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Interviewee: Barry Loveland
Interviewer: Korie Lain
Date: March 22, 2014
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Abstract: Barry Loveland was born December 28th, 1956 in Schenectady, New York. After graduating from high school, Barry attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he obtained a Bachelors of Science degree in Architecture and Building Sciences. Following his undergraduate career, Barry got accepted at Eastern Michigan University, where he earned a Masters in Historic Preservation Planning and became very active in the LGBT community. Since his participation, Barry has been an integral member of this community. From developing Montgomery, Alabama's first gay organization to the creation of Common Roads, Barry has demonstrated his drive and his passion for the success and the advancement of the LGBT community. In this interview, Barry discusses in great length the numerous activist roles that he has possessed in his lifetime as well as the opportunities resulting from his selfless work. Also in this interview, Barry reveals the details of his own personal lifelong journey of coming out and what support systems he uncovered along the way as he formulated his own identity.

KL: Okay, my name is Korie Lain. Today is March 22nd, 2014, it is 1:46 in the afternoon. I am here at LGBT center in Harrisburg interviewing Barry Loveland. Mr. Loveland is it okay for me to ask you a few questions about your involvement with the center in central Pennsylvania?

BL: Yes.

KL: Great. Could you please state your name and that you are willing to be interviewed?

BL: Yes, Barry Loveland, and I am willing to be interviewed for the project.

KL: Okay. So you sign that at the end. Okay. Alright, so if you want to start off just telling me a little bit about yourself, your name, your date of birth.

BL: Barry Loveland. I was born on December 28th, 1956 in Schenectady, New York.

KL: And growing up, your parents, like what did they do for a living?

BL: My father was a contractor manager for a commercial glass company, had a—went to a series of jobs working in that field. And my mother worked for forty years for General Electric Company and she was doing technical work kind of work, working with people who were in the drafting division of GE and processing a lot of their drawings and paperwork and things.

KL: Do you have any siblings, or?

BL: No, I am an only child.

KL: [Laugh]. Me too. Do you like being an only child?

BL: It has been some benefit. [Laugh]. I kind of also wish I had siblings in some respect because it would have been nice having later in life siblings to, you know, spend time with cause now—I'm—my parents are both deceased so I am kind of on my own at this point.

KL: So, can you tell me a little bit about in New York where you grew up, the town, and maybe anything with your...

BL: Yeah. I grew up actually in a suburb of Schenectady [New York] called Rotterdam and it was an older suburb. My school that I went to was Drakeburg (?) High School and elementary school. It was kind of an interesting school because all of it was K-12 all in one building, so it was a pretty small school. We had like a 125 in the graduating class.

KL: Was it a religious affiliation?

BL: No, it was a public school. But it was a small school district that was kind of sandwiched between two mega districts and it had never consolidated with another district and—after I graduated it actually did consolidate with another district, eventually. But it was kind of a neat way to grow up because you could participate in a lot of things at school and it was very much a small community. And you knew everybody in the class and almost everybody in the school for that matter. So it was it was kind of neat. And I didn't really come out until I was later and went away to college, so.

KL: The small community environment, did that really influence your childhood, do you think?

BL: I think so yeah. It was, it's nice having kind of, without siblings, it was nice kind of having a family of, you know, other kids at the school that could, you know, I could be friends with everything, so that was nice. And, you know, I think... I always knew that I was different growing up, but I couldn't really put my finger on it, when it was really early in my—yeah—my life. But, you know, by the time I was even five or six years old, I could sense that I was like different than other kids, had different feelings to other kids. You know, I was...the immediate neighborhood that I grew up in was, there were more girls my age in the neighbor than boys, so I kind of gravitated toward playing with girls, not boys [laughs]. Which was, you know, partly by just the fact of, you know, more girls there but I think also I was just more drawn to wanting to play with girls and related better to them, [laugh]. So... so that kind of gave me a sense that I was different than other kids my age. So... and then later when I got into like about junior high school, I knew that I was gay. Didn't necessarily know what that label was but I knew I was attracted to same sex so...

KL: So Junior High, you mean like middle school like 7th and 8th grade?

BL: Yeah. Yeah.

KL: So, did you, like what was it like growing up in your middle and high school years? What kind of things were you involved in, any activities or any...

BL: Yeah, I was pretty active in school organizations. I was in the student council. I was the editor of the high school newspaper—for four years, I was the youngest editor that they ever had, so and I was also an editor of the yearbook and was really active in the environmental club. The environmental movement was kind of in its infancy at that point. Earth Day was kind of like a new thing so I was active in school clubs, you know, as well as a couple of community organizations and environmental studies and recycling and all those kinds of issues.

KL: So, with the small community, was it the same kids were in the same types of activities or would you say...

BL: A lot of it, yeah, there were a lot of students that were in various clubs and sports and things like that. I was never involved in any sports but went to a lot of the games for the school and stuff, so it was pretty much a tight-knit group of kids.

KL: So, where did you head after high school then?

BL: After high school, I went to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, which is in Troy, New York.

KL: Near—I am not familiar with New York, so is that nearby or....

BL: Yeah, it is about twenty miles from my home.

KL: Okay.

BL: So, I did live on campus, came home on the weekends a lot, so I still got the full campus life.

KL: Sounds very familiar to my experience.

BL: Okay. [Laugh]

KL: The only child experience. [Laugh]

BL: So, I wasn't a commuter student or anything like that that—I stayed on campus a lot, so that was a—that's a very challenging school. It's like one of the top engineering schools in the country. I actually went there for architecture, studied architecture. And it's a pretty rigorous program for that as well. And graduated there with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture and Building Sciences.

My campus was—at the time that I was there or started there, there was no campus LGBT organization. It was definitely, it was like, I'd say, 80-85 percent male population because it was heavy in science and engineering so at that time there were very few women students. It's gotten a lot more, you know, equalized since then, but then it was pretty male oriented. So, there were a lot of fraternities and so forth, I didn't join any of them [laugh]. Of course by then I knew I was gay, but I hadn't really come out, per say, and so when I was in, I guess my sophomore year, I

started feeling like I really needed to do something, you know, to act out on what what being gay was. So, I started going out to gay bars in Albany, New York, which was...

KL: In college?

BL: Yeah, while I was in college.

KL: So, you would have had to be 21, right?

BL: Yes. [Laugh]

KL: [Laugh] Just making sure.

BL: Well, actually, at that time, the age, the drinking age was 18 in New York State.

KL: Oh, I didn't know that.

BL: Yeah, so I was able to go out before I turned 21. Although the first experience I had of going out to a gay bar, I was absolutely terrified of course because I had never been to anything like this and so I didn't know what to expect or what to do. So I, somehow I found out, where at least one gay bar was in Albany. I think it was some article in the newspaper which talked about these bars and everything, so I got up the courage and I went to the bar and opened the front door and immediately the first thing that greeted me was this big sign that said, "You must be 21 to enter this establishment." [Laugh] Even though the drinking age was 18, there was some kind of issue that you could only be 21 or more. Well it turned out that nobody was ever carded for that, so I, I closed the door and I left. So I thought, well I'll have to wait until I am 21. And then I thought, well you know, I am just going to go try again and see what happens when what I go inside. So I went again and I opened the door and no one ever carded me, no one ever asked if I was of age, so I just went in and I started, you know, started going there as kind of a place to hang out for a lot of the time that I was in college. It was kind of my, you know, other hangout place [laugh] besides college.

KL: You did that on your own?

BL: I did, yeah.

KL: That has to be very intimidating.

BL: Yes, yeah, and I was, you know, I was really nervous about it. I was afraid that I—how am I going to meet people and everything else. But, you know, eventually, I started meeting people in there and got some friends and everything through that. So, that really helped through college because, you know, we didn't really have anything going on at school, as far as a group.

KL: Even with the large population of men, you know, there wasn't...

BL: No.

KL: That's surprising to me.

BL: No, not immediately, but at some point, I think it was my junior year. I- I always read the college newspaper cover to cover because—I was—journalism was kind of my second career choice and I was editor of my school newspaper and always interested in journalism. So, I noticed in the college newspaper, one issue, a really tiny ad that said, "Wanting to start gay group or gay organization or support group or something,"—and so—and it had a phone number. So I called the phone number and it was another male student on campus who wanted to start a group, but didn't, you know, know anybody else on campus who was gay either. So, I got up the courage to go meet him and we spent time talking and everything and so eventually, there were several other people who called him and we got enough to start a first meeting, have a first meeting, so I was one of the founding members of this gay group on campus, the first one that they ever had, which was kind of neat so.

KL: And this would have been in the....

BL: It would have been in the, I graduated from there in '79, so it would have been like '77, something around there, yeah, 1977.

KL: So, would you say, from childhood to your college years, like, what support systems, besides this group, did you have? Were there any other ones other than when you went to college?

BL: Not really, no, I think it was really just this group...this group, and a few people that I met through the bar. The bar was called 8 Ball [laughs], 369 Central Avenue in Albany [laughs]. it's funny how you remember these things, but, you know, —it's—growing up and and and doing that, was kind of my real social outlet.

KL: But none in high school, at all?

BL: Not in high school, no. High school was very, I was very closeted. I think that, well, there was there was a point beginning in my senior year in high school that I think that they were on to me, if you will [laugh]. They sorted of figured it out because I never had any girlfriends and I was like kind of just one of those guys that, you know, never never dated, never was involved in some of the things that the guys really wanted to do like parties and stuff.

So, at some point, they, I think, they figured it out and there were a number of times during high, my senior year of high school, where I was kind of like called names and things like that, you know, it's just one of those things that kids just go through, especially in my generation.

KL: From the teacher, it hasn't changed.

BL: Yeah, yeah.

KL: Middle school and high school are tough years.

BL: Yeah.

KL: So where did you head after college then?

BL: I went to graduate school at Eastern Michigan, Eastern Michigan University [Michigan].

KL: That's quite a haul, right?

BL: Quite a leap, yeah. And I graduated from there in 1980 with a Master's degree in Historic Preservation and Planning. I should back up and say though that during my, I guess it was senior year of college, I met my first partner.

KL: That is important.

BL: Yeah, and he had a big influence on my life at that point because he was from New York City so he was definitely a little bit more worldly than I was being from a smaller city in New York. And he was Jewish. I'd never really, you know, known very many Jewish people before so it was quite a different experience for me to be close to someone who was Jewish. He was very involved in LGBT stuff. At that point, he was involved with the—they had a local Gay center in Albany and so he was involved that and he was involved with a campus group. He was going to Albany State University.

KL: So, also very active like yourself?

BL: Yeah, so he at State University in New York at Albany. We met through someone who was in that support group at RPI that knew him through a mutual friend or something and kind of introduced us and so he, he was graduating in 1978, I was graduating in 1979, so he was going back to New York City so we had met before that, maybe about six months before he graduated and so we kept up a relationship throughout my senior year of...

KL: Long distance?

BL: Long distance, which was, you know, difficult to do, but we spent weekends together, which was nice. I would go down to New York City pretty much every other weekend to see him. And he, after he graduated from SUNY Albany, he applied to Rabbinical schools. He wanted to be the first openly gay rabbi ever to be admitted to Rabbinical school. Unfortunately, they all turned him down, they'd never had an openly gay student before. The one, Rabbinical school, said it was an interesting question and they would think about it and, you know, they would, you know, get back to him and maybe reapply another time or something. So he didn't quite get in that way. But he did go to Jewish theological seminary, which is one of the Rabbinical schools, but they have a non-Rabbinical program in Jewish Studies and Jewish History. So he was admitted to that program, but he was the first openly gay student that they had at JTS [Jewish Theological Seminary], which is right next to Columbia University.

KL: Would you say that he had any different support systems growing up and through his high school years than you did?

BL: Probably, yes.

KL: Okay.

BL: Yeah, I think it was a little bit more open in New York.

KL: Just due to the environment of the city?

BL: Yeah, and of course he was, you know, exposed to the whole city. There was much more gay life in the city in New York City than in small cities like Schenectady or Troy or whatever. And he helped get the— there's a Jewish synagogue, gay Jewish synagogue in New York, that he helped found when he was a student there. He also was a founding member of the New York City Gay Men's Chorus and he's the he is one of two remaining original members of the chorus. He's still on the chorus.

KL: So, then you guys, so you were together your senior year and then....

BL: Then, when I went away to college in Michigan, we just felt we couldn't keep up that long of a distance relationship because that was going to be extremely difficult. We both knew that, so.

KL: So then in Michigan, like where did that lead you in your life?

BL: Michigan was kind of an interesting thing. I—it was the first time that I had been really far away from home.

KL: How many hours?

BL: It was probably about a ten-twelve hour drive from from my home. So yeah, it was like definitely packing up the car and saying goodbye to the parents [laugh] and driving off so that was quite an adventure. So, the school it was a new program that was starting that year in Historic Preservation Planning. So I was among the first students and I was the first graduate of the program. When I got to campus, I didn't really know too much about Ypsilanti [Michigan], it's where the school is. It's about ten miles from Anne Arbor, which is where U of M [University of Michigan] is, big school. But I didn't know too much about the city or the campus or that area of the the country. Come to find out, there was already a gay campus group there. They had an office.

KL: So it would have been like in the early 1980s?

BL: Yeah, it would have been, well actually 1979.

KL: Oh, 1979.

BL: Yeah, I went there from Fall of '79 to December of '80 is when I graduated.

KL: And this—they were already established prior to your arrival?

BL: Yeah, that already had that established for some time, I don't know how many years, but it was pretty active and I met the students who were really active in that group and it kind of gave me a new support system, a new group of people to hang out with and yeah...

KL: How did you find out about it?

BL: Well, they had—it was like all in the campus newspaper and they had posters up around campus about it and they were, they were pretty well organized. They had an office and drop in center for students to drop in during the day and they had like a library and just a place for people to hang out. There was... so, yeah, it was pretty neat. So there was that, and then also the University of Michigan was just ten miles down the road and Anne Arbor. Anne Arbor had gay bars and they had a very active student union, gay student union, including a full-time staff person that was just devoted to LGBT issues and programming and things like that. They had dances, I think once a month and...

KL: So you became active with...

BL: Yeah, so I became active with all those groups and stuff. And went out the bars and it was kind of like, you know, great for me, because I was like “Finally there was a big accepting community here and, you know, and I was like "Wow!" Definitely different from the campus life as an undergraduate.

KL: So almost like the true college experience for you finally?

BL: Yeah, it really was and I felt like I was, you know, having a great time.

KL: Did that make you want to stay there then once you were done with your education?

BL: In a way, yes. [Laughs] And a funny part of the story comes next, which is my first job out of school was going to Montgomery, Alabama. [Laughs]

KL: That's pretty funny. [Laugh]

BL: [Laugh] So going from, yeah, going from a completely accepting liberal campus environment, liberal city in Michigan to this ultra-conservative Bible belt.

KL: Did you visit before you moved?

BL: I visited it once before I moved. And the only reason why I took the job was because it was such a great job and I knew that coming out of my school with my first job that I was never going to find another job like that. It was, basically, it was the state preservation architect for Alabama and, you know, I was basically in charge of all the preservation activities for the state owned historic sites and all the preservation programs that related to historic buildings.

KL: At like 23 years of age?

BL: Yeah. [Laugh] And they were thrilled to get me because they were looking for someone for a long time that would be willing to move to Montgomery, Alabama. [Laugh]

KL: Did they know that you were you were gay when they hired you?

BL: You know, I think initially, probably not, but I didn't make a secret out of it. And I, when I got there and started meeting some of the staff, I realized that there were a couple of them on staff that were gay and so I did come out to them and they told me they were gay as well. It, it was great because it was a very supportive work environment and eventually everybody at the place that I was working, which was the Alabama Historical Commission, eventually everybody knew I was gay and and...

KL: And you would say, still supportive?

BL: Yeah, they were very cool about it and it was kind of a liberal office within a very, you know, a very conservative city.

KL: Yeah, that was what I was wondering about, what about after office hours?

BL: Yeah, after office hours was kind of a wasteland. They were two gay bars in town and so I did start going out to some of the bars and meeting a few people. But I was, you know, there were no gay organizations whatsoever in Montgomery [Alabama]. So, I ended up meeting this guy named Clint, who was from Florida, who was a student at the—there was a college there that he was a student at, it was a Methodist College, I think. He also felt the same way that I did. He kind of wished there were LGBT organizations in town that, you know, for something other than just going to the bar. So, we got together and talked about it for a while and we decided that we were going to start some organizations. So we went to Birmingham, Alabama, and got- went to some of the organizations up there because they did have a few organizations there, so we started talking to people about starting something in Montgomery and a lot of them said, "Oh you'll never start anything in Montgomery." [Laughs] But, the MCC [Metropolitan Community Church], Birmingham, we talked to the pastor there and he said that, you know, "I would like to start a mission church there," and he said, "I would be glad to support- support your work there,"

So we got him to come down, we put up fliers in the two bars in Montgomery and we tried to spread the word, you know, through different people we knew and everything. So, we met the first time in one of the bars, cause we didn't have any other meeting place to go to. So we got people together, I think there were like 20 people that showed up!

KL: Wow.

BL: Which was just, that blew our minds because everyone was saying, "Oh you'll never get anybody to come to a meeting like that." So, so we were very excited about that and we were able to get a church started there. We were able to get the Unitarian Church to let us meet in there facility. They were very supportive, again, a very liberal bastion within a pretty

conservative area. But, and we were able to, from that in addition to the MCC Church, we started a little gay men's chorus, which there were about 15 or 16 singers. We also started a support group, just a discussion group called Unique But United [UBU], so that was kind of fun and it really kind of started a, you know, more community developed, developing more of a community in that city for the first time and, you know, people were finally coming out to these different events and things and feeling more of a part of something other than just going to the bars, so that was very nice.

KL: Did you ever, cause you seem to have such perseverance, you didn't ever experience any setbacks in... especially in Montgomery?

BL: Yeah, we did get some, some threats that people had written us letters or sent us something that indicated that they knew we were there and they didn't like it. So, it was a little intimidating at times and we were always watching out whenever we had some kind of event or some kind of program at the Unitarian Church, we always had someone kind of looking out as a kind of a watch to make sure there wasn't any suspicious people coming around that might be looking to do some harm to us or whatever.

KL: So you would say that individuals of all ages were a part of your efforts in Montgomery?

BL: Yeah, we had a lot of young people, a few older people, but it was definitely more younger generation people, I think, and I think part of that has to do with the fact that it was such a closeted and conservative area that older people tended to be more afraid to come out to these kinds of things so.

KL: How long did you stay in Alabama?

BL: I was there for 3 years and I think the second or third year that I was there, we decided—there was a statewide gay conference that was held in Birmingham [Alabama], I think they held like two of them, and then I went to one of them, I think I went to the second one up in Birmingham, and we asked them if we could host it because it had never been outside of Birmingham, so they agreed, so we ended up hosting the third annual gay conference in Alabama and we had Virginia Apuzzo, who was the executive director of national gay and lesbian taskforce at the time, as our keynote speaker, and we had another keynote who was Reverend Troy Perry, who was the founder of the Metropolitan Community Churches worldwide so both of them were, you know, for the time and for what we were doing, it was pretty amazing that we got them to come to Montgomery, Alabama, to participate in a conference so they were pretty, you know, pretty amazing speakers and really energized a lot of people down here, I think.

KL: So, then where did you head after Alabama?

BL: After Alabama, I found out from a mutual colleague who worked for the National Parks Service that Pennsylvania was looking for a Preservation Architect, so I decided to apply and came up for an interview to Harrisburg, and it was with the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission, which is where I work still. And I got—obviously got the job and moved to Harrisburg. At that point, I was, I had I had my second relationship with someone I met in

Montgomery, his name was Tommy. And Tommy was willing to move with me so he decided to move up with me. So, we moved up to Harrisburg together and everybody at PHMC [Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission] knew I was gay 'cause I was moving up with my partner and everything was pretty cool about that. Everyone was pretty accepting.

KL: Did you, would say that you moved from Alabama to Pennsylvania based on the job opportunity, or were you just ready for a change? Like what was your real motivation?

BL: Well, I think both. I definitely wanted to get out of Alabama because I just [breathes] I had enough of the very conservative politics and atmosphere there so it was time to get—to move on and you know...

KL: Did you hear that Pennsylvania was more liberal by any chance? I am just curious how you decided Pennsylvania?

BL: Yeah, I did hear it was a little bit more liberal. I didn't know at the time that it was more liberal than Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. [Laugh] And a lot of, you know, there's that old saying, that I forget who it was that first quoted it, but the saying that Pennsylvania, you know, is Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and Alabama in between. [Laugh] So, I was moving from Alabama to Alabama, but I didn't quite know that. [Laugh]

KL: [Laugh] I was just wondering that, just wondering.

BL: Yeah so, but, you know, Harrisburg at the time Steve Reed was newly elected.

KL: So this would have been like the 19....

BL: This was like 1983, fall of 1983, and and so there was—I think there was a feeling of optimism. Harrisburg was kind of on the rebound that point, and, you know, the gay community had started coalescing with different organizations so you know, I think there was, at least in my feeling, it was definitely more liberal than where I was coming from and it was organized and more optimistic so...

KL: Did you, when you got here, did you, like how did you become affiliated with the gay community like just by bars or socialization or word of mouth?

BL: A little of both. I—we started going out to bars to try and meet some people and I find out there was an MCC, Metropolitan Community Church, in Harrisburg so we started going to their services and that was—they were being held at the Friend's Meetinghouse and so we started going there and then also, at the Friend's Meetinghouse, there was another group, Dignity Central Pennsylvania, which is a gay Catholic organization but they also were welcoming of every faith so we decided to start attending some of their events, they had like potluck dinners and they were having those kind of arrangements where the MCC would have a—or Dignity would have its service, its mass, at one time and then they'd followed it by a potluck dinner and MCC would follow upstairs with their their service after that, so, a lot of—there was a lot of mixing at the potluck dinners between the two groups.

KL: So it's ironic, that like, that the systems of support are the church and the bar?

BL: Yeah. [Laughs]

KL: There like polar opposites.

BL: Yeah. [Laughs]

KL: Do you believe that they give different types of support? Or seem support just in a different form?

BL: Different kinds of support, I would think, yeah, I mean, the the churches were a supportive from the spiritual side but also just from a feeling of normalcy. Feeling like you're in a more normal setting talking to people rather than in a bar situation which is, you know, anything but feels anything but normal as a kind of natural setting. So... and it in you don't feel like your in that sort of highly charged environment of, you know, people are there to pick people up and that sort of thing, so it was definitely a much different kind of support.

KL: I know that 1980s was the age of email, but did you maintain contact with all the people that you established in Michigan and in then in Alabama when you moved to Harrisburg?

BL: Not very much, no. It's kind of sad in a way because, you know, they....

KL: Just seems like you've had a significant role in a lot of those things.

BL: Yeah, yeah, it was, at that time, it wasn't easy to keep in touch with people. I mean unless you were able to pick up the phone and call, you know, writing letters and cards and things like that just takes time and effort and thought, you know, so you you tend to sort of let those relationships fade away and so it's a—it is a shame because there was a lot people that I would love to be back in touch with or kept in touch with over the years because they were, you know, pretty important in my life throughout the times, so.

KL: So, in 1983, you came to Harrisburg and then then where did your resume go?

BL: Well, yeah, I started going in, like I said, MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] and Dignity and I eventually became president of Dignity even though I'm not Catholic [laugh]. Dignity at the time was really the one social kind of a group. A lot of people went there just for the social activities and outside of MCC, which did have some social activities, Dignity really was kind of like the only game in town in terms of non-bar activities for LGBT people.

So it was it was started in 1975 by Jerry Brennen, who was active in the LGBT community. He was one of the first activists really in Harrisburg. So. I met Jerry when we started going to Dignity and he was, you know, he was kind of like Mr. Dignity and was really responsible for keeping the group going for so long. You know, I got, he got me interested enough to become president for a few years, and I served, basically, I think three or four years with that. Then got involved with the gay and lesbian switchboard of Harrisburg, which was also created in 1975 and

that was a, I think, kind of a turning point in my activism here because I really got got very involved in that. Became president, first co-director, and then president of the switchboard for several years and during that time I, you know, did a lot of things to get the switchboard more organized. You know, it hadn't—it had been kind of a loose kind of organization for a while and didn't have very big budget. So I started trying to do some more fundraising and got—raised the budget level up—and got an office in Planned Parenthood, which was a larger office than they had had before. They... I was able to start like a community directory of organizations and resources and so forth and published that.

Also started a group called Common Roads, which is the the youth organization. At the time, it was not called Common Roads, it was called the Bi Gay Lesbian and Youth Association of Harrisburg, but eventually, it evolved into Common Roads, which is still in operation today, twenty years later. That was probably the most important thing that I did here in Harrisburg. Just having, just knowing that you are kind of helping a lot of gay youth feel more accepted and have an outlet other than their high school experiences.

KL: By youth, how how young would you say?

BL: I think the group ranges from like 16 to 24 or something like that. I think they might go from as early as 14, but I think it is more 16 to 24 range.

KL: How do you think your high school career, you know time, would have been different if, you know, you maybe possibly had....

BL: Yeah, I really think it would have been a lot different if I'd had that support. 'Cause it just, you know, you just feel alone, you just feel very alone and, you know, you feel like you're the only one and you don't know what to do, you know, you really just don't know what to do. So—and when I was on the switchboard, I'd volunteered first as a person on the phone. They had operated a phone line that was in the evenings from like six to ten Monday through Friday and you would get calls, of course a lot of the calls were just "Where are the bars or where different resources or stuff?"

But, we would get these calls from kids who were 14,15,16 years old and this was before Common Roads had started. You know, your heart just breaks, because you can't—you don't know what to tell them, where to go, what to do. You know, you can talk to them and say "Look, you know, your life is going to get better once you get old enough, you can do all these different things. You know, it will get better as the saying goes now. But—it—you just couldn't really give them any place to turn to.

So that was one of the motivations for starting the group, cause, you know, we get all these calls all the time from kids and we'd we'd like to be able to say, "There is a support group that meets on Friday night at," you know, so finally and the reason why I kind of was like waiting to start the group was because I knew the kind of, even though Harrisburg was a little bit more liberal than where I was coming from at the time, I knew that we needed to have some way to ensure that nobody was going to say, "Oh they're just recruiting," you know, there's just a gay man starting this group getting young people to meet and all that stuff.

So I knew that we can't we couldn't have a gay male or even probably a lesbian female who was going to be the moderator and the facilitator of the group. So I was looking for a woman, a straight woman [laugh], so there would be absolutely no question in anyone's mind that it was above board, and that nobody was trying to use it as a way to, you know, meet meet young people. So it turns out that a guy that worked for me—an architect in the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission—his wife was involved in her-her profession was basically in social services and she was involved in an organization that helped youth in Harrisburg for a number of years and she had gone to a hearing for the Department of Education and had heard some testimony from a young man from Lancaster who had talked about all the harassment that he faced in high school and just all the problems that he faced in his life coming out as a young person and she was very moved by that and she said, you know, went home that night to her husband and said, "I really want to do something for the gay community." So, he came to me—he knew I was gay—and said, "My wife would really like to get involved in the gay community, how could she help, you know, with something." And I said, "Tom [laugh], she is like the perfect person for this youth group," I said "I want to, you know I've been wanting to start this youth group for so long."

So we had lunch together and we talked and we decided this this was what we need to do. Her name was Sharon Potter and she's-she's now moved to California, but she was, for a number of years, a facilitator for that group, and she was the perfect person. I mean like she was like so accepting and so loving and so caring about those kids. They loved her, you know, they just really did and so it was really a great situation, I was kind of like the back house person that did all of the organizing and the mailing out of packets to all of the high school guidance counselors and all of the private counselors and psychologists and so forth in the area. We, you know, we contacted everybody that we could think of, all the youth resource organizations. Just to let them know that we were there and we were a resource for LGBT youth, and, you know, low and behold all that work paid off and we got a really good core number of people show up for the first meeting and I knew that was going to be important so that we kept them coming back because, you know, you can't, if one or two show up, you are going to have a situation where it's never really going to take off so we got a good core group of about seven or eight kids the first meeting.

From there, it just blossomed, we just kept getting more and more. Of course, the more kids that would call the switchboard, we were able to tell them about the group and, you know, it just grew and it got to be like 15-20 kids in a meeting. Which was just great to see, you know, they had developed such a support family, really among themselves, and so I was really very happy. Yeah, that was one of my main accomplishments. [Laugh] If I never accomplish anything else in the gay community that would be enough of a legacy.

KL: So I'm curious though, you moved around like Michigan-- New York to Michigan to Alabama then to Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], but you stayed in Harrisburg, right or did you...

BL: From here, yeah. From here, yeah, when I moved here in 1983, I've been here ever since and, you know, it's become really my home. I feel probably more at home here than if I went back to Schenectady [New York] because it just feels like it really is home at this point.

KL: So, with it being 2014, what would you say is different within the support systems for a teen for them now as opposed to when you grew up in New York?

BL: Yeah, well I think definitely having Common Roads and Common Roads really has grown under the leadership of the Center here and other people that have carried the torch in between that. They have now groups that meet in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]—or yeah Harrisburg—and also one that meets in Lancaster and one that meets in Carlisle. So they they really have developed the program nicely here. There's another group that's not Common Roads but is sort of affiliated that meets in York as well under Planned Parents jurisdiction.

Yeah having-- having all these youth groups meeting in this area and just knowing that they have resources that they can, you know, rely on has certainly been a lot better. And also the schools, I think, they've come a long way because they developed a lot of gay/straight alliance groups and LGBT groups and right in their own schools that becomes a support, you know, for them as well. So, yeah it's really changed dramatically, I think, from 30-40 years ago.

KL: Did you have the support of your family like because I know you didn't have the youth groups and you didn't have...

BL: My parents were really good about my being gay, they they kind of discovered that when I was still in high school.

KL: You didn't tell them?

BL: I didn't tell them, they actually discovered a gay novel [laugh] in my room so but they were they were okay. My mother was not so okay at the beginning, but she came around. My dad was better, I think because he was—he was a lot on the road with his job and so, I think, he felt kind of guilty in some ways of not being around as much. So I think he, he was more supportive to make up for that [laughs].

KL: But, with your mom, you just think she just because of the time and her generation?

BL: Yeah, I think that initially she just had trouble with it and—but she was, she came around very quickly.

KL: Did she?

BL: Yeah cause when I met Jordan, the my first relationship, you know, she was at first very cool to him but then eventually she started to warm up to him, and, you know, she realized first of all he was—he went out of his way to be very charming with her and he was very charming person anyway so—you know, she eventually just came around and realized this was who I was. You know, later in life, she was very supportive.

KL: Did your parents then become as you became so active, did they become active too? Or they were just supportive to you?

BL: They, they didn't become active in the community at all and I didn't really push that because I had—they were not the type that went out and got involved in community organizations anyway so, so I wasn't about to suggest that.

KL: So, how are you so driven?

BL: I don't know [laughs], I don't know what drove me to do that, but yeah I've I've always had that feeling that I've wanted to contribute something to the community so yeah.

KL: So in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] after 1980s, you're still in the same employment and Common Roads, have you had any other affiliation?

BL: From 1990, now—pretty much, from 1990—well when I was involved with the switchboard, some of the other things that we did, I I was very good friends with or became very good friends with Dan Miller and he's a local activist and also he ran for—well he was elected as the city controller and had been on city council and has ran for mayor the last election, did not win, but—so Dan, I had met Dan, I guess back around in 1990 or so when he was still working for a CPA firm across on the West Shore and he ended up getting fired from his job because he was involved with some gay activism work that I was doing with him...³³around the issue of gay bashing, things that have been happening in in Harrisburg.

KL: A predominantly male firm this CPA?

BL: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, so anyway, he was--he was on appeared on television and then he ended up getting fired from his job so I, you know, I kind of rallied around with a number of his other friends and tried to support him. He ended up starting his own firm at that point and then his former employer turned around and sued him because he took a number of clients with him. Which, you know, just goes to show there were a number of clients that saw the value of Dan as a person, you know, whether he was gay or not, they didn't care so.

KL: This would've been in the mid 1980s or the...?

BL: It would have been around 1991...

KL: Okay.

BL: Or 1992, I believe.

KL: Different from the sentiment when you came here in the 80s or would you say maybe the same?

BL: It was—I think things were gradually starting to get better in the 1990s, but it's hard to say. It was not a fast pace let's put it that way [laughs]. But Dan, Dan is the actually the one who pulled me into being co-director of the switchboard with him cause he-- he first became a co-director with someone else, that person had to drop out, and he asked to come do that with him so that kind of got me involved more involved with the switchboard. Also, around that time, we

were, we were having lunch every day. We've, we've been having lunch every day [laugh] during the week for probably 20 years.

KL: Every day?

BL: Every day, yeah. Which is kind of a special thing for us I mean he works downtown, and I work, you know, a few blocks away so we would meet in the middle at a restaurant and have lunch. You know, we were kind of like the same mind, activists who are really trying to do things for the community. So we would get together and strategize different things we could do and that sort of thing so...

KL: So, he was definitely instrumental in your role in Harrisburg?

BL: Yeah, yeah, he really was. So we were—one day we were having lunch and we'd heard that there was this festival that was kind of like a gay pride festival but it was called the Unity Festival and it was started, I think in 1998 or '99 something like that. They had had, they had had three of these I believe, community festivals, and the woman who was involved in organizing it decided that she couldn't do it anymore that she—that the venue that they had, Ski Round Top, was were the last two were, they wouldn't let them come so they decided, she decided, I guess at the last minute, that we're not going to look around for another venue, we are just going to stop having them so.

So when we found that out, we decided, you know, Harrisburg really needs to have a gay pride festival, other cities have them, and we really need something for Harrisburg, so we decided at lunchtime [laughs] that we would start planning an event. This was like, I am thinking March or April, and these were typically held in July, the end of July. So we started, you know, in like three months, we planned this whole event and we held it at Reservoir Park in Harrisburg. A lot of people said, "Oh, you'll never get people to go to Reservoir Park for a pride festival," you know, everything, so but we got a pretty good turnout, we were very pleased with it. So that was the beginning of what today is the pride festival of central Pennsylvania and it's been going on for about 20 years so that was, you know, a great...

KL: I would say [chuckles].

BL: Yeah, it was a great thing to get started. The other thing that we did was, we, we knew that there were other LGBT communities that had like recognition events, where they would get give out awards to people who were doing things for the community and so forth. Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] had never had one of those either so we started a fall recognition banquet and the first one was held at Miss Garbo's Tea Room [laughs] in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which is no longer there. But it was a lesbian-owned restaurant and they had a banquet room in the back. So, we worked for them and setup the event and had the first first award's events and awarded you know, quite a number of awards to people, who had been really been instrumental in starting a lot of the LGBT organizations before I came town before Dan got involved. So, it was really a nice thing that we were able to honor some of the people who were really the pioneers and got it got things started. That was nice, and that event has really continued as well. There was-- was a

few years were they didn't have it that I think well it's now called FAB, Fall Achievement Benefit. So it's it's become essentially that event that's involved in in that.

KL: You are just so driven.

BL: [Laughs]

KL: Do you think that your drive helps you or would help anyone, maybe, formulate their own identity as being gay or maybe just... is it just maybe like the desire everybody wants to fit in or everybody wants to have that connection, would you say like that's were your drives stems from cause you don't seem like you had a horrible experience or...

BL: Right.

KL: You just had a high school years that, unfortunately, you had to keep under a different perception that I think you may have wanted to. But other than that, it's just you just have all this positive energy and this drive, I'm just curious where it comes from.

BL: Yeah, yeah, I don't really know, other than the fact that, you know, I've just always felt wanting to get involved in making things better for the community and for whatever group I am working so, you know, I was involved from high school in clubs and different things. I've always been, I've been, I'm a well-organized person, I've always been someone who really wants to get in there and really organize something and do something that is positive and, you know, for change and for things like that. I think probably going back to my years spent in environmental work, you know, that probably gave me a lot of my drive to try and make to a better world.

KL: And then just the medium changed for you?

BL: Yeah, exactly. It just became part of, you know, self-awareness of being gay and also wanting to make that part of me feel better and have a better world to live in as well, so yeah I think that's probably a part of it.

KL: That's just amazing. You have a very long list of accomplishments especially for Harrisburg. So, when you, you talked a little bit about coming out in college, what does, like how do you put that into an experience or is it not an experience... like is everybody similar to- for- or different for all gay people? I am just curious how you can put that into words.

BL: Well, it's tough to say that it is similar for everybody because I think it really depends on the kind of campus environment they're in....

KL: So based on support systems?

BL: Based on support systems—

KL: Okay.

BL: Yeah I think so, and, you know, having a support group once we were able to start a support group on campus really was like night and day for me as far as campus experience because, you know, I was in, I was in the dorms, I was around straight, seemingly straight, you know, guys all the time. And of course, they're all talking about girls and they're all talking about sports and they were all talking about things that I am just not interested in [laughs].

So—so, it really was a lot different kind of environment once you got the support system that you could go to and say, you know, this what I am going through, what are you going through, and you know, it really did help.

KL: So coming out means more beyond than just telling one person?

BL: Oh yeah, coming out really is a life-long experience for gay people because, you know, every person you meet for the first time, you are coming out to because--

KL: I never thought about that.

BL: --They don't know, they don't know you're gay and so it really, it's it's something you deal with your entire life.

KL: What are some perceptions that like straight people, would you say, incorrectly perceive about people that are gay that you have encountered maybe in your years since college?

BL: Yeah, that's a tough question. Well, you know, there's- there's a lot of perception that, you know, we're only-- the only part of us that's gay is sexual desire and that's really not that. It's really part of your whole being. You know, it's your, you know, affectional desire and it's your, you know, wanting to be part of a relationship with someone, it's- it's your friendships with your people, it's just it's really part of your whole being.

(Camera stopped filming due to a dead camera battery.)

KL: Okay, so the last question, I wanted to ask you was were there any other important events that we didn't get to cover in this interview that maybe had a big impact on your life that maybe you wanted to discuss?

BL: Well, I think one of the things was meeting my current partner. I met him shortly after I came to Harrisburg. I--the person that I moved here with, Tommy, we had eventually a falling out because just he just had a lot of issues with alcohol abuse and just a lot of other kinds of problems, personal problems, I think that he just couldn't deal very effectively. So, we ended up splitting up, probably about a year after I moved to Harrisburg. I met Tom not too long after that probably about six months after that. My partner, Tom, has been a terrific part of my life and has really been a great partner and a great companion. His--the relationship, I've with him has been strong and it's been 29 years. So, it's really had such a major impact on my life and, you know, he's a great person, he's an artist...he--after, he worked for the post office for like 25 years, but he really now is doing what he loves to do which is working part-time in gardening, he loves gardening and he works a lot with his artwork, as a painter, and really has blossomed, I think, in

his own, you know, personal life. Just because he loves-- now loves what he does and does what he loves, so it's great—great thing for him and great for both of us. So, yeah, that's had a big impact on my life and, you know, I think just coming to Harrisburg and getting involved in the community here, I think, has been a major turning point for me in my life, and I really, I've stayed 30 years and I've enjoyed it and I wouldn't go anyplace else, I don't think at this point.

KL: Turning point in what sense?

BL: Just in really how it affected me in so many ways because my job, I really enjoy my job and I enjoy my personal life with friends and being involved in different groups and so forth over the years. Just feeling like I've made some difference or impact on the community here, so all of those things have really been such a big change and pushed me in a different direction that I might've had if I'd not come here.

KL: Anything else that you wanted to add?

BL: I don't think so. Other than the fact that I sort of took a break from being very active in the community from like the mid-1990s to just a couple years ago because my mom had Alzheimer's so I spent a lot of time as a caregiver for her. Which was important for me of course, but, you know, it was something I felt I had to do. So I took a step back from that and—but recently getting involved in the center here and starting the LGBT History Project, which this is part of, is really exciting for me because, you know, I was involved a lot early on myself with-- with different gay organizations and the gay community in general in Harrisburg. But, also the fact that I knew so many people who were the real early pioneers who started a lot of the first organizations in the area. It was it was a way for me to reconnect with that and really honor that so.

KL: Well, I definitely thank you for your time today and this concludes my interview with Barry Loveland on March 22nd, 2014.