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Interviewee: Cindy Lou Mitzel

Interviewer: Debbie Gable

Date of Interview: March 29, 2015

Location of Interview: York, Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Sara Tyberg

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Abstract:

Cindy Lou Mitzel was born in April of 1942 in York County, Pennsylvania as the youngest in a big family. Growing up, Cindy knew that she felt attraction towards women but married a man just after graduating from high school and had three children. Throughout her life, Cindy has been involved in the National Organization for Women [NOW], the Lavender Letter, the Lesbian Alliance, and the Central Pennsylvania Women's Chorus, among other women's and gay rights activist organizations. Cindy remained married for many years before separating from her husband and, after the age of 40, began dating other women. In this interview, Cindy discusses coming out to her adult children, her involvement in the passage of a gay rights ordinance in York city, and how LGBT-identified individuals practiced safety while community building. She also mentions the importance of coming out, her experiences at the Metropolitan Community Church, and her attendance of the first Central Pennsylvania Pride Festival. Today, Cindy is pleased with the recent affirmative gay marriage laws, which were once thought "impossible" for the LGBT community.

DG: Hi! So, this is an interview for the LGBT Center Central Pennsylvania History Project. I'm the interviewer. I'm Debbie Gable, and the narrator today is Cindy Mitzel. Today is March 29, 2015, and we're in York, Pennsylvania. So, Cindy, do I have permission to record this interview with you today?

CM: Yes, you do.

DG: Thank you. Alright. We'll, let's just get started and talk a little bit just about your family of origin and where you grew up and what that was like for you.

CM: Okay. Well, I'm Cindy Mitzel, and I live in York County, and I was born and raised in York County, and I was born in April of 1942, and... let's see... okay, my—my parents—okay, I have five brothers, and I have—I had five brothers and five sisters. So, and I'm the youngest of the eleven, and—so it's been an interesting life. I liked all of it. It's been, you know, mostly pleasant, but of course, when it came to the lesbian situation, that wasn't always so pleasant with my family, but... everyone seems to have gotten past the fact, and I've been in relation—I've had a couple relationships, and I was always out front about that. Although, not—at first, not that I talked about being a lesbian, but I was living in an apartment with one bedroom and another woman lived there. I sort of thought that would be a big clue for my family [laughs]

DG: How did that go?

CM: I'm not quite sure, but you know, if they picked up on it or what, but I know at one point, I was going to take my birth name back, and I was telling my one sister—and it's a sister that I had felt comfortable to talk to about—not at first, but after awhile, and... like I said, I was going to take my birth name back, and I was telling her—and we had talked about the lesbian issue, and I knew she wasn't real happy about it, but she made the remark to me something the fact that I was going to take my birth name back, and that she found that to be very embarrassing for her. For people. I'm from a small town, and York County is, you know, everyone knows everyone else it seems, and so she was—she would've been embarrassed if I had done that, because it was—at that point, I had already been out, and most people knew me.

DG: So, how old were you when you came out? Did you know as a child, or?

CM: I did know as a child. If 13 is a child. I was always in love with my best friends. [laughs]

DG: Okay, okay. Talk a little bit about how that felt at that time.

CM: Oh my. [talking to someone off camera] Do you want me to do something? Did it fix? Okay, how did it feel? Well, it was I felt I was the only one in the whole wide world that loved another woman the way I loved my girl friends. [laughs] My girl friend. And, so I was... I just remember when I got married—oh, I don't know if I want to go that route—yeah, I did get married, because at the time, I wasn't living my life as a lesbian. I didn't know that I could live my life as a lesbian, and so I ended up, you know, being involved with a guy, and we loved each other, and we got married, and but I always remember that it was almost just as important if not more important that my girl friend was standing beside me than that he was [laughs].

DG: Okay, okay.

CM: And that's when it told me something. So, it...

DG: So, you said you thought you were the only one in the whole world, so we're looking at—so you said you were born in '42, so this was in the fifties then, by the time you are a teenager.

CM: I graduated in '60, so you know, and got married like the next year

DG: And so certainly no gay or lesbian people in films or on TV.

CM: Oh my gosh.

DG: Did you hear any discussion amongst your family one way or the other?

CM: You know. I guess I came out at a time when it—well, it was. It was just starting that you could talk about it. One of the things that I always remembered is—okay, so when I came out [clears throat] Excuse me—I was about one... [laughs] About one. 40.

DG: [laughs] Okay. Like one!

CM: Or 41 is where I was going. And—oh, and so I used to give talks at the York College when they talked about sexuality class, and you know, that sort of thing, and first, when I went, I would—somewhere along the line, I thought it would be interesting if I could see anybody sitting in the class who knew anybody who was lesbian or gay. So, I would ask, and, like, at first it would be [mimics student nervously, slowly raising their hand] You know? Maybe one or two of those. No one's like [raises hand confidently] “Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I know!” [laughs]

DG: It's a very hesitant...

CM: Like they do not [laughs]

DG: Right.

CM: And so every time I would talk to the class, I would ask that, and every time, it was more people putting their hand up, so after awhile, it would just seem ridiculous to be asking, because everyone was putting their hands up, and I really liked the fact that I had kept track of it that way by, you know, asking how many knew somebody and stuff. And every now and then, I come upon the—one set of questions that they would ask. They would write their questions, and—and it was interesting to see that as to the fact that they had to write their questions, they couldn't just... you know, ask. [laughs] ‘Cause of the topic.

DG: What kind of questions? Yeah, what kind of questions did they write?

CM: Well, they'd often say about—I would say that I have children. I have three children and five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. So, I'm coming from a big family now. And, so they would all ask how my family, you know, felt about me being a lesbian and being out, you know. They would've—I remember two of my sisters said to me, ‘Well, why can't you just... don't talk about it?’ You know. “Go do what you want to do, but don't talk about it.” [laughs] So that made me—

DG: So how did you respond?

CM: How did I respond? I wonder how I did. I wasn't very confrontational at that point. I was more hurt. You know... that—that's the part that I remember... [laughs] So—oh, some of the questions—I'm trying to think what else. There were some about sex, and I'm thinking—I can't picture how they would put it... but I was part of a panel, and we always, you know, tried to not to avoid any subjects, so, you know, we were as diplomatic as we could and still not skip the

questions. I haven't done that class for—for years now. It would sort of be interesting to do it—to see what the questions are now as compared to what it was, you know, in those—and that was—what did we say in—I'm 73, so that was about '85, something like that, an—so—so to me, it's amazing to see where we have come, and where we were at that time, and this morning, I was thinking about this interview, and I thought about years ago [laughs] when I was first coming out, I went to one of my first pot luck, and I was really nervous, because I was still married at that time, and I was still living at home although we had both gone our—living our own lives. [laughs]

DG: Okay.

CM: And, but we still lived in the same house. And...I'm going to have a—times when I'm not going to remember what I was talking about.

DG: Okay. [laughs] You started to talk about a pot luck, okay?

CM: The first pot luck. So—I'm trying to think how old... oh, I know! I was trying to find somebody in this area that I could talk to about this, and there wasn't anybody, and then I discovered that there was a telephone service that people could call in just to talk, and I thought, well, I'll do that. Well, then I found out that one of the people I played tennis with, one of the women, was a volunteer there.

DG: Oh, okay.

CM: And I—so then I can't do that, she's gonna recognize my voice, you know, and I was just—I couldn't—I couldn't even take a chance that she was working that shift and—and call her. So, that eliminated that. And... oh, I know. Then one time, there was a TV show, and it was a daytime interview kind of show, and they had someone on from PFLAG [formerly stood for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays]. I probably hadn't—I'm sure I didn't had not heard of that organization—well, I wasn't talking to anybody that was lesbian or gay, so no, I didn't know that they existed.

DG: Right. And PFLAG is Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays?

CM: Yes. So, I wrote down the information how they always tell you to call such and such and what. And that time, it was calling. You weren't looking up in the computer. [laughs]

DG: Right, right. Just to be clear.

CM: And so, I called to get information about it, and the only thing they could give me was—oh, an MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] in Baltimore [Maryland].

DG: Okay. And MCC is...? Metropolitan...?

CM: Metropolitan Community... Church.

DG: Okay, so they were—well, they are churches that exist that are—they're kinda primarily for gay and lesbian people, right?

CM: Yeah, I think so. I mean anybody is welcome, but they—they're an accepting church and one that you can feel comfortable in. And—and it was in Baltimore. Well, I didn't—never went to Baltimore. [laughs] Certainly not by myself if I did. [laughs] And, but one Sunday afternoon, I got myself ready, and I found out how to get to this place, and I went to their church.

DG: And so was it in the city of Baltimore?

CM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DG: So, about 40 minutes?

CM: Oh, at least, yeah.

DG: Yeah, okay.

CM: [laughs] It was a big trip for me! [laughs] And, but I just—just remembered. It just came to me right now. I sat there, and I cried the whole time through that service. It—it just shocked me, you know. I just, you know, the fact that I was around someone that felt the way I did. [laughs] It was just amazing.

DG: So, in that way, it felt like a really big trip. Was it helpful that there was a little more anonymity? 'Cause it sounds like you were worried about—you weren't ready to come out to everyone in York.

CM: [nods] Yeah, yeah.

DG: Do you remember that feeling helpful that you were alone?

CM: Oh my gosh, yes. Yes, yeah. And I think I only went to one or two... services, and then I asked about anything going on around York or Harrisburg, and there was a group... that met at the Quakers Church, and it was like a Sunday afternoon, and it was lesbian and gay—it don't know if it was the Discovery Group or... who—the Catholic Church—well, not the church itself, but some Catholics had their own group that—

DG: Is that what Discovery was? I'm not familiar with that—okay.

CM: That was Discovery, you—you know, in that manner. So, anyhow, they told me about this group that gets together, and so, I went up—obviously it was in the spring, so I went up to this church—another semi-big trip for me. [laughs] I make myself sound like a hick, and I guess I am. [laughs] To whatever degree.

DG: [laughs] Just own it. [laughs]

CM: Yeah [laughs] And... so I went up there Sat—they met on a Saturday afternoon, and I went in the church, and there was no one around, and I finally ended up downstairs, and there wasn't many people down there, and... so I started talking to someone, and they were people that go to church there, and—and they said, "This is the..." How is that? "The weekend that they do something..." Outside the church. So they weren't meeting there that day. So, now what do I do? I'm in the big city. It's Saturday evening. So, at that time, I had talked to... like, I can't piece it together—but it was someone that I had talked to on the phone one time, and maybe that's how I found out about the group, and so... I called her and asked, "What does a person do on a Saturday night in Harrisburg?" [laughs] And she told me about a small café that was owned by lesbian or gay people and where it was, so I went to that, and I had my dinner, and—and—like I guess Mary had told me—the women I talked to—had told me about the gay and lesbian bar. Right now I can't think of the name of it. It was—well, anyhow, it was one of a couple that were in the area. So, I went to this bar, but it was early in the evening, and I didn't know about bars. I didn't really hang out in bars when I was single or when I was, you know, married and stuff. So, I was there right after I had my dinner, and I'd say I was there about seven o'clock, and they were—so, I'm sitting out in the parking lot—Can you imagine? For quite a few—I don't know, I don't think it was hours, but for, you know, quite awhile, and people just weren't coming in. I didn't realize you don't go to the bar until ten o'clock, but now I knew that. [laughs]

DG: [laughs] Very sophisticated.

CM: [laughs] So—so finally, I think I saw one person go in or something, and I thought, "Oh, Cindy, just go do it." So, I went, and there was a woman there who we sat and talked, and that was my first—first time at a lesbian or gay bar, and—and it was funny, because when I saw two men dancing together, I could—I was having trouble accepting it—that it, you know. I would've thought in my head—I certainly had fantasized as it—as a woman that -- I loved other women, and you know. We never had a relationship—I didn't have a relationship with anyone... but I was surprised at myself that, why—why can't I—I can accept the fact that if two women can be together but to see two men dancing close or something like that, it was a surprise to me. So, I thought that was an interesting self-discovery kind of thing. But from there, then I—you know, I would go to the bar more often, and I finally met a—someone from Williamsport [Pennsylvania], and we started seeing each other, and... that was my first experience with being with a woman. She was a very nice person. [laughs] We had a—a nice relationship, but it was not real easy, because she was so far away, so we didn't continue that—that relationship, but anyhow...

DG: Well, it sounds like you were very brave.

CM: [laughs] Well, it was scary, so then I did it. Yeah.

DG: So, what other ways did you find to connect with people and find community?

CM: Well, that was my...

DG: You said—you mentioned something about pot lucks, I'm sorry.

CM: The pot lucks—it—we were... I can't put—there was a newsletter called the Lavender Letter in the Harrisburg area, and I guess one time, I was at the bar—by this time, I was going to the bar in—in York [laughs], and someone came around and was handing out this newsletter, and... it... I think it was Lorraine had started the—I know Lorraine had started the lesbian—

DG: The Lavender Letter.

CM: The Lavender Letter. [laughs] Couldn't put lesbian into it at that time. Lavender Letter. And, so I think after I had read the letter, and I gave Lorraine a call and said, "I'm in the York area, and is there anything I can do to circulate?" Well, of course there was. [laughs] So, I got involved with the Lavender Letter and helping to pass that out at different places and organizing events and stuff like that.

DG: Okay, so, the Letter had—tell me about what was in the Letter. What was it used for?

CM: Well, there wasn't a big list of things to do, because in... what else can I say besides "in those days?" The—there wasn't a lot of events happening, and I remember when I moved here. It was in 1989, and I got the Lavender Letter, and it was the first time that there was two things on the same night—that we had to choose. It was a shock! And then when—it made me happy to say oh wow, yeah! So it would have the events that were going on. There were columns about you know, maybe women's health or, you know, ads from people that wanted to get their business out here, and...

DG: And that covered the Harrisburg, York area? Lancaster?

CM: Yes, definitely those—and times—sometimes there would be events in Baltimore or Philly [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] that were—that somebody had thought to list—but it was a lifesaver. It really was. To know that there's other people out there and that you could get in touch with them and just going to the—okay, the first pot luck that I went to... It was an icy night. [laughs] But I went. But it got icier as the night went on, but at that time, in order to go to... to find out where a pot luck was going to be held, I had to meet with someone like the week before and just to see that I am real.

DG: Okay, okay.

CM: And...

DG: So, this is a way that people were protecting their safety?

CM: Exactly. Yeah, and... and they allowed me to come. They gave me the address. But anyhow, it was icy, and the person that had it—at that time, it was maybe ten, 15 miles away. And, she said if I didn't feel comfortable, you know, that I could stay over. Well, I was afraid [laughs] to stay over. I don't know what lesbians do... [laughs] Oh god. And—but I eventually did, but I'm sure I didn't sleep too well. [laughs]

DG: Lesbians around and all.

CM: Exactly!

DG: Wow, wow.

CM: And—and—and I remember thinking that I would be the only one that—that was married, and the first night I went to one, there was a lesbian couple, and they had been together for quite awhile, and you know—I think they both had been married at some point, and... so I thought, “Oh! This won't be so lonely!” [laughs] You know? So, that was—that was nice. That was really helpful for... for me.

DG: Common experiences?

CM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DG: What other kinds of things were people doing to try to protect their safety?

CM: Well, I knew that you didn't give your last name. I didn't, anyhow, and I don't think many other people did either. That was just... you know. We felt dangerous to do and not feeling comfortable in it, yeah. The first Campfest (sp?) and I—well, the first couple's Campfest (sp?) that I went to, which was a—a week-long, women's festival—no, it was just a long weekend. [laughs]

DG: Okay. Where were they held?

CM: Somewhere close to Lancaster. On the other side... and, so the thing with the privacy thing was that... if you wanted to take pictures, you had to ask the person, and a lot of people did not want to be in the pictures, and they would say no, so you had to be careful if you were taking a picture of meeting or performance or something like that. So, we—yeah, it was scary.

DG: And this was way before—this isn't a time of Facebook or anything like this, so the level of caution is pretty strong. I mean, as far as just printed photographs.

CM: Yeah, I mean—it just reminds me of—one of the questions that a college student had asked me and asked if I had been—had ever been harassed or discriminated against, and—and that sort of thing, and I said, no, I really haven't, I said, but I have the same fear that everyone else has. It's not that it's not what they do to you, it's the fact that they may do something to you, you know, and you wouldn't feel comfortable walking down the street holding hands with your girlfriend. I mean—you wouldn't take that chance, because it was such a secret. You know? And—so scary to be out, you know. To be yourself, you know.

DG: Okay. So, one thing I wanted to ask you about—so you were—you were married, and then you said you separated, and you had not been in a relationship yet, so it was just so clear to you that you were a lesbian, even though you hadn't been in a relationship?

CM: All my life. Yeah, all my life. Yeah, just, you know, didn't think I could do anything about it. I remember one time. My one girlfriend—I guess in high school, I was determined that I was going to tell her, because I had feelings for her, you know, I was going to tell her this. Now, I was married at that time, and so was she. And... so, I had it all rehearsed—and it was the time that Billie Jean King was doing the tennis match with Bobby Riggs, and you know, we were all excited about that, and... dang, I lost it already.

DG: You were going to tell your girlfriend about your feelings.

CM: Oh yeah, so I had it all arranged, and she—she lived in Oklahoma, and she would come home at least once a year for a couple weeks and stay at my place with her and her kids. She had three kids, too. And—but I really just needed to tell her this. So, I had it all arranged. I think—Bobby Riggs and...

DG: Billie Jean King.

CM: Billie Jean King, thank you. Billie Jean King's picture was on the, like, the Life magazine or the Look magazine, whichever it was at that time, and I used to get it, so I had that—and there was a story about Billie Jean King, and so I put that magazine where it could be seen, you know, and sitting in the living room, and that's how I was going to start, and—and... when I... I don't know how I put it, but she said, "Well, I just know if anybody came onto me," she said, "I'd knock 'em to the ground." Well, that was the end of that conversation. [laughs] So, we lived the rest of our lives not ever talking about it... you know.

DG: That must have been really painful.

CM: Yeah, yeah, it was a constant thing, you know. Yeah.

DG: So, I'm interested in hearing more about your first Campfest experience.

CM: Oh, well, let's see...

DG: Because you said it was like a weekend long, so is it a music festival? I don't know a lot about Campfest...?

CM: Yes. Yes, it was a music festival, and there was classes and meetings with different subjects, and... I can—you know, I think I might last five days. I don't know. I can't remember now. When I said a week, then I thought, "Maybe it's just a long weekend," but now I don't know. But it was just wonderful. It was just to—to be there with all women, all lesbians, and no men were allowed on the land. [laughs] And the first year, I think we had a problem. "Well, how—how are we getting rid of the garbage" kind of thing. "You need them for something!" [laughs] Excuse me, I'm sorry. [laughs] That brawn. So, there were—we had a public meeting of the campers, and we met, you know, at one place, and we discussed this and how can we deal with it, and—and went from there, but I liked the idea that we had this public meeting and made the decision among ourselves that—that impressed me. It really impressed me, and you know, it was nice to see women openly showing who they love, you know—and I remember one year coming back from Campfest, and I was the whole way to York before I saw a man and a woman holding hands, and it shocked me so that I thought, "Oh, that's right. That's what they do!" [laughs] But—I was so comfortable, you know, in the community that—that I had been in that it was a real shock.

DG: That's so funny. It's kind of like it's—it's like the flip of the first time you saw men together, just 'cause you've never seen it, so you've had that discomfort. It's almost like that happened to you again after being around all women for five days.

CM: [nods] Yeah, right. Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, I can always remember that was over around Cowanesque Lake. [laughs] And—"Oh, oh, yeah." So, I never really had any doubt about, you know, being a lesbian. I either always wanted to be [laughs] or—or live my life as one, you know, later in my life. I guess I was over 40 when I started to search for other people that felt the way I did. [laughs]

DG: You waited a long time.

CM: Yeah, yeah. My kids were all grown, and... I guess it was my time. [laughs]

DG: Is it okay to talk a little bit about your children and how they reacted?

CM: Yes! Yeah, I—I don't mind, because they were pretty good. I guess if they were horrible, I would say, "No, I don't wanna talk," but they weren't. I didn't actually tell my children, you know, point blank at any time, but like I said, I had the apartment and one bedroom and... girlfriend, and so I figured they figured it out. Well, my daughter had a friend who's a lesbian,

and she lived out of state, and she came home one time, and she was like a second daughter to me, and I still look at her as that. So, she—how was that? At that time, I hadn't been open to my family. I just let 'em see and [laughs] so anyhow, I'm talking to Shel's friend, and—about—about this—and I may have asked her how Shel felt about her being a lesbian, and I forget how she put it... and she said, "Well," she told me the comment—Jenny didn't know that Shel and I had not had a discussion, so she's treating her like the trusted friend that she was. [laughs] And that she could talk about me. And oh, then she felt awful, but I said, "No!" I was just glad that it happened, and whenever she—oh, I think she said something about, "Well, I'm glad that mom's finally happy," or something like that, so it was like a picture perfect way. And then—and then I remember one time after that, the kids and I were all having dinner at a restaurant, and I think it was our server who was pretty—a woman, and I think one of my boys said something about, "Oh, I wonder if she has a sister," or something like that, and I said—or something, to that extent—and I said, "Yeah, I wonder if she has a sister." [laughs] And that was like the first time that I openly, you know, said anything like that to—and they just laughed, and you know, that's sort of pretty much been it as far as my kids. Yeah, yeah, I've been very fortunate in that way.

DG: That's nice. So, can you talk a little bit about the work that you did in York around—I believe you were involved in getting the ordinance passed. Can you talk to me about that experience?

CM: Yeah, that was I think in '93. We had an organization, and at the time—the last one that we had was a lesbian alliance, but before that, there was a gay men and lesbian group.

DG: That was called Lambda, right?

CM: Yes, yes, that's what it was. Yeah. And that was a big thing, using that term, because I remember sitting at a meeting when we first started that group, and we were trying to figure out what to call ourselves, 'cause it was—at that time, [whispers] that sounds better [speaks] at that time, you—you wouldn't have used, you know, "lesbian" or "gay" or, you know, anything, so we came up with—I don't know how it came up, but, at that time, lambda sort of represented lesbians, and... so... oh dear, this will be my thing on how I started to lose my mind tape. The first proof of it.

DG: You were talking about lambda, because I had asked about the ordinance, so this Lambda got together...?

CM: Right, right, and we came up with the Lambda thing, and so we would—we were a little more public at that point. It was a step—you know, everything's been a step, and so—so then when—oh, I know, as a group, we had asked the mayor who was of York City who was [William J.] Althaus. Yeah, I can't think of his name. Mayor Althaus. And how we had written him a letter asking him to observe the... the gay—not a week or month or anything like that, but like a recognition, and we got this letter back from him, saying—he wasn't very good about it. He said the typical things that people thought it was okay to say, and... so—so then, a couple

years later, Althaus was—I guess he was still the mayor? He had a change of heart—oh, I know, he was president of the Mayor’s...

DG: Of Pennsylvania or?

CM: No, it was for the whole country.

DG: Oh, okay.

CM: And they were having a meeting in Denver [Colorado], and Denver, at that time, was being boycotted for whatever they had done, you know, against us, and—I think it something that was legally passed by the people of Colorado, and—anyhow, so people and organizations were boycotting Denver, and that’s where they had their meeting, and—and I think at that point, some of his—this is just my theory, someone in his family must’ve come out to him, because it was a complete turnaround. He was very vocal, and he was supportive then of, you know, us having our—our time and being protected, and so there was a fight that started between people that felt we shouldn’t be living on this Earth and the ones who felt we should live there peacefully, and people—some preacher guy came from—I don’t know, out west somewhere in to testify there was—we had to stand in line to get into the city council meeting. Now, that has never happened before, and I don’t think it has happened since that time, but—but it was sort of fun—you got to talk to other supporters who were all, you know, everyone wanted to be in the meeting, and when they discussed the issue and... so anyhow, there were I think a couple meetings and hearings about it, and at that point, my—my partner’s name was Kate (sp?). They had asked—I don’t know, WGAL had asked us if we would do an interview. No wait—nope, the newspaper... it was the newspaper, and we ended up being up WGAL also, but the first one was the newspaper asking if they could come to our house and take our pictures and interview us and that sort of thing, and so, we agreed to do that, and that’s one of the things that I do have—the picture that was in the newspaper, and—and that was another scary thing to do that, ‘cause we thought there’s all these kooky people out there. What are they going to do to us? You know, and our fear was we knew what they did to a lot of lesbian and gay and bi and trans people, so, you know, the fear was legitimate, and... so, my dear friends Peg and Del... [laughs] they brought us one of those alarms that goes off if you squeeze the button, so that if we had any problem, you know, before this—before cellphones, [laughs] you know. And... I still have that in my bedroom. I’d like to sort of know if it works yet, but if I set it off, I don’t—don’t want to pay the consequences for scaring my neighbors or not being able to turn it off again. You know, so it’s still there. But anyhow, we ended up getting two phone calls, and one of them said—and our picture was in the paper—one woman said, “If you both weren’t so fat and ugly, you might be able to get a man.” [laughs]

DG: Okay.

CM: Right? That makes sense to her, and then she hung up. And then—what did the other one say? It was something, you know, negative, for sure. But we only got those two phone calls. We

were really surprised, but we were—oh, I think then we said we're not going to answer the phone, we'll just let the answering machine take it, so we could hear the message and not have to deal with it personally, but... yeah, so finally, we did get the ordinance passed, but we worked very hard on getting it, and it was just interesting to see the people coming from the whole community that—my friend Peg said one time, “We will only get our civil rights when straight people begin to champion our causes,” and I just always thought that was so true, because—it got to the first time—I'm sort of going off, but the first time I saw a letter that was affirmative, a letter to editor that was affirmative for—for—for my community, I thought, “Oh, Peg's right.” [laughs] You know? And then I remember sitting back and saying, “It's sort of nice to read those letters to the editor that are saying we're okay,” and then I don't have to write so many, and she didn't have to write so many, because straight people—and they would listen to straight people that were being supportive much sooner than they would listen to, you know, a lesbian or gay person, so...

DG: And I'm thinking of you saying your theory that Mayor Althaus probably had somebody in his family come out to him, and it seems like that was such a powerful effect over time when straight people found out someone that they loved was gay or lesbian could change—change their hearts and minds.

CM: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, and it was always hard to talk about... wanting people to come out, because it really—it's such a personal thing, and you couldn't insist, but I knew we would start saying things like—that we won't get our rights until—oh, shoot. Help me, Debbie.

DG: You were—yep. I'm thinking about where we were at. So you were...

CM: Thank you! I need you in my life! [laughs] Sorry.

DG: [laughs] Thinking about—we were talking about the difficulty about, you know, you can't just tell someone they have to come out, but it sounds like you started to think about, like, wanting to encourage people to come out and the value of that.

CM: Yeah, but you couldn't really do it. You know, you just—I would just have to make this statement that—that we're getting these things because of more people coming out and... I had a girlfriend recently—I thought about—I was thinking about this morning—that was not out to her family [clears throat] and... and that was very difficult. We have since broken up, but that was not—that was very difficult to deal, because I'm a very out lesbian that—to be with someone that wasn't—wasn't out was hard. There were a lot of other issues, too, but anyhow—so, even today, people have trouble, because the—I think the main fear is usually that you're going to lose your family, and she's very close with her family, and I'm sure they all know. She just doesn't know that they know. [laughs] But... but—but that's the fear—is losing your family, you know, and some people just—

DG: Sometimes it doesn't feel like it's worth the risk.

CM: Yeah, yeah. Some people just can't do it—and I think it's sad. I just remember how good I felt when I didn't have to watch every word that I said—that... I remember—I have family that lives in Florida, and I had gone down to visit them, and this is before I was real out, and my sister-in-law who I love dearly and I were talking, and I was at the point where I was watching—that I didn't say “he,” because I didn't like to do the “he” thing—I didn't want to pretend—but I didn't want to be honest enough, you know, to come right out with it. And we're talking about something—and like I said, I love her, and we've always been very close, and so I'm—I'm talking about an experience, trying to cover up my pronouns, you know, and I was feeling so comfortable I said “she,” when I normally would've come up with another way to explain who it was, and I realized, and I stopped, and I started to cry. And—and she just, you know, assured me that—that it was fine, you know, and that was—she's still my favorite—well, I shouldn't say that. [laughs]

DG: It's interesting you use language about—you weren't “real out,” and I was just thinking about just the layers and layers of “outness.” Right?

CM: Yeah, and when I'm talking now, I—you know, I forget that I know where I was at that point, but you know, you and whoever is listening doesn't know at what point, yeah... so, yeah—I always say everything's a step. You have to take this step before you can take that step, and like when the marriage thing came up a couple of years ago. I had worked very hard with being out and being supportive of, you know, people coming out and, you know, put a lot of energy in and being involved with the National Organization for Women, you know, we did a lot of work about the lesbian and gay issue, and... now, you're probably... I'm gonna say you're probably sitting there saying, “She's losing it. I can see she's losing it. What was she talking about?” I'm sorry, Debbie. [laughs]

DG: [laughs] I think you got it, right? It was about gay marriage, you said.

CM: Yeah, right, and when they first started talking about that, I couldn't get excited about it, 'cause—I think, because I thought it was impossible for that to ever happen, and I didn't realize the financial part—benefits of being married, you know, so once we started finding out about that, then it sort of made sense to me, but I was not one that was out there campaigning for it, 'cause I just didn't think—so—so I'm just so amazed, like when I look at the marriage licenses, which I didn't used to—have it done for a long time—since I was like 20, I stopped looking at the marriage licenses, but now I'm looking at them again! Oh, there's one—there's a couple—there's one! There's a couple! Yeah, yeah. And, so I'm still, you know, just so surprised that we are where we are... and...

DG: You didn't think it would happen. You didn't think you would see it.

CM: I didn't—no, I did not think that I would, but that's—that's what happens when, you know, one step and then the next step and then after awhile, woah! You know?

DG: What do you think might be next?

CM: Oh my gosh, I haven't thought about that. I thought we had it all now. [laughs] I don't know. I don't know. I think the children thing is an interesting happening—that lesbians are dutifully (???) getting pregnant and having babies or adopting children, and I just think that's wonderful that... because you couldn't do that years ago, and there were always brave people that did, and they set the example and it just kept growing, and it was because people came out that made us get to where we are. I'll have to ask this—I'll have to think about that question "What's next?" See, I'm sort of—sort of retired now. [laughs] And I sort of like the idea of sitting back and watching other people do things that I used to do. [laughs] And... and it's sort of nice, so I don't have to think about, "Oh, what's next?" [laughs]

DG: Right, right. You've done a lot of work.

CM: Yeah, yeah, we'll have to give some thought to that. We can't stop fighting now. [laughs]

DG: That's right. So, I just want to make sure that we make it clear in this recording that—the ordinance that passed was specific to York city, and it's protection for around sexual orientation... and gender identity?

CM: Sexual orientation... and gender identity—well, the gender identity got added after the sexual orientation ordinance was passed.

DG: Okay.

CM: I'm picturing maybe—a couple years or something that like, and then that got added to the—the ordinance.

DG: Okay. So, that's for equal housing rights...

CM: Housing, employment—definitely employment—housing—what else is it? I was thinking it was three things that it covered, and right now, I'm not coming up...

DG: Yeah, I can't remember. So, it means that if people feel that they're being discriminated against, they can—

CM: Yeah, because of their sexuality that they can legally do something about it, and—and we have a Human Relations Commission in the city that is—who deals with that issue and helps to bring the two sides together and see what they can work out when... so...

DG: And you've been a Commissioner, true?

CM: Yeah, I was for several years.

DG: Several years? Okay.

CM: [laughs] I don't know. I don't know how many years I was.

DG: And did you see many complaints come around sexual orientation and gender identity?

CM: There were... Yeah, I'd say—I don't have any statistics to back this up, but I would say maybe one out of five cases, six—you know, that's just what I have a feel that it was, I don't really know for sure, but yes, yeah, it definitely was. More on... on race and—but it was—it was—I think one of the reasons I agreed to go onto the Commission is because... there wasn't—I don't know if there was anyone on the Commission at that point—yes, yes, I do know there were people on the Commission at that point that were lesbian and gay, but it's one thing that I wanted, you know, I wanted to be able to represent and have—and that—that—when I got on, it was sort of toward the beginning when you could feel comfortable you know, talking about it... yeah... Even when I do this, it just got me to the point where—at one point, I was running for the National Organization for Women's Pennsylvania Chapter, and I was running for—to be—to be on the committee—or commission, I guess. I can't think of the word, but anyhow, we had like a regular campaign, and you—you gave talks and had balloons and stuff like that, and at that time, I thought that lesbian and gay issue was something that people were out about, especially in the NOW group. Well, I did my talk on what all I have done in the lesbian and gay issues and about the ordinance and stuff and stuff like that, only to find out afterwards—people were coming up and thanking me that was the first time anyone had mentioned the issue in this kind of situation. Well, now you tell me. [laughs] You know?

DG: You didn't realize you were being so courageous.

CM: No! [laughs] See, it's stupidity sometimes that does it. [laughs] Not courage. Yeah, yeah. So, anyhow, that—I just—you know, a reason that I didn't want, you know, our issues to be forgotten or not to be addressed and not be an example for other people to, you know, to be able to be able to talk about and that sort of thing, so...

DG: Right, right. I'm wondering about—you haven't really mentioned anything about pride festivals, so when you were in your first pride festival? Can you remember?

CM: Not exactly, I'm trying to—oh my gosh. [laughs] Brain. I was at the very first pride festival. It was at my friend Lorraine's house in Harrisburg somewhere, and it was just—I think she had a nice big yard and stuff like that, but that's where the pride festival was held. That was where—

DG: Oh wow, so this is the Central Pennsylvania pride festival?

CM: Yeah, that was about '82, something like that.

DG: Oh wow, okay.

CM: Yeah, then it—I think it might have been at her place two times, and then it was Ski Round Top a couple times in the Harrisburg area one, and... then, well, now we're—the pride festival is on the river, Susquehanna River, downtown Harrisburg, out where everyone can see who we are. [laughs]

DG: Right, right.

CM: And... so we've come a long way from someone's backyard to being on the river, so—that's funny how things come back, like just us talking, I guess, "Oh, that's right," because when you said about the pride, I couldn't picture, "When did I get involved with that?" I was thinking of the Central Pennsylvania Women's Chorus. Yeah.

DG: Okay, we haven't talked about that.

CM: Yeah, I—I was involved with getting that started. People used to say to me, "Well, I would like to have a singles group get together. What do you do?" I says, "You put it in the Lavender Letter with a phone number, and they will call." So, we had gone to see the Men's Chorus that had been in operation for several years, and we went to see one of their concerts, and then when we came home—that was with Kate (sp?), at the time, and... we were both saying there should be something like that for women. Well, not long after that, one—a woman called and wanted to know if we would help—they were going to a men's concert, and they were going to have a petition for women that would be interested in—in—in being in a women's chorus, and that was the start of it. So, from there it just—and I was on the board for quite a—quite a while, and... but that was—that was one of my prouder things that I've been involved with. They're still—they're still doing their thing. I think they have 20-some people this year, which is sort of on the high side. It goes this way and that way, but yeah. It's sort of neat. And we have straight women that join the chorus... we try not to discriminate against them. [laughs] I can't really say we, 'cause I'm not in the board or anything. I help out with their dinners and go to their concerts, but... I'm not in a decision-making position, and that's fine. [laughs] It really is. I'm getting to be a homebody. I'd rather stay home tonight than go to a meeting. [laughs] You know?

DG: So, you talked about the Lavender Letter, so... I know you're also involved with the Lesbian Alliance? Did I get that right?

CM: Yes, yeah. That was the last group that we had and the—Lambda group had stopped, and a couple of us wanted to see—well, it would be nice to have a women's group, so we started the Lesbian Alliance, and that was in operation for several years. I don't know exactly how many—five or six.

DG: Okay.

CM: And then it got to the point where... like, people didn't need a newsletter any longer, because they had their own group that they got together and did things, you know, so it was... the Lavender Letter became less important—now, it had been around... well, it was just a couple years ago that it stopped being published. But, anyhow... [laughs]

DG: So, you switched back to the Lavender Letter, so was there the Lavender Letter and the Lesbian Alliance for awhile? Right? They were—

CM: Yes, yes. There were different people who had the Lavender Letter, but we had started—no, we had—I think—I think at that point, we had pot lucks. That was always our old standby. But, you know, it just—just got—I don't know if it was political or what, but anyhow, the Lavender Letter stopped being published. And... so we did the Lesbian Alliance—had our own list of people that we emailed information to and that sort of thing—and we had pot lucks, but then we sort of got to the point where... we felt more comfortable just going to a restaurant. A group of people, you know. I don't know if we called it women's night out or something like that. So, we—you know, we kept the thing going in the area. Right now, I don't know... there might be a dine out night—I think there is in Lancaster. I don't know if it is in York or not.

DG: It's interesting things change.

CM: Yeah, yeah. It is.

DG: Was there anything else that you can think of that you want to share before we wrap it up?

CM: Check back with me tonight, I'll have this whole list of things I wish I talked about, but right now...

DG: Well, I do want to thank you for your time, and I also do want to say that if you do think of a lot of things, we could schedule another time.

CM: Okay.

DG: 'Cause it's a long history and very interesting journey, so...

CM: This is a wonderful project. I'm glad to be involved with it. Yeah, yeah.

DG: It's exciting to think of all of the documentation of stories.

CM: Yeah, oh yeah, and I do have things that I've collected that would be nice to give to—the College, are they -- is the College the one that's having the—

DG: Dickinson College and the LGBT Center are really working together, so, yeah—yeah.

CM: Wonderful.

DG: Well, thank you so much.

CM: Well, thank you.