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Interviewee: Steven Leshner

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Date: January 19, 2017

Place: LGBT Center of Central PA, Harrisburg, PA

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Abstract:

This is an interview with Steven Leshner of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He conveys his struggles of coming out in the 1970s and being a gay man in central PA through a series of anecdotes. Steven also talks extensively about his work at Dignity and his relationship with Jerry Brennan. While Steven was not active in S.C.A.A.N. (South Central Aids Assistance Network), he was involved in a group that later became S.C.A.A.N. Also of note, Steven talks about his first time with a man, life as a male nurse in the 1970s and 80s, growing up Jewish, Jerry Brennan's death, attending Pride festivals in NYC, and being a single gay man in Harrisburg.

BL: Okay. My name is Barry Loveland. I'm here at the – I'm here with Catherine McCormick, who is our videographer, and we are here on behalf of the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania's History Project. Today is January 19, 2017 and we are here for an oral history interview with Steven Leshner. This interview is taking place at the LGBT Center in Harrisburg. Steve, do we have your permission to record the interview today?

SL: Yes.

BL: Thank you. Well, welcome.

SL: Thank you

BL: We're actually doing this the second time, so I apologize for the problems we had with the first interview but hopefully this time we'll have no problems and get a good story from you today.

SL: We'll hope. [laughs]

BL: Yes. [laughs with SL] Okay, well what I like to do is start at the very beginning and maybe you could tell us what year you were born and where you were born.

SL: I was born here in Harrisburg. May 22, 1953.

BL: Okay, great. And tell me a little about your family and your family life growing up in Harrisburg.

SL: It was very typical nuclear family, my mother and father and my sister and I. So four of us. And I grew up here in Harrisburg all my life. We lived on Wiconisco Street, in Uptown Harrisburg.

BL: And what did your father do and what did your mother do as far as, I mean, occupations.

SL: My father was a salesman for M. Brenner and Sons. They were originally located, used to be located at 7th and Division Streets. A big warehouse. That's gone now. My mother was a state employee for a long time, she originally worked for the Liquor Control Board and then went to the Department of Agriculture where she stayed for many years before retiring. My dad eventually gave up his job at Brenner and Sons and my mother was able to help him get a job with the state for his last five years. So he then worked at the Department of Revenue for five years before retiring.

BL: Okay. And your sister how much difference was there in ages between you and sister?

SL: My sister is four years older than I am.

BL: Okay. So tell me a little about school life...

SL: I went to the Steel Elementary School. Which the building is still there, I don't know if it's being used now. I went to Camp Curtain Junior High School, which is not far at all from where I live. Within very easy walking distance from where I presently live. And also to the William Penn High School. And also very, very contiguous with Camp Curtain, the schools are together. I was from the last graduating class of William Penn High School before it became Harrisburg High. If I had been one year younger I'd had, had to be bussed out for my senior year to the old John Harris School. Which is now part of Harrisburg High.

BL: And were you involved in any kind of activities in school? Or any sports?

SL: No. No, I was never athletically inclined and I wasn't really involved in any, very many extracurricular activities as far as the debating club or anything like that, you know. No not much of that.

BL: Okay.

CM: Barry, why don't we go ahead and pause for a second before we go too far. Because I don't like to interrupt people when their speaking.

[End of recording. Readjust camera settings. Begin new recording.]

BL: Alright so, in terms of your... when did you have a sense that you were gay and when you felt different or whatever.

SL: Oh very early on. Very early on. From the time I was four or five years old.

BL: Oh really?

SL: I knew I was, I knew I was homosexual. I didn't know the, I didn't know the word for it but I definitely knew. And it's uncanny when I look back on it, but even then I had picked up the message that it was something that couldn't be talked about. And somehow I just knew that. I knew that from all the messages I was getting around me, you know, from movies and T.V. that never showed men together or women together, just men and women together. You know, and the messages unintended from my parents and, you know, adults around me. I just knew it. And as I grew up, I guess maybe I was in third grade perhaps, when I came across the word homosexual, perhaps in a magazine or an article somewhere or something. I think it might have been third grade, it may have been a little later. But I knew it applied to me, you know, I remember saying to myself, "That's what I am." You know I, I went through, like we all did, you know. I went through a lot of grief about it. You know feeling like I was the only one and all of that. And not being able to, you know, expose my feelings or divulge them to anyone. I remember thinking, you know, you know praying to God at night, and thinking if only you could make me, you know heterosexual or straight or the other way. I'm not sure I even knew the word for heterosexual. But I, I, I would pray if only I could, you know, be quote normal or, or be attracted to women or females, you know. And, you know questioning why I was made this way, and all of that. I remember that. So yeah, it was, it was difficult. You know, I was definitely a closet case for the longest time, but that was survival. You know it was, it was the 1950s, the 1960s, and 70's.

BL: And then as, as you went through high school, did you have any, well did you try dating girls or anything to, to, to... fit in?

SL: No, not really. I, I, you know, I can remember like going to the movies with one girl one time in my class. She eventually was dating, you know another, a guy. But I remember, you know, going to the movies with her. And I had some friendships, I guess with, with women, especially in, in my high school years. And, you know, I had gone, well I not only being Jewish, I had gone both to public school and then had to Hebrew School as I got older, and you know, so I was certainly circulating socially, you know with both girls and boys, but, no I never really dated. And I'm sure my parents noted that. You know. I'm sure they knew. They never said but, you know. I wasn't athletically inclined, I wasn't rough and tumble, I, you know, I didn't date girls, you know. How could they not have known?

BL: And did you have any experiences at all with any other guys before leaving high school or did you...

SL: Sexually you mean?

BL: Sexually or affectionately or, or any kind of..

SL: Friendships only. No, I had no sexual experience until I got out of college.

BL: Okay.

SL: And I did, as far as, as far as any kind of harassment, no, I did not experience any bullying from being gay, because I wasn't out. However in, in elementary school years I was, I was

frequently bullied for being Jewish. And was beaten up. But, not for being gay because I, I just wasn't out.

BL: Do you want to talk a little about your Jewish upbringing as well in terms of what how that impacted your early years?

SL: Well, I went, I went the gamut of Hebrew School. My father and mother did not have a, a Jewish education. And he felt that he was very, he felt very ashamed of that. And was very, thought he was very lacking in that. And he was bound and determined that his children, if he didn't have a religious education, his children were going to have it. Two things they were going to have: a religious education and piano lessons. Two things that he didn't get in his childhood, he, he was going to have his children have. But Hebrew School was, I mean it was tough because I'd be home from school by about 3:30 and I'd have to be in Hebrew School by 4. It was at the Bethel Temple just down the street from where I lived. I'd walk there right after school. And then I'd get picked up by either my parents, or one of my parents, or more likely my parents would make an arrangement with parents of one of the other kids in Hebrew School and they would take me home, because it would be on the way or something. So I went through, let's see, well, I guess it was, it started, it must have started sometime in elementary school and I went until I was 13 and was bar mitvahed.

BL: And how do you think your Jewish upbringing and religion has affected you in terms of your, I guess self-image of being gay and being Jewish? Does it have any impact or...

SL: I never really found a conflict. And even though I, I, I went through the religious upbringing, I don't feel religious at this part of my life and though I still feel ethnically like a Jew. You know, I still identify as a Jew. I can't see trying to, I don't feel particularly, particularly religious in any way. And so I can't see, even although I'm interested in spirituality and forms of various religions, I can't see exploring another religion because Judaism doesn't satisfy me. You know, if I was going to become religious again, I'd become a religious Jew, because that's how I was brought up and I pretty much feel that would be all I would need if I were to become religious again, or wanted to. But no, I didn't see a conflict beyond the usual biblical condemnation and, and the stuff in Leviticus and all of that. I, you know, I understood that was part and parcel of it, but that was also, seemed to be part and parcel of the Christian religion, you know. So I didn't see much difference. Just that Judaism was older and you know...

BL: Okay. How about college? You mentioned going to college. Where did you go and...

SL: I went to Shippensburg first. I went to Shippensburg from 1971 to 1975. I had, I had no sexual experiences with men in college. I mean it was very, still was very closeted there. Though I, I know people must have suspected. I wasn't dating women. There were, there were, was at least one, probably more than one college girl that was attracted to me, that you know I didn't know how to respond to and, you know, often ended up avoiding. You know, those things must have, you know, made people uncomfortable. I had at least one intense crush on a, on a college mate, that I didn't, I lived with him in dorm, I didn't live in the same room with him. And that was, those kind of experiences were very, very painful. There's not much you can do about it except just, you know, just live through it. It was, you know, very distressing. Sometimes

embarrassing. You know, because, you know, I knew I couldn't tell him that. I'm, I'm sure he must have suspected something. And there were others that, you know, that I guess, made some either pointed or snide remarks towards me about it, about it indirectly, you know. So yeah, in college I, I ended up coming out, well the first person I ever came out to was Mary Ann Carrol (?). She, She was one of my college mates. We lived in the same building, after I finally got of two years in the dorm. They expected you to live in the dorm for two years. And when I got out I was living on the main strip in Shippensburg on Kings Street and she and I lived in the same house, though not in the same, it was chopped up into apartments. And she lived in another apartment, but sometimes, it had a flat roof and sometimes we'd go up and hang out on this roof and, and that's where I came out to her. On the roof of, of the building. [chuckles] She always jokes that I almost fell of doing it because I was so, just about shaking, but...

BL: Did, did you know that she was lesbian and that's why you came out to her, or did she just...

SL: No, she wasn't out as a lesbian then.

BL: Oh.

SL: In fact she hadn't even come out as bisexual, but I felt it. You know. I could tell. I didn't have to say anything. And, you know, I mean when, it wasn't just that. I mean, we were kindred spirits in terms of, you know, intellectual interests and, you know a lot of other things. You know, we felt like, you know, spiritual or intellectual equals. You know.

BL: What was your major in Shippensburg?

SL: I started out, I wanted to major in psychology, it's kind of funny [laughs] but, I'm going into an aside here, but I was always absolutely horrible in math, absolutely horrible. And I guess if there's such a thing as sub-abysmal...

BL: [laughs hardily]

SL: Like that's what I was in math, you know. I went through, you know, like algebra and geometry and you know, trigonometry, and you know, couple algebras I guess, one and two, and geometry and trigonometry. And I was in one of those classes, and maybe they still have them, I imagine they still do, that we were called the accelerated section. You know, and our class was the highest achieving of the, of the classes academically, but my math was just, in the pits. And probably what they should have done is flunked me in math and you know, made me repeat it, but they just passed me through with the other kids. And when I took, when I took my SATs to get into college, my math, I mean the math was beyond me to the point where I didn't even bother using the worksheet. After a couple problems I thought, the heck with this, I'm going to just start checking off things because I'm never going to get through this in time. You know, so I started checking off anything I could. Course I pretty much flunked that section, I think I only got like a 300, but my English was 600 or above and it saved me. So, I was able to get into college with that. So anyway, when I got to college, or even before, I knew I couldn't do anything math based. And math, you know when you can't do much in math, then you can't do

much in chemistry or physics, you know. So I was pretty much blocked from, from those things. Even those I was intensely interested, have always been intensely interested in biology. So, you know, I would maybe have gone into biology if I'd been stronger in math, knowing that I would have had to take, you know, more math, but, well more math based classes, but especially chemistry. But I avoided that and thought, well, you know, I'm going here to college on two things: I'm, I'm going here on my parents money and I'm going here on scholarship money. And my parents were able to procure a scholarship for me. It was called the Leon Lowengard Scholarship for Jewish Boys, well now I guess that would be considered discriminatory. But back then it was okay, to keep it just for Jewish boys. But anyway, I had this scholarship and I was going on my parents' money and what little money my parents forced me to save from my summer jobs. So I thought, well if I'm going here on my parents money and scholarship money I at least have to pick a major that I know I can do. You know, because there's no sense in doing a math based major that I know I'm going to flunk out with, you know. I've got a lot riding on, riding on me. My parent's expectation was that I was going to college and there was no getting out of that. And I didn't want to get out of it. So I picked psychology because I had had, in high school my last year, I had had like a half semester each, I believe, of like psychology and sociology and I did very well in them. And I thought well, this seems like something I can do. You know, if I'm gonna go I might as well do something I can do. So I picked psychology. Unfortunately, at that time the psychology department in Shippensburg was so embryonic they didn't even have a psychology major. They had a sociology major and they promised that by the next year they would have a psychology major. So I started out as a major in sociology, and then the next year when I became major in psychology I kept sociology as a minor. So that's how I worked it. And I did very well. Despite, you know, a lot of partying, partying and a lot of drugs and a lot of everything. I, you know, I knew when to bear down and you know when to study and when to write papers and stuff like that, and you know, when the time came to deliver I was able to do it. So I got through with very good grades. So that was my five years at Shippensburg. Not that it amounted to a whole lot.

BL: And you did get a degree from there?

SL: Yes, I got a BA in Psychology from Shippensburg. I have two other degrees, but I never ended up getting a master's degree. I went to HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College] for three years, after I was long since, later, sort of floundering and wondering what to do. I went to, to three years of night school and got a paralegal degree and right after that I jumped into the I HACC nursing program. And went for over two years through the HACC nursing program and got out and became a nurse. But that was much later. So.

BL: So, when you were at Shippensburg was there any kind of, like gay group on campus or...

SL: No. Oh my God no. This was like the Dark Ages. Oh no. I mean when I [laughs] when I went to Shippensburg the first semester, and I was in the dorm, and these guys would have what they called panty raids. Now [laughs] I never even heard of a freaking panty raid. I didn't know what it was. But apparently they would raid the women's, the girls dorm and steal their panties and run around with them hooting and hollering, you know. It was such idiocy. But that was the mentality back then. Can you imagine trying to come out in a situation like that? I mean [laughs]. You wouldn't live through it.

BL: Yeah, and what year did you graduate?

SL: '75

BL: '75, okay, yeah. So once you graduated from Shippensburg what was kind of like the next step in your life, what did you do?

SL: Well, I was still living with my parents for a while. I, I tried looking, looking up several jobs. And then my mother, who was a state employee, and back then, you know, I don't know how state employee, state service is now, but back then, you know, you sort of had to know somebody. You know, you had to have some kind of connection to get a job. Well my mother got me a job at Child Line, the child abuse hotline. I became a telephone counselor. They're still there, over at the state hospital. I worked there for 12 years. And after a while of it, I started to flounder and think, "What else can I do?" And by then it was much later in my life, it was in the 80s, and AIDS had started to happen, and I had gone to, I remember going to a, I remember actually we were talking about Jerry, he had recommended going to this vocational counselor in Carlisle. And he, he gave me a bunch of tests, like sort of like aptitude tests that might show you what, you know, you might really be interested in, might be something you could do, or might be interested in. And I thought that maybe the ideal job that I always would have wanted to do would have been to be a veterinarian. Of course I knew that was way out of my league with all the science involved, but when he showed me the results he said, "You should look at this." He said, yeah veterinary, veterinarian rates high on your list of interests, but what really jumps off the page, he said, it just about jumps off the graph is nursing. And I thought "nursing?" Well, the thing is I'd always thought nursing would be interesting and I had a friend who was, who was a nurse. He is now, for many years he's been a nurse anesthetist. And when he became a nurse I thought that was really fascinating. I thought, "What an interesting thing. A male nurse." You didn't hear about men being nurses that much back then. But I kind of put it in the back of my mind, I thought no, you know I, you know too much math involved. I'd have to take algebra. I'd have to chemistry. I'd flunk all of it. You know, there's no way. And then there was a guy in the apartment that I, the apartment building I was living in, Riverview Manor back then, named Joe Tucci, I don't know if you remember Joe?

BL: Yeah I've heard the name at least.

SL: He got, he was one of the first people in Harrisburg to get AIDS. And I remember since I lived in the building, and at that time Roger Beatty was forming the beginnings of S.C.A.A.N. and all of that. You know, and I was going to those meetings, and we all thought, well we've got to do something for Joe. You know, he's very sick. So I volunteered to, along with some other people, to go in and just see how he was doing and if he needed something get it and whatever, you know, it wasn't like it was caring for him intensely, but, you know at least to try and provide some support. And I got to know his partner, John Slemmit (?), who, John was kind of a wishy-washy guy. He tried, but he couldn't really get himself together. He eventually got HIV and then AIDS and died unfortunately as well. But I remember one day just kind of hanging out with John and having a conversation with him, and he said, you know, "I've decided something, I'm going to go to HACC and get into the nursing program and become a nurse." And just for some

reason, all of a sudden, just a light bulb went over, went on over my head. And I thought, that is it! I, you know, I've got to it. And I thought well, maybe I will have to take some math and science, sciences and stuff, but, if, you know, if I don't do it, you know, I'll just be laying on my death bed someday thinking I could have tried and I didn't. You know, if I don't make it at least I'll know I tried. So I went [chuckles] and this was after three years of night school for paralegalism, right after. So, because I was working at Child Line during the day, and I'd waited a long time to get on dayshift, because I had started on 4 to midnight shift and then gone to noon to eight shift, and finally got on dayshift, which was always my goal and taking night classes, or evening classes there for a paralegal degree. And then when I decided I wanted to at least try the nursing program, I went to see the Dean. Well this guy, he was like a really old fashioned Dean. And he looked at my stuff, you know my transcripts and all from Shippensburg and from HACC, and he said, "No problem." He said, "I'll put you right in the nursing program," he said, he said, he said the minimal, and I only took, like, one statistics class in, in Shippensburg, because, you know you had to take a math class, for, for psychology, you know for any of the humanities. You at least had to take one math class and most of us ended up taking statistics. And I even took it pass/fail because I was afraid of the grade, so you know, but he said: "The statistics class you had gave you enough algebraic concepts, you won't have any problem with the nursing math." He said, you know, you've had all the sciences because I had had a combination of chemistry and physics that they gave us for people who were in the social sciences and stuff, you know. So he said, you have all that, all you have to take is your anatomy and physiology and your microbiology and you're in the nursing program. I thought, geez, if I'd have known that, you know, I'd have started a lot earlier, you know. But, it turned out fine, the only thing was I had to back to working four to midnight so that I could take classes during the day. And, you know, it was very, very difficult. It was the hardest thing I ever went through. But, I wanted it very, very badly and if you're young, I was 36, I think, I was much younger then I am now, so, you know, I wanted it very badly, I was extremely motivated and I was, you know, it was a real grind, but I got through it. So then after I graduated in, well, 1988 from nursing school, I went to first worked at Harrisburg Hospital. Which turned out to be a very homophobic place at that time. It's not now. But it was then. Disturbingly so. And then I went to Polyclinic for a while trying, I wanted to be working the operating room. That didn't work out very well. I ended up being able to work in the pre-op for a little while until I got transferred to psychiatry. And, and again I was talking to Jerry about it, and because he had been working at the state hospital for so long, was a social worker there, and, and you know we discussed it and I thought, well you know, mostly been working in the social field and have a nursing degree now, why don't I just do the logical thing and combine it and work in psychiatry? So that's what I decided to do. And I've got in psychiatry and I've been there ever since. And this is now my 28th year there. So, yeah I'm glad I did it. But speaking of Harrisburg Hospital and the homophobia there. I remember, like my friend that I told you about, my friend Jim who was, who was a nurse anesthetist. Now he works out of, out of state. I really haven't been in touch with him in a long time. But, he worked both there and at Polyclinic in the emergency room and as a nurse anesthetist later. And he told me even back then, this was you know, mid to late eighties, that, you know, that they would sometimes turn away people, you know, act very act very nasty to them and turn, and sometimes even turn them away if they were, if they were gay. Refused to treat them in the ER.

BL: Wow.

SL: Or just be very discriminatory to them. And on my floor the attitudes were, the attitudes around me were very homosexual, or very homophobic. And I was, I was out then, you know, I, you know, I couldn't see being closeted there, you know. And what, a very interesting thing I remember, I wanted to get, I wanted to get a warm up jacket. Now a warm up jacket is one of these like, light cloth things that people in the medical field wear. It's not like a long lab coat like a doctor wears. It comes up to here [gestures toward his hips], and it, it just keeps you warmer, it has some extra pockets, whatever. And they did not want me to have a warm up jacket because women were wearing them at that time and not men. You know, and they, they wanted me to wear the typical male nurses jacket. Which makes you look like a dentist with the strap in the back [gestures around his waist] and it's real square looking. And I said, well why, you, why can't I just get a warm up jacket? And I remember the response from, I forget who, maybe my, the clinical manager at the time, who did turn out to be gay later on, was that if you, if you wear a warm up jacket your sexual orientation will be called into question. [Scoffs] You know, and I said well, it's not called into question because I'm out and I don't care who knows. And they said, we still don't want you to wear it. Because patients might be uncomfortable [raises hands in question and slaps them down on his knees]. I mean that's the kind of response you were getting, you were getting back then.

BL: Wow.

SL: You know. [laughs] So, you know. It's the way it was. And luckily when I came over to Polyclinic from Harrisburg, none of that, none of that. Especially working on the psych floor. Completely open. A lot of the people there were openly, openly gay or lesbian. And if they, and even if they weren't nobody cared. You know. And that's the way it's remained. There have been some people there, who for religious reason did not accept it, but for the most part it's been a very comfortable environment as far as that goes. But I remember how Harrisburg was. Luckily that's gone. I'm sure they won't tolerate that now. I also remember another incident. [chuckles] I know I'm going on too long.

BL: No, that sounds good.

SL: I also remember another incident at Harrisburg Hospital where a woman who was, a woman was in one of the rooms, she was a lesbian. Her partner had, had come to visit her and was observed kissing her. And one of the staff people came back to the nurse's station, one of the LPN's and was talking about how disgusting it was that this woman was kissing her partner. And the, the clinical manager who, later I found was gay, Barry Boyer, I shouldn't say his name, but, because maybe he's been interviewed here [laughs hardily] but anyway, he, he said oh my God I've got to see this. And he tore off from the nurse's station to go and peek. You know, and then years later I happen to run into him at a Pride Fest with his then partner who was one of my previous clinical managers, Mark Crichter (?) who was always openly gay. [rolls eyes and smiles] So, that was that

[Both BL and SL laugh together]

SL: But yeah the attitudes weren't good there.

BL: Ah, let's turn to, maybe once you were out, starting in the workforce, how did you connect into any of gay organizations or bars or any of the activities going on in Harrisburg, when did that happen?

SL: Well, its, it actually started while I was still living with my parents. And this was about 1976. And I had straight friends and none of them cared, really. In fact, back maybe 73, 1973 or so, or yeah, about 1973, was very interesting thing happened. I, I, we had a, a professor who, Julia Lorde (?), she was a most interesting professor. Social, she taught social psychology and one thing she wanted us to do was write our autobiographies. And Mary always said there must have been something voyeuristic with this, because she, and she said I, she said you, you, I remember her saying, Mary saying to me, you know, we all right these autobiographies for this woman and she has them sitting up in her attic, you know. All of this stuff that people are pouring their hearts out to, and there they sit in her attic, you know, almost like, almost like who could, who else could, could find out these things and take advantage of them. You know, in a way, but anyway. I wrote this autobiography and I, at that time I was pretty tortured, because I was so closeted. And you know, people all around me dating and having sex and you know, me having these, you know, terrible, distressing crushes on guys I knew I couldn't have. Or be with. And so at a certain point in the autobiography I decided to write that I was gay, write that I was homosexual. There was no gay then. I wasn't, I wasn't self-identified as gay. So I came out to her in the autobiography. That was the opening of it, and also coming out to Mary. And by the end of college, by '75 I was starting to meet more gay people, by then Mary had come out to me and to some others as bisexual, but she was still dating a man there. Guy named Jim. I often wonder how he's doing. Strange bird, but he was good guy. And I remember going to an apartment of somebody, somebody that a woman I knew there then knew and she had a bunch of books laying around. And one of them was the book by Peter Fisher called *The Gay Mystique*. And when I read it felt like it was speaking directly to me. You know, it was just one of those book experiences that you know that its, that there is a direct connection between the author and you and what they are saying. I still look at passages in that book once in a while. I don't know if you have it [gestures towards bookcase] but it's one of the original books about being gay and coming out. And from that point on, well let's see after that, my college experiences, my college experience was over. I was back home. I didn't have any prospects for finding a job until the job for Child Line came along. But I felt the need to, to, to start connecting. And I didn't really know how. Now, this is another aside. The first gay bar I ever went to, this is kind of a long story. I was pretty much a druggie back then and was doing a lot of acid and other drugs. And one day I took this acid trip and I was, as I was just starting to come down an old friend, and acid connection from my high school years, a woman named Mary Ann, was driving around the campus. She wasn't a student there, but she was driving around with another woman who a lot of the lesbians I came to know didn't like, she was a lesbian herself but she, you know, was apparently kind of a screwed up person. But I didn't know her well. Her name was Holly. They were driving around and they picked me up and they said let's just go take a drive. So we drove. And we drove and we drove and we went into the mountains and this is like Shippensburg, out in the mountains and hours went by. And I thought huh, this is really strange. Things were already strange because I'd been tripping all day. Well anyway, it was deliberate. They took me to State College. They both figured I was gay, and they took me to this bar in State College called the My O' My. I don't know if you've ever been to the My O' My or heard of it.

BL: No, I've heard of it though.

SL: But the My O' My was an interesting bar because it had a straight side and a gay side. You went in the middle and if you went to the right you went to the straight side, if you went to the left you went to the gay side. There were like two bars, you know, on either end with a hallway, you know. And it was... one thing I thought was very funny, my one math professor, the one that taught the statistics class, was there with another man. And the minute he saw me walk in they both left for the straight side.

[All laugh]

SL: And oh this was I guess, I don't know '74 like '74 going into '75 or early '75 and you know there are these guys there that, you know, were dressed in like you know polyester shirts and, you know, powder blue jumpsuits and things like, you know, listening to disco. And here I was this like long haired hippie in flannels and jeans and it was like looking at creatures from another planet, you know. [chuckles] I didn't know what to make of it really. But, you know, I mean Mary Ann and Holly knew that I was gay, even though I never told them. And they decided to do me the favor of forcing me into a gay bar, you know. Which I guess I have to thank them for in the long run, even though it was an uncomfortable experience. But that was my first experience in a gay bar. Mary got me to go with another guy that she knew that was gay, and I don't know it was very uncomfortable. He was trying to make out with me in this car. But I remember we went to, I guess it was called back then it was called the Dandelion Tree. Which was like, like later the Rose and you know the Apple and the Frenchman. Whatever, it went through so many names. But I believe then it was the Dandelion Tree. And I remember seeing, actually seeing some guys that worked at Brenner's and Sons. That was another thing before I got the job at Child Line, my Dad got me this little job at Brenner's in the office, and some of the guys there were gay. And one I remember Rodger Silps (?) kept putting moves on me during that and I, you know, and the last thing I wanted was my Dad or anybody walking in when he was trying to do this. Not that he wasn't nice looking, but I, it was, it was just too uncomfortable. But anyway, I guess I was young and had some looks back then, and you know how that goes. But anyway, that was one of my experiences. But what basically became a pattern, for a little while anyway before I left my parent's house, was, I don't know, I was working 4 to midnight and for some reason I picked Tuesday night as a safe night. I thought it would be a safe night anyway, to go to the D Gem. Because I knew the D Gem was gay, or lesbian or whatever. And I'd sit there and have a couple beers and look at the crowd and it wasn't a crowd, I mean you know I shouldn't say crowd because it was just a small group of people that would hang out there among themselves and they were what I would used to call "Disco Bunnies." I mean they were all in the polyester and everything and they loved disco. And I looked very different from them back then. But I felt well, this may not be the greatest, but at least for now I'm among my own kind. You know, I need this, you know. I knew I needed it. I mean even if I didn't put it into words, I, you know, I knew it. So I started hanging out there, one night was, was got very uncomfortable because there was a guy that was cruising me. When I got up and left and went home to my parent's place he followed me, you know. And you know my parents were upstairs asleep, and it's like one in the morning or one thirty in the morning, you know and here's this guy in his car, you know parked outside my house. And I thought Jesus Christ. What's going to happen if he comes up and rings the doorbell? You know, luckily he didn't. But anyway, that was a very uncomfortable situation,

very scary. But eventually I started going out on Saturday nights and I'd run into people and start talking to them. And I remember talking to this one guy, we just started up a conversation, we weren't really, you know, cruising each other or anything. But I remember saying to him, well isn't there anything else besides the bars? You know, isn't there anything? You know, and he said well there's Dignity. And I, and I remember saying yeah but that's Cath.. that's Catholic, you know. I didn't know what else, you know, I didn't know anything else about it. But around that time, you know luckily around that time I had, you know, I was working at Child Line, I was still living in my parent's house, I was about 24 and I was starting to buy, at like town news, I would buy copies of *The Advocate*, which back then was, wasn't even a magazine. It was a newspaper, you know. And I was just so overwhelmed and thankful to at least know that there was there was at least someone out there that was gay and out and was publishing, you know, publishing stuff. And so I had copies of *The Advocate* and some other gay magazines hidden away in my desk. Well, one day my mother, who was a snoop, and you know you can't help it you live in a family you're always going to snoop, let's face it, you know there's no real privacy in a family. But, you know she found 'em and she freaked out, and things became very uncomfortable. My dad didn't know and my mother always tried this emotional ploy with me, for a while anyway she did. Because my father had stroke back in '68, 1968. And unfortunately, my mother always blamed my sister for that. Because my sister, you know, we were, she and I, we were both just a couple of hippies, you know and she, my sister was very headstrong and went out and did whatever the hell she wanted to do. And it, and it drove my parents crazy. And she really did give them a run for their money, I mean she, you know, she was just a rebellious teenager and, you know, she was gonna, you know, go out and get high and have sex and do what she wanted to do, you know. And my dad ended up, ended up having a stroke and my mother blamed my sister for that, for upsetting him so much. So my sis, so when I finally came out to my sister, you know and she, she, my sister couldn't have cared less that I was gay, but, and she always knew, but you know she, my mother would try to blackmail me emotionally, you know. And, and she'd say, she'd say don't tell your father about this, don't tell your father, he'll have another stroke. So my sister would joke and say, "Well, the first one was on me, the seconds on you!" [Laughter] But anyway, once that happened, once my mother found those magazines, and then those copies of *The Advocate*, you know, and, you know I remember talking to her on the phone, and, and you know she was so upset. And I couldn't really talk to her because, because she was at work, so she couldn't really say anything, there were people around, and, and but she said is it true? And I said, "Yes." And she said, "I always knew it." And she, I remember saying to her "I'm still the same person." And she said, "No, you're not." You know, and you know, the whole, "I wish I never had you" "This is the worst thing that... blah blah blah. You know all that stuff, you know. And at that point I knew it was time to leave, it had long been time to leave. Most of my friends had been out of their parents houses by the time they were 18 or something, you know. And there I was 24, you know and still hanging around my parent's house, because I'm a creature of habit, or of inertia. So, I knew it was time. So, finally, I got my own apartment. I got out to Locust Grove Apartments, off of Locust Lane, and I still remember, now my father couldn't quite understand what was going on, but it, but, you know he accepted it, and, and he thought well you know he wants his apartment, you know. So and I still remember the day I moved in my parents help me, you know move some stuff in, and I didn't have much back then, of course, you don't when you first, when your moving into your first apartment. But I remember my dad stood in the doorway and my mother, my mother is standing there and my dad stood in the door way next to her and he went like this [makes chopping motion] in front of

her stomach and he said the umbilical cord is now broken. [Laughter] So after that I was on my own, so I started going to the D Gem more on Saturday's. And eventually I ran into John Barnes. And he was very attracted to me. And I had had one sexual experience before John. And it was some guy that he was with his friends and I, you know I wasn't terribly attracted to him but he, but, you know, when I admitted that I was that I was a virgin, he said, "Oh I have to be your first! I have to be your first!" Well, it was very lackluster. We were both, we had both been drinking pretty heavily, neither of us really could get it up, unfortunately and it wasn't, it wasn't much of an experience. So you know I, but then I met John and he was very attracted to me and wanted to date. And we became lovers like, for like maybe four months or so, you know. Didn't last too long, but I, you know, once I had sex with John I thought, "Oh! So *this* is what it's supposed to be like! This is the bells and whistles!" You know, so anyway, luckily John persuaded me to come to Dignity, which was, of course then at the Friends Meeting House. And so I met, well John...

BL: Do you remember about what year this was?

SL: Oh, maybe '77? So I met John, well there was John and Jerry and Richard, Bill, John Onofree (?), you know and eventually, you know, John Folby, Larry Valerio, you know, more and more people started coming into my life, and I, you know, and I immediately, immediately felt, "This is it." You know, I mean the bars are one thing, but, you know, I'll never find in the bars what I'm finding here, you know. So that was the beginning of it really.

BL: And, and what was Dignity like back then? What did they do? What kind of events and things did they have?

SL: Well, I remember, that first time, I believe, was just like a discussion group, kind of like of a general discussion group. You know, but I remember the warm, the feeling of warmth and being welcomed and I don't, I don't at all remember what we were talking about, but, you know, maybe about being gay or whatever, but I, you know, I can remember feeling welcome. It's hard for me to remember much of the evolution from that, and as far as from that to what it became. Because it became so much more complex. Because I mean committees were formed. Jerry was, you know, Jerry was very, very adamant that there would be committees. And so there was an education committee, a social committee, you know, a liturgy committee, you know. I mean, there were the board meetings and, and, you know, and then all the committees had their meetings. And, and...

BL: Were you ever on any of the committees?

SL: I was on the social committee. I may have been on the education committee. I think there was a membership committee. There was a women's committee, there weren't many women in the group back then. That came later. But, yeah there were a lot of committees. A lot. And we, you know, we had some interesting educational activities, we had of course a lot of social events. Even from the very beginning. We had the picnics out at Pine Grove. Let me see...oh I'm drawing a blank now and I shouldn't. Well the thing, the thing is eventually we started playing volleyball at the old police athletic league building, which is now HMAC. And that really drew a large crowd. More and more people started hearing about it and, you know, men and women,

and, you know, mostly men, but still some women, like Barb Nestle. And the more people came into that, the more people started joining Dignity, and Jerry wanted to take advantage of that by expanding the membership. And then, I guess, by that time I was just becoming more and more, Jerry and I, our lives started to become more intertwined as friends, you know. And, and he had the idea of leafletting the bars so that, you know, if we were having a picnic or some kind of big activity we could advertise it as long as we got permission from the bars we, you know, we'd go in and leaflet the bars and that would bring more people into, into, you know, the activity. And so we, we went from having a group of maybe twelve people, you know, to, you know, up to 40 people at time at, at some of these picnics at the, at the Pine Grove Furnace. We were also having picnics on City Island back then. And we went to a lot of restaurants. We had some very interesting speakers for the education committee. John McNeal spoke. We had a woman who, I forget her name, but she did like a one woman show appearing as Gertrude Stine and that went, that went over very well. And of course there was a lot of the liturgy stuff that I wasn't involved in. And of course Father Sawdy was involved in all that stuff, you know, and they had their masses and all of that, you know.

BL: Were they doing the potluck dinners...that too?

SL: They were doing the potluck, oh yeah, they were doing the potluck dinners at, at the Friends Meeting House. And, yeah, yeah a lot of stuff. And I remember, I don't know if it was, there was a potluck one time and, and I guess they, the Friends Meeting House had been closed because it snowed. Well it snowed and snowed and I remember, and I was living, I think I was on, I was living on Emerald Street by then, Second and Emerald, and I remember Aaron Spiker who lived on Logan Street, and I walked, because we couldn't do the potluck then, either it was a potluck or Jerry was just having, having an impromptu potluck at his place back when he lived on Boas Street, and I remember walking with our casseroles, whatever, you know, trudging through this knee high snow, you know sometimes even in the street because you could hardly walk on the sidewalk to Jerry's house on Boas Street so we could go to this potluck. That was quite something. And we also, there were regional Dignity meetings, and we hosted some. In fact I remember one, another incredible snowstorm, incredible, and, and John Folby held it at his house, or at least held, he had the reception. I think we had the, I think we had the, the regional meeting at a church, but John Folby had a reception at his house. And I swear, I mean people came in from Philadelphia, from Pittsburgh, you know, I guess when you're young and you just think you can do anything and we were young and we had the energy to do it, you know. Looking back on that it was quite something. I think we did accomplish a lot in those days, you know. And I, and I have to say I look back on, on the newsletters, *The Keystone* newsletter that was done, Jerry put a lot of time into that a lot, he wrote something for each one. And it was the days before computers, and John Folby and Larry Valerio did incredible artwork for those newsletters. It was, it was marvelous. So I look back on that and think, "Gee, That really was a lot." I mean it seems like a whirlwind almost, to look back on it all, you know. But yeah it was quite something.

BL: Well, speaking of Jerry Brennan, you might want to kind of introduce that topic as well, because Jerry is someone that I know impacted a lot on your life and a lot of lives of people early on in the community because he was really kind o the first gay activist, I think you could say, in Harrisburg, that really started a lot of things in Harrisburg.

SL: Yeah, I mean I think Jerry had originally had a plan for the, for the Gay Switchboard and that eventually became headed I guess by Chuck McKee and some other people eventually. And then I don't know when he started the Dignity chapter here. He had, he had been in seminary school, I guess back in the like, well Jerry was ten years older than me, but he had been in seminary school and he became involved in the civil rights movement and he, he in fact marched at Selma. And eventually got kicked out of the seminary, I believe, because they said he was too radical. And I remember him telling me that one of his friends had called him from New York during the Stonewall Riot and said you gotta get up here and see this, I guess it went on for something like three days, you know. And I don't know if he got there or if he just made it at the tail end of it, or whatever, but he, you know, he certainly knew about it and was told first hand by somebody that was witnessing it, so yeah he had been radicalized even before Stonewall. As far as his starting Dignity, well Richard Hause would be able to tell you more of that. I don't know, you know if that was maybe in '74 or '75, you know.

BL: Yeah I think it was '70.... The end of '74 and they got their charter in '75

SL: Charter in '75, yeah, so I can't tell you much about that.

BL: How did you meet him?

SL: How did I meet.., well I certainly met him through Dignity.

BL: Okay, yeah.

SL: And there were some other situations, I mean. He had, I was trying to date this one guy here, he's unfortunately long gone of AIDS, but I had met him through volleyball and, and it wasn't, you know I knew it wasn't going to amount to anything and I was pretty disappointed. And Jerry could, could see that, and he said, "Well look, why don't you and I go to the Babs (?)" And I'd never been to the Babs, and so went down to Baltimore and ended up going to the Babs and that became my, not a regular thing but, it was it was something we did and I can't say I have any regrets about it. I mean I, we both loved good food. We loved going out to eat. We had a lot of very close intellectual interests at times, very interesting conversations. I found out soon enough however, that he had a very hot temper and could be a bear to be around. And as often as I was around him, I was often the object of his anger. He obviously did not suffer fools gladly and could be very impatient. And being a visionary and being very, very intelligent, he didn't really have patience for people who weren't as fast in grasping things as he was. And so I was often on the receiving end of his irritability, or his irascibility with that. Because I'm not a fast learner, I'm a slow learner, you know it's just the way I am. I can, I have intelligence, I you know, but I'm not always smart. You know, Jerry was smart. You know, he knew how to use his intelligence. He was not like a lot of other people, he was not a daydreamer, you know. He was too hard boiled to daydream, I think. He was, but he was very much a visionary. He knew what he wanted to, to work on. And he also, of course worked with Maryann Carol (?) and others, Jane Perkins who was on the council, the city council then, on getting the non-discrimination clause worked into, worked into Harrisburg's law, so he was very involved with that. He was a dynamo really. I mean he, he worked back then full time as a social worker. He also had his tax

business. He also did all kinds of, of political activity. And he just kept it going, he was really a dynamo. So I, just as an aside, or to go back a bit, one thing that I do remember, the very first thing I remember after getting involved with John, when he and I were still together. When we were, I was just starting to go to the, to the Dignity groups and discussions and stuff like that, it was maybe only within a few weeks of my being involved that John and I guess Jerry, and I don't know who, maybe Richard, but I know John and I did it, went to the Capitol to lobby for gay rights. And this was like in my very first experience with anything like that. And again it was only within maybe three to four weeks me even joining Dignity. And I remember John and I went to see, I guess it was Senator Jubelirer from Blair County, well talk about, talk about an ice chill [laughter] he was, he was not at all happy to see us. I mean he was, he was polite enough, you know, I mean he didn't just tell, jump up and tell us to get out, I mean, he at least sat through what we had to say. But, you know, and I felt like a fish out of water, I was such a novice at anything like that and had no idea, but I thought well, you know I agreed to go and here I am, you know. But yeah, so even as early as that, and that was 1977, Dignity was involved in politics. And that was all through Jerry I'm sure, you know. So, also he was on the supervisory committee of Pennsylvania's State Employees Credit Union. I mean he kept a lot of balls juggling, you know.

BL: And he later passed away of AIDS, right?

SL: Yes, yeah. He, he came out to me as far as his illness, or as far as his HIV status in, maybe I think, 1988. He said he had known about it since maybe 1985 or '86, I think. And I remember saying to him at that time, well, you know really, you know, the only choice you have is to just keep going, you know. Lot of things happened with it unfortunately, you know he ended up getting a lot of illnesses. But I, one thing that I think about Jerry, and that seems to have been proven right with a lot of people who have illnesses like HIV and cancers and things like that are that the people who fight it, are the fighters who won't give up are the ones that live the longest, you know. And you have to remember, back when he started with this stuff, he was getting good care, but, he was getting the best care that they could give at the time but it was not nearly what it is now.

BL: Right

SL: You know, I mean there were all kinds of medication regiments that he was put on. There was a regiment that he had to go to Washington, D.C. to even get. There were, there was a regiment that stupid drug company only made in liquid form. Cumbersome bottles and, and it was a while until they even made the pill form. And I remember that, that was when Jerry and I either went, we had gone on several European trips together and cruises, gay cruises, RSVP cruises, and one of them I remember, I think it was either Paris or Italy, that he had to bring all these stupid bottles with him of liquid. It was, and you know worrying about, about the bottles being broken in transport and all of that, just because the company couldn't get its act together to make a pill form of the medication. He went through so many different medication regiments and he became extremely well educated on HIV and AIDS because he, not only was proactive with the meds, but he got online, when you could finally get online, and learned everything he could about HIV. He corresponded with this physician in Japan who was on the cutting edge of HIV research. I mean he, he, he kept up, you know, he knew I think a lot of things even the doctors

around here at times, you know, unless they specialized in it, you know, even they would have known. So, and he did live a long time with it. He, from, well if he, if he became HIV positive in like '85 or '86 and he died, when 2001? May of 2001. So that's a long time, you know. And of course since then, the treatment has advanced, you know, so now I guess we're at the point where, you know HIV is something you can live with for a long time and it might be something else that gets you in the end, but what happened with Jerry, I think, was that eventually his liver, he went into liver failure, because of all, a lot of the medications were extremely harsh on the liver. And then once that happened the whole cascade of wasting syndrome and everything happened. So...

BL: You had mentioned that you were involved early on S.C.A.A.N. as well, right the..

SL: Yeah...

BL: can you talk a little bit about what you did with...

SL: Not much. I remember Rodger Beatty was having meetings about it, eventually it became S.C.A.A.N by the time, by that time I was out of it and I had gone into nursing school and really didn't have, I was like consumed between full time work and full time nursing school, I really couldn't do much. But I do remember, you know, the beginning meetings and they were very informal. Let me see....I can't remember once S.C.A.A.N. became a formal organization that I ever went to any of their meetings. I did become involved in the Rural Gay Caucus.

BL: Oh, okay.

SL: For a while, and that was...gee...maybe going into the late '70s? Late '70s early '80s perhaps? And I remember they had a, a conference here. It was at the old, you'd know the name of it Barry, the old main hotel downtown, the....

BL: Oh the Holiday Inn?

SL: The Holiday Inn, yeah. It was at the old Holiday Inn. It was, it was like a three day over the weekend conference. And they had a lot of different workshops and speakers. And that was mostly organized by Maryann Carol, I believe, or she was heavily involved in that. I remember also going out to a conference, I believe sponsored by the Rural Gay Caucus that was in Delaware Water Gap. That was quite a long time ago. And what else did we do? They had some cockamamie ideas, you know about going off into the rural areas and trying to make contact with gay people. I remember one, it was so preposterous one was, one was like, you know, let's go out to like Elk County with a megaphone... and [exuberant laughter from all] You know? "Gay people you can come out now! We're here to help you! You know, that sort of... of you know sort of half joking, but at the same time I thought, there's nothing but trees in Elk County, you know?! But they did try to do some good things. I mean a lot of it was, I shouldn't say formless, sort of half baked, you know they tried to work out some things. The only thing that I got involved in, and it didn't last very long at all, I only, in fact all I did was coordinate it, was the gave me one assignment, they said, they said Harrisburg needs a group for, for gay alcoholics, because AA doesn't have a specific group for gay alcoholics. So I talked to Jerry about it and,

and he said well there had been a group for gay alcoholics that had been held at the Friends Meeting House. But somewhere along the line one of the people that was in the group, their partner was disruptive and came to the group and, and said, you know, "I'm gonna tell everybody that all you, all you gay people are here" and blah, blah, blah, and everybody went [gestures with his hands, like people going crazy] eh!!! And you know, they all took off and they didn't come back. So, but he put me in touch with Rosemary Model who Rodger knew. And he said get together with Rosemary and Rodger who, again both of them eventually start, formed S.C.A.A.N., I remember her at some of the meetings for S.C.A.A.N., but you know, she gave me some contacts and I just eventually put this meeting together, you know, of people saying would you like to start doing this? You know, and they said yes. So they started for a while at least, another gay alcoholic, or gay AA group, or related to that.

BL: Where did they meet?

SL: That was at the Friends Meeting House.

BL: Oh, okay.

SL: So..

BL: And that would be about what year, do you remember?

SL: Well again, it must have been in the late '70s. You know, early '80s. You know. So. And I remember also with Dignity we would charter buses to the Pride marches. Which were always such a blow out.

BL: Like to New York?

SL: To New York, yeah. And it's interesting, I should have brought it, but I forgot to bring it, I did give some photographs, donated some photographs to, to the center here, one of them I know was New York and it was John Barnes and Jerry and me. And just within the past half year or so John Folby sent me a photograph that he found, while looking through some photos, he found, he found this photograph of me, even earlier than that. That, that, that photo that I donated here maybe have been like '85, '84... I'm trying to remember, but this one was even earlier. I was even younger. I'm thinking it was probably about maybe '79. You know, so we were doing it even back then. You know, chartering busses. And that was all Jerry's idea, you know. But I look at myself in that picture and I think, Oh my God, I look like a lost puppy! You know because, you know. I'm just standing there forlornly holding these rainbow balloons, you know. But, yeah it's pretty amazing when I look back at all the things that happened, you know. And, and I think we have, you we have the right to, you know, pat ourselves on the back, you know. A lot of this stuff is not known, you know. But people did accomplish a lot.

BL: Were there any other organizations that you were involved with at all? Or was that pretty much all?

SL: No, not as far as gay organizations, no. I did eventually become a shop steward when I worked at Child Line, I became a shop steward for PSSU [Pennsylvania Social Services Union], so I was involved in unionism. Then when I became a nurse and first started working at Polyclinic, Harrisburg was non-unionized, always has been, and they eventually ended up taking over Polyclinic and breaking the union. But before that happened we were unionized and I became a floor rep for, for our floor for what was then, oh god we went through several, several unions, actually nurse organizations like Pennsylvania Nurses or PNA and all of that. But I never felt comfortable in those roles. I, the only reason I did it was because, well first of all, you know, I got into, I got into the shop rep, the shop rep thing because Jerry represented me in a case at work, and then I, you know, between him and one of the people at the, at PSSU kind of elbowed me, that's how its always really happened with me. I've always just been like pulled along by the elbow, "Hey would you do this?" and you know, the next thing you know I'm doing it, you know. That's how a lot of people get into this stuff, you know. So I got kind of elbowed into doing that. And then since nobody else would be a floor rep on my nursing floor I did that. But I never really felt comfortable in that, you know. And I was vice president of Dignity for a while and, you know, I was never really comfortable with that either. I just thought my God what if something happens to Jerry and I have to take over, or something, you know. Of course, then other people stepped in. Richard Hill and Claire and a lot of people, Aggie. But, you know, I never felt comfortable in any leadership position. I'm a follower, you know. I, you know, give me a task and I'll see if I can do it, but, you know, I've not ever felt comfortable being much of a leader, you know. At work I'm often the charge nurse, and that's enough of a role.

BL: Okay, what about relationships? You mentioned John Barnes was a short relationship that you had.

SL: I've never really been in a long term relationship.

BL: Okay.

SL: I had the very short relationship with John, John Barnes for about four months. I had a for a little, little while, a very short while, maybe three months I was seeing a guy down in Baltimore for a while that I had met at the Babs. But he didn't have a car, and I would just go down and see him on the weekends, you know. And working every other weekend when I became a nurse that, you know, but back then I wasn't, but I would go down on the weekends to see him. But that didn't really last, and you know it wasn't really serious. In, back when I was, I'm 63 now, I guess back when I was in 50's I met a guy online, Bob Life, who, you probably met him, nice young, nice man, very nice person. We weren't really all that compatible, we enjoyed each other's company very much. And I, he was a very nice person to talk to, didn't have a lot of common interests. But we stayed together for nine months, and again we only got to see each other every other weekend, either I would drive to his place in Reading or he would drive to my place in Harrisburg. He, as far as I know, is still a minister. He was involved with MCC and he was, once he became ordained he, he went through a lot of like flopping around looking for his vocation for a long time and eventually he realized he wanted to become a minister. And he did apparently have a parish, or had a parish out in Ohio somewhere. But the, he told me the parish people there were always trying to hook him up with these ladies in the church. And it was very uncomfortable for him since he was closeted he couldn't really do much about it. And eventually

he just left it. But he eventually found his niche, he, he instead of, of working as a pastor in a church, he, he went into pastoral support as a pastoral and spiritual counselor for hospice with Pinnacle Health, their branch in Reading. And the last I heard of him, or from him, he had found a gentleman, maybe from Allentown, and they were happy together and I hope it stayed that way, you know. Other than that I've, I've been alone. I've, I don't regret it. I've never really, it's kind of strange. And this is kind of, you know, just a personal, personal thing to tell you, but I remember a long time ago, and I remember telling Jerry this too, you know, and I was sitting alone in my car one day, I remember I was at the corner of 7th and McClay, I was going to make a left hand turn, it was in the evening, I had gone to see my parents they were pretty soon going to move out of the area, because once they both retired they moved back toward the Philadelphia area where they, where they remained until their deaths, but I remember, you know, sitting there in my car and this thought just came to me and you know, I'd been through a lot of, you know situations in which I looked around and saw that, you know, a lot of my friends were in couples and thinking what's wrong with me? You know, why aren't I with somebody? You know, and I remember talking to Jerry about it, and he said, there's nothing wrong with you, don't worry about it, it's there, you know, just because you're alone there's nothing wrong with you. But I remember sitting in my car and all of the sudden a thought came to me, and I just said to myself, I'm alone and that's okay. And that's all it was, but I guess it's sort of grown in me that that realization was always true. And that even though there were times were I may have deluded myself into thinking that there was something wrong with me, or I wasn't complete because I was alone, the fact is I've always liked being alone. I love living alone. And I do worry as I get older that, you know, I worry about, you know, physical infirmity and, you know, and maybe not having the support. You know, and they always say single men don't live as long, but, you know, as long as I'm happy as long as I'm satisfied with it, you know, then I'm thankful just to, just to be the way I am. I, you know, I can't worry about it. So, that's pretty much the way I feel about it.

BL: And you still have Dignity that you attend? And yeah so you still have...support network...

SL: Oh absolutely, I mean I love having my friends and I'm extremely, extremely thankful to have had Dignity in my life all this time, because for me I've always called it my built in social life, you know. Like I look at some of the other people I've known and, you know, they go, they would go to the bars, or they go, you know, they'd prefer not to be in a group, you know, they're not group people. But then you have to find friends on your own, you know, and people in the bars aren't necessarily people you're going to be friends with. Maybe, maybe you'll be lucky and something, you know, you'll find a, a, a good friend in a bar, you know, or elsewhere, but, you know, and, and, you know, certainly, you know, I've certainly found other friends you know besides, come across other people. Yeah. But I, I've often, I've often been very, very shy. I've always been thankful to having this, you know, this group that, that has activities. That, you know, the thing is I'm, I'm pretty much a loner, you know, and I, I, I enjoy solitude, you know? I'm a bookworm, you know. I'm an introvert, you know. I know I need to get out and socialize at times. But at the same time I feel like it's just enough. You know, I can get my social, socialization, I have my friendships, but then I can have my own time as well, you know. So. But I also wanted to tell you one thing and it just sort of as an aside. There was one time in my life, I guess, when I was first starting to come out. And you know, and I mean just not, you know, coming out is like

BL: Stages

SL: incremental, you know. It's a process. But there was one point in my life I guess in the, you know, mid to, mid 70s to finally by the time I got into Dignity and beyond, a little bit beyond. When, you know, during that time of my life, see now I don't have as many straight friends as I used to. But I have, still have some straight friends. But back then I had, it seemed I had just as many straight friends as I had gay ones. I was starting to get more and more gay friends, and I already had my straight ones, you know. And one day I kind of like, I just took a look, you know, at my straight friends and my gay, and my gay friends and I thought, you know all these years, I've thought to myself that if, or for many, too many years, I've thought to myself if only I could be straight, you know, I, life would be so much comp, so much less complicated. Because if you're straight, you know, you do, you pretty much do what's expected. It may not always work out, but you know, I mean you, you date, and, and you go to the prom, and then you get married and you have kids and the golden retriever and then the kids go off to college, and then you have your nice little retirement off in the beach somewhere and blah, blah, blah. And it's just a set pattern. Whereas nobody had any pattern for being gay, you know, so, you know. I thought, well, you know, maybe if I was straight, life wouldn't be so complicated, you know. And maybe, you, but then I, you know, I just took a hard look at my straight friends and at my gay friends and we were all, and at that time we were all in our twenties, we were all going through the same things. And I thought, well, you know I look at my straight friends and they're no happier than I am. I mean they have problems with their jobs. They have problems, conflicts with their families. They have, you know and, and so do my straight friends. None of them are any happier, no one, no one in the straight group is any happier than the gay one and, then the gay one, and no one in the gay group is any happier than the ones in the straight one. And I thought, well that's it. I give up. I'm not worrying about it anymore. And that's when I stopped worrying about it. So. So that was that. [Laughter]

BL: Let's see, I just wanted to, to, to see if there are any other things that you wanted to, to mention as far as your interview today any stories or any things that we haven't covered enough.

SL: Not that I, I mean just, you know I might think of things later, you know but I'm, you know, I'm not sure.

BL: Okay, okay good. Well I, [to Catherine] did you have any other questions that you...

CM: No.

BL: Okay, great.

CM: I don't have any questions. Everything looks, looks and sounds good.

SL: Well I hope so because I don't know that I want to come back and do this again!

[Laughter]

CM: Well if we're ready I'll go ahead and hit stop.

BL: Yes, thank you Steve, we appreciate it.