

LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA

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

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

Documents Online

Title: LGBT Oral History: Dan Maneval

Date: July 24, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – Maneval, Dan – 072B

Contact:

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

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Interviewee: Daniel Maneval

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Videographer: Lonna Malmshiemer

Date: July 24, 2015

Place: LGBT Center, Harrisburg, PA

Transcriber: Talya Auger

Proofreader: Sarah Goldberg

Finalizer: Mary Libertin

Abstract:

Daniel Maneval was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania on October 3, 1947. In this interview, Daniel speaks frankly about his experiences growing up as an only child, about the homophobic violence he has experienced, and the gay organizations he has lead and participated in throughout his life. He specifically speaks on his experiences with his parent's death and the independence he was forced to cultivate as a result. He first became involved with Susquehanna Valley Gays United and was a founding member of Homophiles of Williamsport. He also was a critical component to leading a protest against Anita Bryant, and participated in several Rural Gay Caucuses. He was forced to move out of his family home after homophobic gang-related attacks on his property, and experienced gay-bashing outside a bar in Williamsport. Daniel reflects on the differences he sees in the Williamsport LGBT community today. This interview provides an in-depth history of gay life in Williamsport from the 1950s to today.

LM: Okay, we're rolling.

BL: Okay! Well, my name's Barry Loveland, and I'm here with Lonna Malmshiemer who is our videographer today. And we're here on behalf of the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. And today is July 24, 2015, and we're here for a second interview with Dan Maneval. This interview is taking place at the LGBT Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And Dan, do we have your permission to record the interview today?

DM: Sure, absolutely.

BL: Okay. And we have a consent form that you can look over later and sign at the end of the interview, and we'll take care of that later. We're here because we had a little bit of a technical glitch with the first—beginning of the first interview, I should say, and so we wanted to make sure that we got your full story, and especially the early part of your story, so I'm probably going to spend a little bit more time focusing on your growing up and your coming out process and so forth so...

DM: Okay.

BL: So we can start at the beginning, as to, when were you born?

DM: My birthday is October 3, 1947.

BL: Okay. And where were you born?

DM: Williamsport, Pennsylvania

BL: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your early years, growing up in Williamsport.

DM: I was an only child, and I suppose I was spoiled. I was very definitely attached to my mother and not to my father—and led a sheltered life. We were very poor. And definitely led a sheltered life. I had

health problems, I have allergies, I am allergic to animal fur and to dust, and we had a dog and a cat and I was sick all the time with asthma until we figured it out and I had skin tests done and then I was on medication throughout all of my school years because of that, and until we got rid of the dog and cat, which I didn't want to do. You know, everybody wants a pet, and it stunted my growth. I did not grow up, I was the shortest—well the shortest boy in my graduating class of high school [Barry grunts in acknowledgement in background] because the prescription medications that I was on stunted my growth, in all ways—in all ways. And I was picked on, even at that point, and it wasn't have—didn't have anything to do with “gay,” you know. And I was a scrawny little kid at times, and I was a fat little kid at times, and the prescription medications really did these horrible things to me, until I went into my college years and I was able to get off the meds, when we got rid of the dog and the cat.

And then, unfortunately, my senior year in high school my mother died of cancer, and right after I graduated college, my dad died of a stroke on Easter Sunday, and so at 21 I was an orphan, if you can be an orphan at 21, you know. And so I was not ready to be alone in the world. But it was the beginning of the change in my life. You know, I had not been—I knew something was different in me from way back when, when I played with my cousins, the boys would be in the room watching football, and the girls would be in the room playing with dolls—I'd be in that room with them, playing with dolls. You know, just something was different about me, and I didn't know what it was, and I know there were kids in my high school graduating class that were gay and out, even then, but I didn't. You know, I was too afraid, I was way too afraid, because I had had a sheltered existence—you know, I hadn't been exposed to it at all. And it took, after high school, after college, to realize, “oh my gosh, this is how I'm different” and to do something about it.

BL: Did you have any sense, when you were in high school, that it was an attraction to same sex or...?

DM: Definitely! I definitely felt the inclinations, you know. Biologically, I was not ready yet either, you know, but I knew that I was different, and I had a pretty good idea of what it was, and I thought “oh my god, nobody else feels like this, do they?”

BL: So, your parents, what – what did they do for a living, or what did they—how was the...?

DM: My father was a jack-of-all-trades, and I couldn't follow in his footsteps no how. He was mechanically inclined—I scored a 2% on mechanical on coder tests—you know, totally different. He worked as a furniture delivery person; he fixed washers and dryers, appliances, restored and repaired furniture, and he had his own little business on the side. And you know, we were very poor, and my mother was not a—was a home-maker. She just stayed at home and took care of me, you know. And he had a little business on the side, a photography business, and I wish I would have followed through on that, because I loved to take pictures when I was younger. But after he passed away, I left the photography business go, you know, and he wasn't making much money on it, but it was certainly his—his major hobby, and he wasn't home much! He worked all day, and then on Saturdays he would work, and he would go out and he would do private things, like fixing people's washers on the side, you know. So he wasn't home much, so I was mother ... I hate to say mother-dominated, because I love my mother. We were very close, but...

BL: In terms of, of school, what was your school life like? I mean, did you get involved in a lot of activities at school, or were you just pretty much just academic focused?

DM: No, I—during the high school years, I started—I don't want to say coming out, but I did start to be more sociable, and I did become involved in activities, not physical activities, but like, I was on my school newspaper two years. I was president of a club; you know, I was active in things like that. You know ... in extra-curricular activities yeah. And I got in—I—I liked that, and you know, it brought me out

of my shell a little bit, and you know I was—I was liked at that point by people ... you know. And that was important to me, you know, because during my elementary school years I wasn't liked, I didn't think.

BL: Hmm, and then you graduated from—what school did you graduate...?

DM: [speaking over Barry] Williamsport High School in 1965, we're having our 50th class reunion in a couple of weeks, it's going to be crazy. And then I graduated Lycoming College in 1969 [Barry says okay] with a BA [Bachelor in Arts] in Elementary Ed. and in French, which I taught for a couple of years. But I ... then it—then the bubble burst, and I wasn't as good at teaching as I thought I would be; and so I just eventually got into office kind of work.

BL: Okay. What was college like for you?

DM: Difficult! [laughs] I learned how to play cards during college [laughs] ... you know. But it was ... the courses were difficult. I—I did okay. I didn't do a grade A, that's for sure, but I—I didn't get Deans List. No, but I graduated in 1969 with a BA degree, and like I said, I had my Elementary Education and my student teaching, and I taught elementary for a couple of years. I enjoyed my college years, I'm glad I did it, but I'm not using my education, and I haven't ... you know, but I don't regret it.

BL: Mmhmm, and did you have any coming out experiences in college, or was it all ... later? [speaking over each other]

DM: [speaking while Barry is ending question] Everything was after that, everything was after. I was a very later bloomer. I was—I came out *way* after Stonewall. I would say it was probably nineteen-seventy-thr—see my parents died, and then I—and then I had a rough time getting used to being independent. So then I had to, you know, to—to start all over again really, so it was ... I would say it was probably about 1973 when I sort of started doing something about it, with my life, you know. And finding gay bars to go to, even though they were hours away, you know. And then one thing led to another on that.

BL: So what was, kind of, the sort of—the moment—that you sort of made an initial gesture towards, you know, recognizing that you're gay. Or did you like, go out to a bar for the first time? Or how did you kind of make that...?

DM: I went to a gay beach in Atlantic City.

BL: Oh.

DM: And a man picked me up. And I was thrilled to death, you know. I felt dirty afterwards. I took two showers, because I felt dirty afterward. But, that was the beginning, and I knew something about it was right.

BL: Mmhmm. And from there what, what sorts of things did you do to try to connect with other—other gay men.

DM: Well, I've told this story many times. I went to a bar one time in Crescent, Pennsylvania. I think it was called the Hideaway or Hideout or something like the Castaway or something. It was 2 ½ hours away at least, but we ... That's what you did at that day and age. This was the mid-1970s, and things weren't as public, and we didn't have computers, and we didn't have laptops, and we didn't have cell phones, you know, so we just did it via magazines and newspapers. And there were gay newspapers that I picked up somewhere along the way.

So I went to this bar in Crescent, Pennsylvania. And I went up—and I had never been there before, and I went up to the bartender, and I said, “do you know anybody at all here from Williamsport?”

And he said, “oh yeah, sure!” And he pointed somebody out to me, and, so I went over and I started talking to this person; and we introduced ourselves; and the names weren’t familiar at all.

But, I said, “well, where do you live?”

And he said, “well, the Western end of town.” – And I said, “well so do I.” And I said, “would you mind telling me what street?”

And he said, “Beaver Street.” And I said, “Well so do I.” ...

And I said, “What number?” and he said “656.” And I said, “well, shake hands with 659.” [Barry laughs in background] And that’s how we met.

That’s how we met. And that was Gary Norton. And, then, from that point on, he was abo ... about right at that point, he was about ready to start a gay group in Williamsport. And I said well, call me, let me know, come over and tell me. And the first meeting of this group was in his house, right across the street, and so I went, and that was the beginning of what I guess you might call gay activism in me. You know, it changed my life. And that, that was after, I—I forgot about Sam Deetz and SVGU [Susquehanna Valley Gays United] in—in Northumberland [PA], and that was my first gay group experience, and that was before that.

BL: Okay.

DM: But, so I went an hour down to Northumberland to go to my first gay meetings, and that—that thrilled me to death that I met gay people, because I saw a number of gay people in Williamsport at that time, but SVGU was my first exposure to gay groups, and I really liked it, I really liked getting to know people through that non-bar atmosphere.

BL: Mmhmm, and this group again was called what? Susquehanna...

DM: Susquehanna Valley Gays United. It was somewhat political in nature, and that floored me, that there was a whole political scene that I didn’t know anything about. Because I just wanted to meet people; you know, I just wanted to know other gay people, to know that there was other people out there that felt the same way that I did, you know. And locally, you know, I didn’t want to go two hours to meet up with people like that.

BL: Do you remember about what—what year that was that you first joined that group?

DM: I’m going to say mid to—early to mid—well no, it was after 1973. So I’m going to guess between 1973 and 1975. Yeah.

BL: Okay, cool. Were there many people that went to that group?

DM: No, it was a small group. I would say maybe eight or nine.

BL: Okay.

DM: And it varied, people came and went, and I found out that's the way it is in gay groups that I've been in, you know. They come and they go ... you know. But there was a core group of six to seven people that were there all the time. They had monthly meetings in Sam's apartment, as I remember.

BL: And, did you go there frequently, or did you ...?

DM: [speaking over] I went there every month because it was—it was a great outlet for me. It was what I wanted, what I needed. And Sam Deetz is the one that I would have to pat on the back, and say that he brought me out the furthest out of anybody that I know.

BL: And did they have many sort of social activities, or was it mostly just political discussion?

DM: [speaking over] It was mostly, no, it was mostly talking about activities that were going on and political things that were becoming involved. Like, shortly after that was the beginning of the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus. And then I—after I ... I didn't go to those meetings as well. I started meeting other people from other parts of the state, such as Joe Burns from Allentown at that time; and Mary Nancarrow, at that time, was from Shippensburg. And these were real go-getters. I really enjoyed meeting them, and I admired them then, and I admire them now for their spunk and their drive to do something with the gay movement that I wasn't doing, but I learned how to do—you know learned how to do it from them.

BL: Mmhmm, so once you met Gary and they -- he started that group --

DM: That was the very first gay exper—gay group experience in Williamsport, and we named it HOW, Homophiles of Williamsport, because we wanted to join up with other homophile groups. There was Le-Hi-Ho, Lehigh Valley Homophiles, that Joe Burns was in, and there was HOPS, Homophiles of Penn State, so we wanted to get that “HO” in there somehow, so we called ourselves HOW, Homophiles of Williamsport. And that was—we rented a PO Box, because at that time, like I said, there was no computers, and I think getting the word out was very difficult. We placed an ad in the paper and people could write to a PO Box to find out more information or to find out when and where we were meeting, you know.

BL: And about what year was that? That was...

DM: That would have to be 75, definitely not before then.

BL: Mmhmm. So how—how did things go with that group, kind of?

DM: Yeah. We—I'd say HOW was pretty successful for a while anyway. Our purposes were educational and social more than political. People didn't want to be political, they didn't want to be “out there.” I mean “out there” literally. You know, they didn't want to expose themselves to the general public, because in Williamsport, it's still backward. It was very, very backward then. I mean, the gay movement was just getting underway really, and it really wasn't getting underway in Williamsport at all. But we just needed an outlet to meet up with each other.

So Susquehanna—well ... I'm sorry. First of all this—this was the HOW group. We just met socially and my—one of my biggies was education. I—I wanted to educate both the gay and the straight about what our lives are like, you know, and how hard the coming out process can be. And so that was one of my biggies was education. So I started speaking in college classrooms and doing what I could in that regard to help. You know, I would speak about them and then there would be question and answer, and I think that was very vital and very beneficial to those that attended.

BL: Mmhmm, and how did you make sort of contact with the colleges, and find people interested in welcoming you into their classes?

DM: [interrupting] Yeah, a female friend of mine was a Psychology professor at Penn College, and she invited me to speak in her class almost every semester. And then one semester, this is a tough story, one semester she followed me out to my car in the parking lot. And I didn't know why; she had never done that before. And when she got there and she said goodbye to me, I said, "well why did you come out with me, you never did that before?" And she said, "cause one of the students, I heard them say after class, threatened your life."

BL: Wow. Hmm. So that must have been a shock

DM: Yeah. That was—that was a rude awakening to what kind of negativity was out there toward me and toward my kind of people.

BL: Mmhmm, that's amazing.

DM: Mmhmm, that was from a college classroom in the 70s.

BL: So at that point did you feel—did you still feel like you wanted to continue with...?

DM: Yeah, it didn't stop me at that point, it didn't stop me. There were other things later on that stopped me, but that didn't stop me. It was shocking, but I still—I still spoke a few times after that but not as often, not as often.

BL: And were other—were there other places you spoke as well besides ...?

DM: I spoke to a sorority group one time, yeah. And, let me think ... Mostly in the college classroom situation. That was about it I think.

BL: And what other kinds of things did the group do? Did they have any special kinds of events that you remember that you enjoyed?

DM: We had socials. We—we got into rap sessions—we would have a monthly meeting and then we would have a monthly rap session, where we didn't have business but we sat around and talked about our situations. One month we might have religion as the topic, one month we might have coming out as a topic, one month we might have bisexuality as a topic. You know, we tried to keep things going. And one month we might not have any topic at all, just talk ... just talk. But then the other monthly meeting was the business meeting where we had to conduct the business of the organization, and raise money to pay for a PO Box and raise money to do things. Like we tried to have a social event—which would cost us money because we'd have to rent a hall—maybe two or three times a year. We had nice parties, we had nice dances, and it was successful for several years.

BL: Did you always have the events like in people's houses, or were you pretty much renting halls?

DM: [speaking over] There was a—some people did not want to come to people's houses because they were afraid about that. So we did do some events that way, and we—the rap sessions were done in people's houses, like mine for example. And, but a lot of meetings were held in public places, like we'd rent a space at the library, or we'd rent a space in churches. We went through a lot of churches. And it

was interesting to find out which denominations would accept us and what wouldn't, you know. So yeah, we met in church basements a lot.

BL: And what kind of denominations were accepting [laughing] in Williamsport?

DM: Luth—Lutheran was very accepting. Lutheran was very accepting. A Methodist was very accepting. And...I think that was about it. The library was very accepting.

BL: Well that's good, yeah.

DM: But we would have to pay a fee, you know, so we'd have to have money for that.

BL: And what else, what else can you tell me about sort of gay life in Williamsport? When—when did they first start having, like, gay bars, or you know, places to go?

DM: There was way, way—almost before my time ... Back in the 1950s, I'd heard, that there was a gay—I don't even want to call it a gay bar, but a gay room, in a downstairs of the Ross Hotel in Williamsport, which is no longer there. There would be a room behind the curtain where two men could go and dance if they wanted to.

BL: Wow.

DM: That was back in the 50s. After that, there wasn't anything until we had gay groups going; we had gay bars going. It seemed like everything was going all at once in the 70s. And we had a series of gay bars—we went from one place to another, you know. There was one bar that we were in that was very, very nice that used our money and closed it down and be, became back to a straight bar when they kicked us out, you know. And we were homeless once again. And we just ... We floated from bar to bar to bar. We've almost always been in the downtown area though. That the one corner of downtown, we've had almost every bar in that little—the little little vicinity. I's really funny.

BL: So where is that in Williamsport?

DM: Court and Willow is the intersection. It's right behind the court house. And we've had almost every bar in that neighborhood at one time or another.

BL: Hmm, that's interesting. Do you remember the succession of names of bars that were in Williamsport?

DM: The first one that I can remember is Kelly's Grill on West Forrester, which is still there, but it's definitely it's a straight bar now. And then we had, oh my gosh, there was several on the alley that I don't remember the names of. We had Peachy's Court in the alley, which was still—it's not there anymore. We had one up in Linden, Pennsylvania, for a short period of time called Sips. We had the twenty—Twenty One? No, we had the—one of the college bars that we had one summer before the college kids came back, and then they kicked us out. I mean, we were a transitory group. We were just transitory. The longest one we had was the Old Corner. We had that for several years. That was the nice one that we were kicked out of when they remodeled it and it became a straight bar. But we really had a good time there, dancing on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and really good crowds. That's where we really grew, I think, is when we had the Old Corner. Because it was big, it was a good size.

BL: Yeah, one of the things that we're trying to do with the history project, is to figure out where a lot of these places were so that we can document them for, you know, future nominations to the national

register for example, because a lot of this history is, is—is, if we can identify place-oriented things we know, we know, you know where things happened with importance to the community.

DM: Well I can, in Williamsport in terms of the bars, I would definitely say at the corner of Court and Willow. You could go and stand there and I could point in every direction. It's really funny. [Barry laughs] It's really funny...And there's still one bar there! The newest bar is a lesbian owned bar, that's been there for several years now, called The Planet. And it's very successful, but it's very small. But Kathy is a great person and she makes a real good go of it. She owned a sub shop before she bought this bar. You know, she knows how to run a business. And she's making a good go of it, and it's very popular but it's very small! And I don't know where the gay people are going, I really don't.

BL: Okay, let's see. And you were—you were not in the military at any point, correct, right?

DM: No, no.

BL: And, I'm just trying to think of some of the other ...

LM: [videographer speaking in background] Want to pause for a minute?

DM: Yeah I want a sip of my water [reaches down for water]

[video one ends]

[video two begins]

LM: Well, it is now ...

BL: Okay. Alright, so yeah, maybe we can talk about the situation, I guess it was the Bloomsburg Fair that Anita Bryant...

DM: While we were going pretty strong in HOW, along came Anita Bryant with her nation-wide crusade against gays. Well, she was scheduled to do just a singing appearance at the Bloomsburg Fair which is the nicest fair in the state of Pennsylvania in my regard, and it's only about 45 minutes away from Williamsport. So, we as a gay group thought, well we gotta do something. Because her appearance there—even though it was just a singing engagement, she posed a threat to our kind of people, our community, you know. So HOW was not very thrilled about that.

So Gary—Gary Norton and I and a couple of members from NOW, the local chapter of NOW in Williamsport, started up our separate group to sponsor a rally against Anita Bryant's appearance at the Bloomsburg Fair. And this organization did sponsor a rally. We had speakers in Town Park in Bloomsburg, and then we marched to the fairgrounds and marched around the fairgrounds the day of her concert—not the night of, but the day of. And once the fairgrounds got wind of it, they asked us to be quiet and leave. But during that, that, the rally, I was one of the speakers. In fact I think I was the first speaker in Town Park. And there were TV cameras there. And it was from like from Channel 16 or Channel 28, one of the Wilkes-Barre Scranton Stations.

And they televised a part of my speech on the evening news that night as to what was going on and what was there. 'Cause on the Channel 16 they were telling about ... there was going to be a rally in Bloomsburg in contradiction to Anita Bryant. They were talking about that for days and days and days before it happened. So naturally, they were going to go there and cover it. So my speech made the airwaves. Well, after that, there was a teenage gang in my neighborhood at home that didn't like that. They didn't like the fact that I was on TV and they didn't like the fact that I was gay, and they didn't like the

fact that I was living there in their neighborhood. And they started attacks on my house. And they threw things—tomatoes and—well it got worse, the tomatoes became stones, the stones even at one point became bricks, and eventually they had knocked out almost every window. And I was forced to move [becoming emotional].

BL: Yeah, that's amazing. And what happened with that whole process—you obviously went to the police, correct?

DM: And they did very little. I mean, every policeman that was there ... 'Cause every time there was damage, yes, I called them. Yes, they wrote it down, they wrote it up. I had no proof; I had no witnesses. But I knew who it was, you know. And they didn't—they didn't ... I don't know what they did. I don't know what they did. But some of them were more receptive in taking down the information than others. You know, I mean, some of them you could tell were sympathetic to what was going on, and some of them weren't. But eventually the house ... I had to move. I could have—my life could have been over. Attacks could have happened, I could have been hurt.

So I moved, I moved out of the area to a small trailer ... This was my family home: I inherited it from my mother and my father, and I was an only child. So I lived there, it was my home, and so I had to give it up ... And I lived in a trailer for five years until I thought it was safe to go back to Williamsport, until it all blew over. This also of course caused the death and demise of HOW, because people were just too afraid to come to my house for anything.

BL: Yeah, that's amazing. So what did—what did that do to the whole climate in the gay community up there? I mean it sounds like it really was a chilling effect.

DM: Well it—it like it closed the organization at that time, and it took a few years for us to rebound. Bars were still going on, but in terms of organizations ... Eventually I started another one up while I was living out of a town in this trailer in Linden, and I believe that was West Branch Gay Support Group we called it. It didn't last very long, but it served a small—it was like a small HOW. You know, people were still afraid to come back out, but they did—some did. And we got new people. Again it was through a PO Box, and through newsletters, and just word of mouth and telephoning and so forth. But that only lasted a couple of years, you know.

A friend of mine was—gave me enough encouragement to say, “Hey, I'll help you start a new group if you want.” You know ... so that's what happened. And then later on down the road we had our longest lasting gay organization which was Susquehanna Lambda, and through Susquehanna Lambda we were able to start our own Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of North Central Pennsylvania, which was a big help for a number of years, in terms of referrals of people to us and to other places.

BL: And what approximate time frame would that have been that they started the...?

DM: That would have been the late 80s into the 90s. Yeah.

BL: And do you know about how long the switchboard was in existence, there?

DM: I'm going to say four to five years. It died from lack of money. Susquehanna Lambda was the supporting organization for it, and both started to go downhill. We left the Switchboard go first to keep the organization going. Because we were taking money from one treasurer to another and so forth, you know. And one thing had to go first—so we had to let the Switchboard die first from lack of funds. You know, we had some very generous people in our community that would not attend meetings but that would give us money, you know, and that was wonderful. Those people I miss to this day, because you

need that financial support—you know, regardless of what you're doing, you need financial support. But eventually Susquehanna Lambda also died from lack of people ... You know, they came for a while, they got the encouragement and help that they might have needed, and then they left, you know. But there were some people that stayed with the groups until the very end, you know, and that was wonderful, you know. And I think I got a lot of education out of it and a lot of friends out of all of the groups, you know, some still to this day. So I don't regret anything, I regret maybe being too public too fast back in the day, but ...

BL: Did you do any work on the switchboard?

DM: Oh yes, yeah.

BL: Did you man the phones or ...?

DM: Yeah. We had a phone in the office, in the AIDS resource office as a matter of fact, but we also had it capable of being transferred to people's homes. So if people didn't want to go to the office and work out of the office, they could do it via their homes. So yes, I was a switchboard volunteer during most of that time. We all did—I did like one night a week on a rotating basis so, you know.

BL: And what were the kinds of calls that were you getting on the switchboard there? Was it a lot of informational calls, or...?

DM: Mostly, mostly yeah. Surprisingly enough, it was not threatening or not discouraging at all. It was mostly encouraging stuff, people wanted to know, you know, where there was a meeting or where there was a contact, or...

BL: Mmhmm. Did you have any like peer counseling types of situations? People needed to talk to someone, or troubled about their being gay, realization of being gay?

DM: Yes. We all at that point—it depends on how much they wanted to get into it, you know. We were not trained counselors by any means. You know, we were trained by the Harrisburg switchboard to do the Williamsport switchboard. But after that we had to tell people, “you know we're not paid professionals, like we're not psychologists or psychiatrists or anything like that.” But we did offer help to a certain extent, you know. We talked people through things. One of our greatest accomplishments was talking somebody out of suicide. *That* we were not trained to do. We had to. The person was on the line, you know. And there was also a helpline organization in Williamsport at that time that, you know, could handle the call as well. And we worked with helpline on referrals. But this call came to us. It was a gay suicide. So not necessarily a gay person, but a person who thought he might be gay, and was very unhappy about his life, to the point of contemplating suicide.

BL: And how did that situation work out?

DM: Well eventually, we met this person. We talked him into coming to meetings ... We met this person, and he, I think he got the help he needed. He eventually moved to Harrisburg. He became a Trans, and went through the operations and to my knowledge is still living in Harrisburg as a woman. And so we—that's our proudest accomplishment on the switchboard—is that we saved a life, and we changed a life for the better, because that's what “he” wanted to be a “she.” [Laughing] This was way before Trans became as popular as it is nowadays, you know.

BL: Yeah, that's amazing, and you know it sort of goes to illustrate how important switchboards were back then, because of the need to reach out to [Dan says “exactly”] people who, they had no other person

to talk to, so yeah I'm sure that was a very vital service up there. What other kinds of things toward the end of HOW did they do? What kind of activities were they involved with?

DM: Well, some of us were involved with the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus, not all of us, but some of us. Well, I was. Gary was for a while. In fact I think Gary was one of the co-presidents for a while. So that was ... They had meetings quarterly I believe it was, in various locations throughout the state, so it made it difficult to get to meetings. You get to meetings when you could, and where you could. But the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus was definitely the political group of the day for the state. And it was the rural gays, like Harrisburg—I hate to say Harrisburg was rural, but it wasn't the Philadelphia, the Pittsburgh. It was everybody else in between, from Allentown, Williamsport, Wilkes-Barre, State College, Harrisburg, all of the other communities that weren't Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

BL: And what sorts of things do you remember being involved with, with that group?

DM: That was—the Rural Gay Caucus was a political group. They worked on getting bills passed for protection, which is still an ongoing thing today, of course. Way back then, I don't think we ever dreamed that we would see ma—I didn't think I would ever see marriage equality passing in my lifetime, but it has. You know I think that was a biggie, that was a real biggie. And now there's a bill that's just being introduced again on discrimination and harassment and so forth. So it's very exciting to know that we had beginnings on that, and the Rural Gay Caucus was working on discrimination issues.

BL: And they had a conference I think, didn't they?

DM: Yes. One of the wonderful things from the Caucus, was that we had an annual conference. I remember the first one was at Delaware Water Gap at some hotel that we took over for a weekend. That was absolutely marvelous, you know. And we did that yearly, until, again, interest started to wane. But they were wonderful state-wide conferences where we would have workshops. It was the case of everybody being able to get together, and almost it ... party and enjoy the fact that here we are, you know, look at where we're at, look at what we've accomplished, and look at where we need to go.

BL: Mmhmm. What kind of involvement was—did that group get, did they have a lot of people come to those conferences, or...?

DM: The first one was the biggest one, yes. We took over a hotel. And I don't remember how many people there were, but there were several hundred. Several hundred.

BL: Wow, that's amazing.

DM: Yep. And I remember it was at a—I think it was at a Howard Johnsons at Delaware Water Gap at Stroudsburg [PA]. I think that's what it was. But I remember we took it over. We had several hundred people there: good workshops, big fancy Saturday night dinner, and then a dance afterward. There was a speaker invited, but she didn't show. Elaine Noble was a US Congresswoman at that time who was gay and out. She was an invited guest to speak but she did not show. But we still had a wonderful successful conference.

BL: Wow, that's pretty amazing. And what—what year was that, do you remember?

DM: I'm gonna guess late 70s. The Caucus was basically in the 70s, so I'd say late 70s, maybe into the early 80s.

BL: Very good. What—let's see, what do I want to ask here? In terms of your religious experience ... did you—were you involved in any churches, or religious organizations?

DM: Yeah, my mother and I were Catholic, I still am. I've come to grips with that in terms of my sexuality a long time ago. I have a firm belief in God. I believe he created me and created me this way, for a reason. I have been—I was involved in Dignity [Gay Catholic Group] for a short period of time down here, in Harrisburg. We tried to get an MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] chapter going here in Williamsport several different times, unsuccessfully due to lack of people. We did start one, and we did had it going a couple different times, we just never achieved enough to get it official. There is a very good UCC, United Church of Christ in Williamsport that is very gay-affirming and gay-welcoming. I did want to mention that, because the pastor has been very actively involved in our groups.

BL: And do you still—do you attend church anymore? Or do ...?

DM: I still go to church, yeah. Yup, every—most every Sunday.

BL: And how do you feel about the way the Catholic Church is ... involved [laughing] a little bit, maybe?

DM: [speaking over] Yeah I'm very—I'm very mixed feelings about that, you know. I realize I should go to some church where I would be more...accepting, where they would be more accepting of me, because the church obviously doesn't know about me. You know, I'm just another face, you know. But yeah, I should go to UCC, but I don't, my schedule doesn't allow me to go at that time. But you know there are certainly other churches out there that are better suited for me.

BL: Do you have any thoughts about any certain events in your life that you feel were really strong turning points in how you—how your life turned out, or how your life was lived?

DM: Well the biggies would have to be the death of my parents, and the Anita Bryant story. Those were both life changing.

BL: And what—in terms of the changes that you have seen, especially in the Williamsport area between when you first came out and started getting involved in groups to today, maybe you could talk a little bit about kind of a contrast in that, and what life today is like, maybe growing up in a rural area in North Central Pennsylvania.

DM: While we don't have a gay group per se in the community, I am very pleased that there are gay groups on campus—both Lycoming College and Penn College of Technology. Penn College of Technology gay group just had a gay week in April that was very successful. They brought in speakers, they brought in films, they had a drag show. They had a different activity every night of the week and that was wonderful. Some of them weren't very well attended, but some of them were. And then, I'm very excited that there are gay groups on campus at two high schools. Williamsport High School and Jersey Shore High School, which is a suburb about 15 miles away, have gay groups on campus—thanks to gay students who are going to stick their necks out, you know. And I think that's what it requires, you know. But they seem like they don't have any problems! I—I see, I go to a lot of plays in the Williamsport area, and the high schools, and I see obviously gay guys on the stage that are obviously being accepted, you know. And I think it's come a long way. I think it has come a long, long way in our Williamsport area in terms of acceptance. I think it's got a long, long ways to go, but I think it's come a long, long ways. I'm thrilled, I'm thrilled.

BL: That's good. In terms of your own personal relationships, have you had any long term relationships with men, or just...?

DM: No I never have. There's a void in my life, but after my parents death, I mean, I learned how to be independent. And I—it would be very—now, now I'm old, so I think it would be very difficult for me to lose that independence. I like being able to come and go as I please. I like living by myself, I really do. But I—I yearned for a relationship for a long time, and now I really don't care anymore, you know. If it happens it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't. I've just become an old stick in the mud maybe, I don't know. I think my time for that has passed, you know. I think, you know, if it's going to happen, it's just going to happen, but I don't look for it to happen. Yes, when I was younger, yes, I was out looking, certainly, certainly. But I'm not out there looking anymore, you know.

BL: Okay. Anything else that you may want to add that I may have missed in our conversation?

DM: I am thinking and I know that there was something else that I wanted to get to you, and I don't know what it was. Hmm.

BL: In terms of your experience in like going out of town to different places, were there certain cities that you went to frequently, to go like out and meet people and so forth or...?

DM: Well, let me think. I went to Atlantic City, I went to Rehoboth Beach after Atlantic City—the gambling took over and the gays left and went to Rehoboth. Bars—I probably would say Harrisburg. State College had a beautiful bar—players on Saturday—Sunday nights. Wilkes-Barre had a beautiful bar, once in a while, you know. Just travelling two hours in almost any direction would—you'd find something, you know. And we had our bars in Williamsport too.

BL: Okay. [addressing videographer] Lonna, can you think of anything that I...?

DM: Yeah I know that there's something I'm missing and I don't know what it is.

LM: Yeah I'm trying to help you there, but I...

DM: I don't know what it is at all. I'll think of it two hours from now [laughing]

LM: Well, we can always do another one, next year.

DM: Yeah [all laughing]. Oh my, oh my. Yeah, this was faster this time. Last time was an hour, as I remember. But I don't know—and we got started late, this was all—maybe it wasn't an hour, but I thought it was.

LM: You were very nervous, you—this is a much better interview.

DM: Really?

LM: Every which way

DM: Really?

LM: Every which way.

Okay. Well I knew—now I know what to expect [laughs].

LM: Not just because there was a technical difficulty. You were very, very nervous, and I'm impressed with how at ease you are now.

DM: Well that was my first time [laughing]

BL: You're getting very good at it, so keep practicing every year [laughing]

LM: So next year...

DM: But I'm killed to think that I'm—there was another topic, I know there was, and it was a—it was a negative one, but there was another negative one. I know there was—Anita Bryant, and the threat on my life, and there was another something like that ... Oh! I know what it was.

LM: Okay. You're going to tell another story, we have to stop.

DM: It's a short one, it's a short one.

LM: I suddenly got a buzz in this.

BL: Oh.

DM: It's a short one.

LM: And I don't know whether it's because the mike shifted ...?

DM: Oh, maybe, I've been—I've been touching it, yeah.

BL: Can you hear anything?

LM: What was that? Well,

DM: Testing, testing.

BL: Yeah, testing.

LM: I think it's alright.

DM: Okay.

BL: It's okay to proceed?

LM: I don't know why this is making a sound ... hmm. Go ahead, because I think we'll have enough time.

DM: It's a short little—no it's a short little story. I just wanted to add one other short little story. One time when I was coming out of one of our gay bars in Williamsport, I was pursued. And I'm not a fast runner, and I got beaten up –

BL: Oh my goodness.

DM: --which required stitches in my face.

BL: And this was somebody that was outside the bar, kind of waiting for someone to come out?

DM: Apparently, apparently. And just in case of—I—you know, I was seen coming out of a gay bar, therefore I am gay, you know. And I am, you know, open and obvious and but he gave pursuit and chased me down, and I got beat up on Market Street, which is one of the busiest streets in town. And it wasn't bad, but it was bad enough that I had to go to the hospital and have stitches put in my face.

BL: And what bar was that, do you remember what the name...?

DM: [sighing] That may have been coming out of Kelly's, one of the first ones, back in the 70s.

BL: Okay, mmhmm. Wow, and did you—did you go to the police and report it, or did you...?

DM: Yeah, you know I don't—I don't honestly even remember, you know, I remember I went to the emergency room, and I didn't realize how bad I was because I had been drinking, you know, and they said "well we have to do—we have to put stitches in your head right away." And so I had a headache for a couple of days, and stitches for a couple of weeks.

BL: And were there a lot of incidents like that up in Williamsport? Do you know that other people ...?

DM: If there were, they were undocumented. People were too afraid, especially back then. They were just way too afraid to have their name out there in public! Way too afraid. I don't remember that making the paper at all.

LM: So did that—that experience change the way you behaved in any way?

DM: No. [laughing] I'm a brute for punishment. [laughing] No, it didn't, but it was another one of those awakening experiences that it can happen to you.

BL: Yeah I mean it was certainly a different time, back then, I think. Everyone was a little reticent, afraid.

DM: [speaking over] Yeah. All of those incidents happened in the 70s, so I'm hoping that we've come a long way, that they wouldn't happen today, but I don't—I can't say that for sure in Williamsport. I really can't, I really can't. I admire the bravery of these high school kids that are out there, you know.

BL: Alright.

LM: Actually, anybody that's out—it's still a brave thing to be.

BL: It is, yeah, because there can—you can have incidents even in New York City today.

DM: Oh yeah, that's true. I just think it's really brave in Williamsport—we're still behind the times.

BL: Definitely. I think—yeah in the rural areas anywhere, but especially Pennsylvania in particular. We've had a lot of incidents in the past and you never know when something like that can happen to you, so it's a brave act just to—to be out.

DM: Have you followed the story at all about Alison Bechdel? Do you know that story [*Fun Home*]?

LM: Oh, she's great.

DM: Yeah, I haven't met her yet but I mean Beech Crick—Beech Crick is like a small, small, small community that you could miss it if you're driving through it real fast, you know, and I think that's an incredible story.

LM: Have you read the books?

DM: Yes. I just read—this summer I just read it, and I'm dying to see the play. But, Beech Crick is only like 40 minutes away from Williamsport.

LM: Yeah she's a fine mirror in a lot of ways. All in the public forum actually.

DM: Yeah, yeah, that book is—I actually wasn't expecting all the illustrations when I got that book. Oh my god, all the time that must have taken. Oh my gosh. And to make a musical out of that story, I don't know how they did that, you know. I definitely want to see that.

BL: Well Dan, thank you very much for being with us today. We appreciate your stories, and ...

LM: This was almost an hour, you know. [all laughing]

DM: It just seems like it went faster this time, I don't know.