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Title: LGBT Oral History: Julie Lobur

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Interviewee: Julie Lobur

Interviewer: Bob Kegriss

Videographer: Nancy Datres

Date: November 12, 2013

Place: LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Josh Rosenbluth

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Abstract:

Julie Lobur was born in New Kensington, Pennsylvania in 1955 and moved to Harrisburg in 1970. She received her bachelor's degree from Penn State and added a master's degree in computer science in 2003. Julie briefly served in the military in 1983 where she met her wife Marla, but was discharged because she is a lesbian. She currently works as a computer architect for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and an adjunct professor of computer science for Penn State.

Julie discusses her coming out process at the age of 18, in large part aided by the existence of something that might be unique to Harrisburg: a diner – The Commerce Diner – that catered to a gay clientele. Julie details how she met Marla, how they decided to get married in Iowa in 2009, how they came to be part of a set of couples suing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to recognize their marriage, and how the lawsuit has completed her coming out process. She describes how attitudes have changed towards gay people over the years, and how this “sea change” in acceptance implies increased responsibility for gay people. She shows her gratitude to the gay men of Harrisburg by describing how they established the “gayborhood,” which she believes saved the city from blight.

Human and institutional support networks have played a major role throughout Julie's story.

ND: Today is Tuesday, November 12, 2013. This is Nancy Datres operating the video equipment and Bob ...

BK: Kegriss

ND: Kegriss who is doing the interviewing, and we are interviewing Julie Lobur.

BK: OK. Well thanks for coming anyway, Julie.

JL: It's my pleasure, Bob.

BK: We have a few sort of pro-forma questions that we'll ask. You know you're not listening to this whether this is going on the tape or not?

ND: I already checked. It's going.

BK: Oh. OK. Now that I said that ...

ND: Yeah now, we have to edit that out.

BK: I know.

ND: Shh.

BK: I'm sorry. But I just saw it laying there and I thought geez not ...

ND: No, I touched it.

BK: Oh. I didn't know you did that darling.

JL: Should I look at the camera or look at Bob?

[crosstalk]

ND: Look at Bob.

BK: Look at me.

JL: OK. Look at Bob.

BK: Your profile.

JL: Yeah, oh my God [laughs]

ND: Well it won't be a direct profile. Don't look at me.

JL: OK.

BK: Is it all right? Is hearing good?

ND: Hmm-uh

BK: OK, What are we going to do? Start over or ...

ND: No. They'll just edit that part out.

BK: OK. All right. Well some of the pro-forma questions that we'll probably start with ... we ask you to give your own name so they know who we are talking to.

JL: OK. I'm Julie Lobur.

BK: OK. Julie, would you be offended if we ask you your birthdate and where you were brought up?

JL: Oh well, I was, I was born in 1955. Oh, I'm not that old. Born in 1955 and I was, I'm from New Kensington which is a very small town, an old mill town north of Pittsburgh. And when I was there, when the, the town was the aluminum city. It ... aluminum city. They made more aluminum there than I think any place in the world.

BK: OK. Very good. Do you have siblings?

JL: I did have a sibling. Yes. She passed away from cancer.

BK: And your parents?

JL: My parents are both deceased.

BK: Deceased as well. OK. When how long have you been living here in Harrisburg?

JL: I've been living here in Harrisburg, except for a little hiatus that I took around the country for a few years, but mom and I moved here in 1970. So, that makes it 43 years.

BK: 43 years.

JL: Minus about three maybe. No, closer to five.

BK: OK.

JL: 43 minus five be 38.

BK: OK. Tell us a little bout about your education, where did you go to school and ...

JL: Well, when I, when mom and I moved here I was 15 years old – you can save me from doing the math – and I enrolled in the Harrisburg City schools, William Penn High School at the time. Now, where I came from was a very ethnically diverse area. But, we ... in 1970 was two years after the race riots here in Harrisburg. And, I – there was an awful lot of racial tension going on, and quite honestly I was afraid, I was afraid in, in that school. And, I wasn't learning anything. It was, it was just an awful place. So, make a long story short, mom enrolled me over in the Harrisburg Academy for two years.

BK: Oh. Yes.

JL: And, that was two years I'd just as soon forget about, but I did graduate from there. Then I, while I was at the Academy, is when I came out. So, I don't know if you want me to go on from there.

BK: Sure, that's fine. Whatever you want [crosstalk].

JL: Yeah, I would say this was in 1973, and I just remembered it's been 40 years now I came out.

BK: Wow.

JL: And, I met my girlfriend in the Commerce Diner [BK and JL laugh] because I was underage obviously.

BK: Obviously

JL: I was 18 years old and the, we had the gay diner there at Second and State Street. And I met her, and she wasn't exactly the pick of the litter, but we, we got together for a while and you know, after keeping all of my closeted feelings bottled up it was like a ton of bricks coming off my shoulders at the time. So ...

BK: Yes.

JL: So, well I was expected to go to college at that point.

BK: Yes.

JL: And I went to Carnegie Mellon for about six months. I had issues [JL laughs]. Wanted my girlfriend. Everything was here. [BK laughs] Carnegie Mellon is in Pittsburgh.

BK: Right

JL: And, so I dropped out of Carnegie Mellon and came back here and just kind of bummed around. Two girlfriends later I ended up going to HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College], finishing up my bachelor's degree at Penn State, and then went on for a Master's degree in computer science in 2003, so that's been an awful long span of education [sighs].

BK: That's alright, you still have it, and you're still utilizing it.

JL: I'm lucky to be able to do that.

BK: Yeah. Good. OK. What are you currently doing now in your occupation?

JL: Currently I am – my title is – I'm a project manager at the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I am a combination of a project man ... I do more computer architecture type work: software engineering, requirements documentation, some of the process engineering; a lot of the stuff that really isn't a classification for at Commonwealth. But, that's, that's what I do, and I am lucky to be working, using my degree. It's, I work very heavily in information technology. And, I'm also an adjunct instructor of computer science at Penn State Harrisburg, and I've been doing that for about 13 years.

BK: You're a busy lady.

JL: Ah, yes [sighs].

BK: Yep.

JL: Keeps me off the streets.

BK: It does keep you out of the streets [JL laughs]. Now, I know, I know that your partner is in the military. Did you ever serve in the military?

JL: Well, actually that's where we met. I had, well when I got out of school and came back to Harrisburg, and of course the girlfriend I met at the Commerce Diner, that was splitsville. And, then I met a very [pauses and sighs] controlling individual, and it was a, an absolutely disastrous relationship for about 12 years. In my numerous efforts at escaping her, one of them was to enlist in the military, and so I did in 1983. So, I was pretty old. 28 at the time [BK scoffs]. I know. My gosh. You know, they still expected me to do pushups. And, that's whenever Marla [Marla Cattermole] was in my platoon, and she was – I was in the third squad, she was in the fourth squad. So, that meant she was always behind me, at in formation, and my being five-foot nine and her being five-foot two, she really enjoyed being behind me, so the drill sergeants could never see her [laughs]. So, [laughs] but we, we were good friends ... she ... you know, the military really does expose one's character, and the, the, the goodness that I saw in her heart really just impressed the heck out of me. We did not become lovers or anything else. We were just, you know, just buddies at the time. And, I ended up, my ex found out where I was, and she brought me in as a, as being gay at the time, of course 1983, we were not allowed to be in the military. And actually, she didn't even have the guts to do it herself. She put a straight friend up to contacting the liaison officer, and saying, "Oh, do you know you have a lesbian in the army?" And at which ... ahhh [exclaiming in sarcastic shock], I know ... and at which point I was invited to leave before I finished basic training. But, before I left, Marla came up to me – I was just in my civvies – I was ready to go out the door and Marla came up to me and said ... just shoved her address in my hand and said "Lobur write to me." And, so I did. And, we wrote letters for a couple years.

BK: Ahh, that's sweet.

JL: Yeah, [smiles] yeah. And then she came to visit once and you know, as they say the rest is history [laughs].

BK: That's how many years ago.

JL: That was 20, almost 28 years ago.

BK: Ahh, you're still together.

JL: Yes.

BK: That's amazing. [JL smiles]

JL: Yeah ... if you knew what I was like to live with, it's even more amazing [laughs].

BK: I'm sure it's not that bad.

JL: Yeah, working all the time.

BK: Right. Yeah, you were working. Do you have any memberships in any, like, community organizations or anything? [JL shakes head "no"]. You guys are active.

JL: Not at this time.

BK: OK. But, now the next question was when did you realize you're LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] and that you already told us that.

JL: Yeah. I ... well I guess everybody realizes it at very young age.

BK: Very. Yes, yes.

JL: Yes, and, and that was ... I was actually I think about 16 or 17 whenever I finally came to, to grips with it.

BK: Umm.

JL: And then lived with that little secret until I found the woman in the Commerce Diner – with nothing to do.

BK: Yeah. What was it like, like for you as an out LGBT individual. What kinds of things did you do?

JL: In the c—

BK: At that time.

JL: At that time in 1973, there wasn't a whole lot we did in the community. We had at the time the nexus of the gay community was at Second and State Street. All of State Street – I'm sure you've probably heard this from a lot of people – was a cruising street where the gentlemen met other gentlemen. And actually was quite a carnival atmosphere there. It was rather fun to watch. We had the Commerce Diner which was at, probably about, its three, four doors in from State Street towards the south. The 400 Club was the gay club there at the time, and it was run by, I think their names were Les and Tiny if I'm not mistaken. And, they, they were a straight people, and they ran that place with an iron fist if you didn't – if you crossed them, you got barred for some time – some period of time. Again, I was underage. I couldn't go in there. But, I could hang out at the diner as much as I could. And, the diner to me is – it's – we were notorious here in Harrisburg, probably the only place that had a gay diner. Not that the diner's run by gay

people, but it was so dominated by the gay clientele, that the straight people knew where they were [laughs], which was rare in those days.

BK: Very good. Very good. So, I think you alluded to it before you have travelled some ...

JL: Yes.

BK: in your lifetime.

JL: Just a little bit. When ... with, my ex – my controlling ex – I really went from job to job. At the time, I had no, knows college education at that time, and things, about 1980, things got really bad here in Harrisburg. We must have had a recession. I know a lot of the lower level jobs went to the Vietnamese boat people who had come over and just swarmed the area, and everybody was really in a hurry to help them out. So, my, my inimitable skills as a bus person and a broom pusher were highly competitive at that time. So, we ended up pushing off for West Virginia for a little while. Sandy's dad had supposedly found her a job which, you know, working in a factory, and she didn't keep that job like she never kept any job. We stayed there for a little while, you know eventually that dried up and we went back to the Pittsburgh area. And, we lived there for a couple years, think we were in West Virginia not even six months. And, then we went back to, to the Pittsburgh area, and that's where I actually got my computer training. I went to a trade school there, and ... so we, we were there a couple years and I knew I could nowhere without any kind of training. So, that's when I got that computer training. I got a couple jobs [nods] doing that and [sighs] when I got ... joined the military to get rid of her and it didn't work, she decided to go to Florida. So, I followed her down there [smiles]. Yeah, I know, I [laughs] ... So, so, we, we, were ... we had I think something like 16 addresses within five years.

BK: Oh my goodness.

JL: It was awful. And, of course we were always about three inches ahead of the bill collector [JL and BK laugh].

BK: Oh, yes.

JL: Yeah.

BK: OK. Well, has being out affected your work life [JL sighs] now that you are working a second job?

JL: Well, it's, it's funny [smiles] because I wasn't very out at work. I again, I didn't make any effort to hide my sexual orientation, but I yet – I didn't – I don't have a picture of Marla on my desk. And, when people ask, you know, about my personal life, I just kind of change the subject for a while. And, I did that up until this year. And, this year was the year that I was one of the litigants in the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] marriage lawsuit. We were suing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to recognize the marriage between Marla and myself. We were

married in Iowa in 2009, as soon as we could. And well, our pictures were all over the paper. We had microphones in our faces [laughs]. So, at that point I was out with a bang. And ...

BK: Yes, I would say that [JL laughs].

JL: Oh, and what has been – you know, this is the, the old saying, you know – that, that a brave person dies only once, but a coward dies a thousand times.

BK: Right.

JL: All those years that I was afraid to come out ... it really, it was, it was not that I was afraid to come out. I just really didn't know how to come out at that point. And so, well I kind of came out and people have been, you know, really supportive at, at my job. Even my very religious boss, and I was worried about him, but he's a real Christian and I found that out ...

BK: Good.

JL: after this. Wonderful man. He's a wonderful man anyway, but ...

BK: Very good. Do you want to tell us a little more about the lawsuit because I'm real interested?

JL: Oh! You're real interested.

BK: Yes.

JL: Well, I, I, can tell what ... as much as I can. We, the American Civil Liberties Union – the Pennsylvania chapter of that group – has decided to fight on behalf of the gays in Pennsylvania, to have the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania either recognize our out-of-state marriages or allow us to marry here in Pennsylvania. And, I'm a little surprised the ACLU has ... I mean they've always been very active as far as GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender] issues here in Pennsylvania.

BK: Oh yes, yes.

JL: But, this, this seemed to drop out of the blue. And, I suspect what happened – I don't know for a fact – but I suspect what happened was, that there is a widow among our, among our litigants ... plaintiffs. And her name is Maureen Shennessey? Hennessey. Maureen Hennessey. And, she had lost her – they were married in Massachusetts – and she had lost her wife to cancer. Her son being a photographer caught all of this on film, her interaction with him. The film is on the ACLU website. And, just her final days – Beth's [Mary Beth McIntyre] final days – and what they had been through and everything. Well, I think that video – that, that they sent that I think, I think they sent that to the ACLU, and the ACLU said it's time to do something. And, there was – they sent out a – they reached out into the community to see, you know, if there was any interest in participating in this lawsuit. And, Marla and I said, you know, hey we, we need to do this. And so, we, you know, joined the fight. We're there ... at the time we filed the lawsuit,

we ... I think there were about, there was 10 couples. I think six of us were already married outside, outside the state. Four were not married yet, wanted to get married in Pennsylvania. One was the widow. And then there were two children of the unmarried, of an unmarried couple who have said, you know, I'm being harmed because my mothers cannot be married. So, you know, we all got together and joined that they filed a federal lawsuit with the district court, getting, wanting to get these marriages recognized and the freedom to marry in Pennsylvania. Cor ... Governor [Tom] Corbett and Susan Kane [likely, Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane] were named as litigants. I, I don't think that's going to be the case going forward. However, the, there are still grounds because we would like to – we have the Secretary of the Department of Health and Revenue is of course interested too, in a, should be a party in this case because, you know, we are married because we want protection from, you know, inheritance, and you know all the, all those tax things. And so, that's ... this week the judge is supposed to decide whether our case is going to go forward – the federal judge, Judge Jones [John Jones III] – whether our case is going to go forward or if they are going to dismiss it based on Baker versus Nelson, and there's, there's a lot of reasons that they should not dismiss it. But, I'm not an attorney, so I can't really speak to that.

BK: Right.

JL: And it's ... since the, we filed the lawsuit on July ninth, and since then there have been – a number of the couples have gotten married out of state because the federal government now will recognize our marriages no matter – based on where celebrated, which they always have. And, so people have been going out of state to get married. I don't know if we are going to ... how many married, unmarried people we are going to end up with by the, the end of this, you know, till the, till the ... there going to have some revisions to the, to the lawsuit this week, so.

BK: So. Right now, you're playing a waiting game.

JL: We are playing a waiting game. We are waiting again. Waiting and waiting [laughs].

BK: Well, I think it is terribly brave that you have ...

JL: Why thank you, Bob.

BK: For those folks who will be seeing this long into the future, probably won't believe this.

JL: That's true.

BK: That this kind of thing happened.

JL: They will think it's absurd.

BK: Yeah.

JL: Why would anybody be denied the freedom to marry.

BK: Right. Whether we all see it or not, I don't ... I doubt that.

JL: Yeah, we, we both were alive during the Loving case.

BK: Yes.

JL: That was the interracial marriage that was fought in the Commonwealth ver ... of Virginia. And it was the Lovings, an African-American woman and her husband, and they were [nods], they, they, they went fought that to the Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court said, you know, "no." [laughs]

BK: Yeah.

JL: You can't do that. And now, if somebody says – even suggests – that, that, you know, an interracial couple

BK: Yes! [Interrupting]

JL: couldn't get married, it would be, you know, thought to be

BK: Yes. [Interrupting]

JL: ... the most ridiculous thing. So. Yeah, another 40 years [laughs].

BK: Well, we certainly hope it's not 40 [JL laughs] years. We certainly do. Have you been active in any other LGB civil rights efforts? This is a big one.

JL: Yeah [nods].

BK: Have you done some other things?

JL: Not, not to any great extent, especially lately. I've done little bit of this and a little bit of that with the churches, and I've gone to marches. We went to the big march on Washington in 2009. And, and have written some articles for newsletters. So yeah, not a real big activist.

BK: Well, you sound very busy as it is.

JL: [Laughs] Yeah. Unfortunately.

BK: We've made some giant steps.

JL: We have.

BK: I, I ... maybe they aren't giant steps. They've – we've made some steps. More than baby, but not giant. Are you aware of what challenges we still have to fight [JL sighs] in addition to the gay marriage?

JL: Well, yeah. We, we – I think in general we have to fight for acceptance among the, the heterosexuals. And, this is just – it’s been stunning. The last years have – just the last year has been overwhelming in, in the way people have just turned around and embraced us. And, it has been a lot people just coming out and saying that they’re gay, and I think gay marriage has had a lot to do with that. You get married, you can’t very well hide it. When Marla and I got married, we were on the front page of the Carrol County paper [BK laughs] in Carrol, Iowa [JL laughs], and something about, you know, lesbians getting married, or you know ... thinking “OK” [looks upward and laughs]. So but, it, it has been a sea change in people’s attitudes. It’s going to, I, I think, the more ... OK, we’ve seen a lot of changes in, in, in the straight community. I think the, a lot of the haters are, are going ... they’re are the ones in the closets now. And, I think they’re still out there. I don’t think they are ever going to go away. We have to always keep are guard up to some extent, I think. And I think within our own community [smiles] – now the way things are – you know, it’s, it’s – you know, we, we now have our seat at the table. And I think a lot of the behaviors and attitudes within our own community are going to have to shape up for that. You know, I was thinking, you know, years and years ago, you just you know, you loved them and left them. And, and, it, it was serial monogamy. And, a relationship that lasted two years was loong [emphasizing the vowel sound in “long”]. And you know, the, the, the joke ... well, the lesbians, you know, tend to hook up too quickly, anyway. Get ... establish the ... exchange the rings to quickly, anyway. And I think that once the rings starts being a little bit more permanent, I would hope that we’ll start being more careful about who we choose, and, and maybe court a little bit? [BK crosstalk inaudible] That’s fun. And, and, and you know, really make some commitments to each other, commitment to the community. And, and that’s, that’s the kind of change that I’m, I’m really looking for. Even among ourselves.

BK: OK. Let me ask ... switch gears just a little bit. What’s been, to you, the most important events in your life, just as a person – not necessarily a gay person, y’know?

JL: Yeah. Wow [shakes head]. I would have to say, certainly getting my degrees – my bachelor’s degree, my master’s degree – meeting Marla, and, and you know, hooking up with her as a permanent partner. Getting married [nods and smiles]. That was certainly epoch making there. Let’s see. Well, when, when my first – when my textbook was published the first time, that was, you know ... at that point you ... you didn’t know I wrote a book [laughs].

BK: No.

JL: Yeah.

BK: Tell us about that.

JL: Yeah. It’s, it’s ... I coauthored it with Doctor Linda Null, and it’s called “The Essentials of Computer Organization and Architecture” – C-O-A, computer organization and architecture. And, it’s in its fourth edition now. We’re finishing that up right now. That’s why I had to put you off till this month because we were working on tear sheets, to get that done. And, it’s, it’s actually selling very, very well for our, you know, in our field. And much ... my hats off to the publisher because the first edition of that book came out in 2003. 2003 was a long time ago.

BK: Yes, it was.

JL: And that was before gay marriage was even legal in Massachusetts. And in Mass – our publisher is in Massachusetts, Jones and Bartlett, now it's JB Learning – and I, in the preface I wanted to thank my partner Marla. And I, I was concerned – I got, got a hold of the acquisitions editor – I said now look you know, I know you are going to want to sell this book at Oral Roberts [deepens voice] University and Liberty University [BK laughs] and Messiah [returns to normal voice] and I said, you know, but I ... you know Marla has put with an awful lot to get this.

BK: Sure.

JL: Took us four years to write this book and that was just the book, not counting all the software I wrote to go with it.

BK: Right.

JL: And, and, he emailed back and he said – I wrote by way of our managing, our production editor, and I asked her to ask him – and he forwarded back [imitates male voice] “you tell her she can dedicate that book to anybody she wants to.” [BK and JL laugh] [JL leans back] Whoa! So, you know, my hats off to Jones and Bartlett for that, and they have ... as far as I know, it hasn't hurt sales at all. I mean, it's, it's done very well. So.

BK: Very good.

JL: Yeah.

BK: Gee whiz. I'd like to get a copy and have you sign it.

JL: Oh. I will, I will be glad to give you – I should, I should donate one to the Center here. I'm always looking for

BK: Yes. [Interrupting]

JL: people to donate my, my copies to.

BK: While we are on the subject of the books, do you have favorite books? Music? That kind of thing? Just, they have particular significance to you in some way – to you and your partner.

JL: Let me think that, about that a little bit. Now, for one thing ... you know, it's funny. I don't, I don't know if this, this, this, this is – has anything to do with being gay, but I – fiction bores the crap out of me. I, I really ... even the classics. I can't stand fiction, and romance especially. [BK laughs] And so, I [laughs], I read, I read a lot of non-fiction – historical non-fiction. And, and of course anything to do with gay people. And the ... some of my favorite – absolutely favorite books that, that I would recommend to anybody – the first one is “As Nature Made Him.” And, if you know, I don't know if you are familiar with the, the, the book – I can't

remember – is his name ... Reimer [David Reimer]? Yeah. And, and this ... he was two twins, two twins boys were born to a couple, and I think they were in [pauses] Oregon? Some place out west. And they – this was in the 1970's – two identical twin boys. They had taken them in for a circumcision, and one circumcision went very badly. And so, the one twin – they decided it was best to remove his external genitalia and raise him as a girl. And it is the most eye-opening book about nurture versus nature, and when people ... I, I think the instruction ... the, the, the piece of that for us as gay people, I mean you know, nobody can make you gay. Nobody can make you male. Nobody can make you female. The story does have a happy ending where Mr. Reimer does ... you know, he gets, he gets rid of the girl trip. He finally, you know, as you, you can imagine went through a lot of mental anguish. And, he finally did get his member restored, and he married a, a woman, and as far as I know, living happily ever after. So, that book is a real eye opener. I recommend it to any – every – you know everybody in the world, but I think it especially speaks to GLBT.

ND: Can I ask you what the name of it was?

JL: As Nature Made Him.

ND: As Nature Made Him.

JL: As Nature Made Him. And,

ND: Thank you.

JL: You're welcome. The other one is "A Separate Creation" by Chandler Burr. And, if you haven't read that one too ... that one talks ... there's an awful lot of stuff in there about, the, the thing – about gender identity and sexual orientation as far as being passed genetically. As they were talking about this – what was it – XQ29 gene or something that is, it passed down matrilineally to men, and they have found a genetic marker for that as far as being gay. The other interesting, there is another interesting piece in that about prenatal hormones ... for, whenever it, it was ... what were they giving? Testosterone to ... it's been 10 years since I read this book. They were giving testosterone to pregnant women, I think to control some kind of, I don't know, morning sickness or something. Well, when they did like 9 out of 10 of these, girls who were born under this turned out to be gay. And so, that was amazing, you know. The, the effects of hormonal ... the, the hormones in the, the womb prenatally. I mean this isn't like I have any issues with being gay.

BK: Yeah.

JL: It's just, just an interesting

BK: Very. [Interrupting]

JL: how that ... and, and they're readable books. They're not terr ... not if you like romances, they're going to be awful, but

BK: No, I'm not a romantic. [JL laughs]

JL: But, but those were two, I, I think of the most eye-popping books

BK: That's great.

JL: I've read as far as GLBT.

BK: Thank you. You've enlightened me.

JL: Yeah. I recommend them.

BK: OK. Is there anything at all that we missed that you'd like to talk about to the [LGBT] Center?

JL: Well.

BK: Anything you thought of maybe earlier that you'd like to talk about?

JL: Well, I, well if I can be permitted to get on my soapbox a little.

BK: Yes, absolutely.

JL: OK. I will ... when, when mother ... mom and I lived, lived here in Harrisburg, we moved at 210 Harris Street which is near Second and ... well between Second and Green, and we, it's right at Penn and Harris streets. We came in ... we were luck, we lucked into this apartment. Mom was a nurse and she got a job at Harrisburg Hospital. We, we actually escaped from our hometown of New Kensington. Things weren't real good there. Her family was giving her a hard time. So, we came here to live. And, so this was a ... again this is 1970, right after the riots, there was a lot of white flight going on, is ... if you will. And we, we were a block from where the riots – some of the riots were here in uptown. The Rialto Theater was devastated, and some new a lot of burnt out buildings along Sixth Street. And there ... you know, when, when we had ... would mention that we lived in the city, you know people would just curl our lip like [makes sour face], "why would you want to live there." [Intentionally dragging out the vowel sound in the word 'there' in an elitist voice] [Laughs] And, you know [in elitist voice], "only the low life live in the city." And, so we, you know, we, we were very happy there. Well, it turns out that the city was so looked down upon, that the only people who wanted to live there were gay people. And, this became the gayborhood.

BK: Yes.

JL: And, we ended up in the, the, the gay ghetto grew up around us, and, and thanks to two men who had been former lovers – Ron Yingling (ph) and Ed Meals (ph)

BK: Yes. Know them both.

JL: Know them both. Marvelous gentleman, and, and they pretty much [hesitates] did their homestead right there at Penn and Boyd Street. And, it just spread. You know, all their friends moved in, and it, it ... you know, at that point I think, you know, Harrisburg could have looked an awful lot like Detroit if it hadn't been for the gayborhood. The gay guys ... nobody wanted us in their neighborhoods. So we, you know, made our own. And, I, I think the city owes a debt of gratitude to, especially the gay men. You know, I won't take any credit for it. The, the gay men who, who stuck out – did their homesteads right there in – along Penn Street, Hamilton Street, Harris Street.

BK: Green Street.

JL: Green Street. All up and down Green Street. And, and, you know, had it not been for, for that we wouldn't, probably wouldn't have this [looks up and around] lovely place here now. I don't know.

BK: The Center.

JL: Yeah, this Center.

BK: You are so right. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

JL: No, that's about it.

BK: That's about it. OK. Well, we really appreciate this.

JL: Well.

BK: This has been wonderful.

JL: Oh, thank you.

BK: Thank you for being part of this project.

JL: Well, I thank you Bob for, and Nancy for taking your valuable time to do this.

BK: [Scoffs] We're happy to do it. Thanks very much.

JL: Welcome.