's very difficult, because it's not like you were talking to them one night and the next night they're gone, you just gradually, they slip away from you and, so it makes you think a little more about...

MS: Do you think it's different between a gay couple and straight couple at this time, or? Do you think you have the same...

CM: I don't think...

JJ: [Interrupts] Well I, I think...

CM: Well, except the straight couple might have children that can look after...

JJ: [Interrupts] Y-yeah, because they have, yeah.

CM: Other than that, I don't know that there's a big difference.

JJ: Well it's- I think maybe a lot of- well I would say probably a lot of straight couples- or more- would be more prepared than a lot of gay couple, unless a gay- like if a gay couple's been together for a long time, they're probably more prepared than some gay couples that haven't been together that long, but -the older gay couples- but, I think it's just a lot of stuff you never thought that much about until recently, like, you know, when you realize that you're not gonna live forever [laughs] You really do have to start kind of thinking about that stuff and we've accumulated a lot of things and, you know, you just kind of think "well we have to start downsizing" [laughs] [looks at CM].

CM: I think we're in pretty good shape, but yeah, you never know what's coming ahead.

MS: Have you ever had medical issues where your relationship became a problem or...

CM: No, not the relationship became with problems.

MS: Not between you, but more with the hospital or...

JJ: Oh no, you mean with visitation and things?

MS: Yeah.

JJ: No, no.

CM: No, no. Not that.

JJ: I've been h-had more issues than he has, medically, but, no we never had- I mean if I had some kind of surgery or something he can pick me up or vice-versa, I guess, but no, we never really had, now I don't if anything serious happened what it would be like if a – I would come to see him or he would try to come and see me, but we never dealt with anything like that.

MS: Well I thought you kinda...

CM: The few times we've always been accepted, I mean as far as the medical...

JJ: I mean on our, like, you know- he's the one that they contact- I mean they can give him any information from my medical history, if something- if- he's the contact if somebody needs to be contacted.

CM: Same.

JJ: Yeah, vice versa, you know, and we never had...

CM: No they never- no one ever questioned.

MS: And you kind of seem that way in general, too, right that you haven't experienced much- outright-

CM: We haven't. I think we've been maybe lucky. I don't know, but we've never had any issues with being-

MS: [interrupts] And has there-

CM: ...denied privileges.

MS: Have there been any times where someone's acceptance, like, surprised you, or something like that, like for the time period, or?

JJ: You mean acceptance or non-you mean?

MS: Someone else's acceptance of either you or your relationship or- or awareness of your relationship when-or?

CM: Oh.

JJ: The only-the only- there was just- there was- the only negative situation I came across was when I was a child there was a family that went to our church and my- I was- they had three sons

and my brother was good friends with the oldest son and I was good friends with the middle son and then the other one was younger than we were, but I was really cl- we got together at each other's houses quite a bit especially like Sunday after church and when- we would see the-the- my friend was shot by his wife- he was shot, Henry, 16 times, he was killed after they- he was- he was taking med-drugs for steroids and everything and he had like this "roid rage" thing, but anyway his wife- but we would see- my family would see his parents, like we would go to Willow Valley Restaurant a lot and eat and the mother would never even acknowledge me when- she-she would come over to our table, but she wouldn't even really look at me, and that's the only negative thing and I- just because she knew- [to CM] I guess probably you were with- Margaret Duncan, I guess you were with me a couple times, but I think I probably introduced initially.

CM: Yeah, I don't think I understood that.

JJ: What?

CM: I don't think I understood that.

JJ: No, she didn't, you know, and I don't know if it's- I mean some of it might be that I was a good friend of Ronnie's and then he had so many problems and then his wife shot him, but that was the only time I ever felt, kind of a cold shoulder and then well-and then well- when I think about it now maybe even the- my father had a man who worked for him and his wife, who I was very close to their family and I think, well like when my parents were in Willow Valley, this woman and her daughter wanted to go see Mom and Dad and my sister and I wanted to meet them down there 'cause we hadn't see them for a long time and they went down, they knew that, but they went down to see them on their own and I- my sister and I both kind of felt that they just didn't want to- well it was probably my fault more than my sister, but I just kind of felt like maybe they didn't want to- 'cause they were very religious- the wife was very- this woman's husband worked for my dad for years and I was close to their family and was good friends with their daughter and everything and I just kind of feel that maybe, Edith, once we started sending her Christmas cards from the two of us and everything, I just kind of think because she's one of those people that has prayer meeting at her house, you know, and all this stuff, I just kind of think that she's just didn't want to see me, I don't think.

MS: So, why do you think you guys have been together for so long and-?

JJ: We tell everybody it's because we have too many Christmas decorations to split [laughs] I don't know it's just- it's-

CM: We're very compatible.

JJ: Yeah, we're compatible.

CM: It just works.

JJ: You get comfortable- I don't know-it's a comfort level too.

CM: We just love each other, you know [laughing].

JJ: [Pinches Charlie's cheek] Yeah it's just, you know.

CM: Yeah, we do, we have too many Christmas ornaments.

JJ: [Laughs] It just-I- you do- you really do- well I mean-I guess initially you just kind of took it one day at a time and then it kind of became taking a month at a time and time flies so fast now, when you get older it's kind of like- you know like when you're talking about- like the night we're sitting here talking about you think my god was it that long ago when this happened or that happened and-

MS: Yes, it does go quickly.

JJ: It's terr-

CM: It does.

MS: [laughs]

JJ: We do- I mean we're- like when we travel overseas or something he's good at taking care of those kind of things, you know planning it everything, and I just let him do that because he's good at it so, you know.

CM: We go by ourselves, we don't go with-

JJ: Yeah we traveled a couple times with- when we went to Italy we went with a gay- a guy that we knew was gay and then a friend of ours, a woman, and they were both Italian and they had these very strong [waves hands] temperaments.

CM: And they chose to-

JJ: And they stayed together-

CM: To be roommates

JJ: We had a room, you know, and they stayed together, well in the morning the woman wanted to get up- every morning get up and grab her camera and go to all the cathedrals, and we kind of got tired of that after a while and that- that didn't work out after two weeks.

CM: So, we decided we would never travel with anybody else for two weeks again, maybe for a week, but not two weeks.

MS: [Laughs]

CM: So, we always just go by ourselves for a major trip.

JJ: And our pace, like when we- we both love to walk, so when we travel we walk as much as we can- I mean we take public transportation if we have to, but we'll- we'll just walk all day and we, you know, like if we're traveling some place we go to- do the-go to museums or whatever during the day then in the afternoon we'll go to the beach if it's a beach-y area, just kind of end the day that way, we're just- we don't have to impress each other- we're not snobs as far as, you know- I mean like we'll go to a Mom n' Pop place to eat or we'll go to a nice restaurant and eat, but we're not- its' just a very comfortable...

CM: Yeah, it just works.

JJ: Yeah, it just works! You know, and we kind of know what each other's gonna think about this or that or-and I just if I wanna do something now, I just go ahead and do it- if I want to- if we talk about buying something- we'd drag too long about it and I just go and do it.

MS: [Laughing].

JJ: 'Cause I just bought a new lawnmower today!

CM: [mumbling] got a new lawnmower today.

JJ: And I took- he didn't even notice that the grass was mowed when he came home, so I took him out the garage and "Oh, you got a new mower!" [laughing]

CM: I would have attempted to fix the other, but that's fine.

JJ: But it's just gonna- you know it's.

MS: Okay, anything else that anyone can think? [Pause] Okay, thank you very much!

JJ: Yeah! You're welcome!

CM: You're welcome.

JJ: Thank you for letting us do this.

CM: Yes, thanks for coming over here and doing this for you and-

MS: And in your downsizing if you find any representative gay paraphan-para [laughing]

CM: Oh paraphernalia? Yes. We probably do have something that we could-

MS: Disco balls, you know, whatever.

CM: That'd be neat, but no we don't.

JJ: I know I had some pins, you know some buttons, some place, but I don't know what else we would have.

MS: Okay.

JJ: Well I don't know if we have any t-shirts or not [to Charlie] do we have any t-shirts? We've got- we've got a lot of...stuff.

CM: But if you come across something we will.

MS: Okay.

JJ: Yeah we will.

CM: We'll let you know.

MS: Thank you.

CM: You're welcome.