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**Interviewee: Mark Segal**

Interviewer: Bill Burton

Date of Interview: July 20, 2016

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**Abstract:** Mark Segal is a gay rights activist, author, and journalist for the Philadelphia Gay News. In this interview, Mark discusses his political involvement in the gay rights movement in Pennsylvania in the '60s and '70s. Particularly, he focuses heavily on his work with Governor Milton Shapp, the first United States governor to publicly support the LGBT community. While discussing his life as a gay rights activist, Mark recounts many personal stories and memories such as disrupting popular television talk shows, working alongside Walter Cronkite, and signing up to become a Pennsylvania state trooper as an act of political resistance. Throughout, Mark stresses the important but often understated role Pennsylvania played in advancing civil rights for the LGBT community, while emphasizing that his state still has a long way to go.

**MS:** One or two in the nation.

**BB:** That's great. Congratulations.

**MS:** Who would've ever expected? I certainly wouldn't.

**BB:** That's interesting.

**MS:** And that's out of 2,964 books!

**BB:** Wow. Okay. Hi, my name is Bill Burton, I'm here with Mark Segal in Philadelphia. The date is July 20 and the office...

**MS:** Do you need me to turn that off?

**BB:** Yeah, that's what I was about to do.

**MS:** Yeah, there's a remote over there and you can close the door also. Look on the – on top of those copiers, you'll see it. And you can close the door also, if you want - keep the noise down.

**BB:** In the office of the Philadelphia Gay News. First of all, Mark, do I have your permission to interview you?

**MS:** Absolutely.

**BB:** An interview for LGBT History Project of Central Pennsylvania.

**MS:** I am honored.

**BB:** Okay, thank you. Mark, we're gonna basically focus in on Governor Shapp and your involvement in what happened back in 1973 with the governor's counsel. I guess my first question is why did you decide back in 1973 to write to Governor Shapp about LGBT rights?

**MS:** Governor Shapp had a reputation for being a progressive. What we were doing was obviously out of the box. There were no rules, no one knew what to do. We knew that the next step in our progression was the political world. Up to that point, no governor anywhere in the nation had met with LGBT activists. If anything, if they saw a gay person coming towards them, they would've run the other way. Governor Shapp, on the other hand, when I wrote to him, I was shocked to receive a letter back stating he'd be glad to meet with us and then later that same day I got a phone call saying he's going to be in Norristown and if I can make it to Norristown, he'll make the meeting that day.

**BB:** Did he ever, in his - any other statement that he made, ever refer to LGBT people or rights?

**MS:** No.

**BB:** He was just a progressive?

**MS:** Up to that point in American history, you will not find an elected official anywhere that had ever mentioned gay, lesbian, homosexual, homophile, what have you. You must remember what the condition of gay people was at that point in history. We were fighting to allow lawyers to pass the bar. We were – if a doctor became known as a gay person, he might've not gotten his license, he wouldn't have gotten into a hospital, governments would fire you, people who had liquor license might lose their liquor license if they served gay people. Things were not very good for us. We were just beginning to come out as a community and people getting to know us. But to that point, if you were gay, you were immoral to the religious society, you were illegal to the criminal justice system, you were medically – to the medical industry, you were psychologically ill. We were the bottom rung of American society.

**BB:** So, what did you think when you actually got the invitation? What did you personally feel?

**MS:** I was – the best example I can give you is when a dog hears a very strange sound and he just tilts his head [tilts head], that's how I felt. It was like, wow, the man is actually gonna meet with us! And then I thought, does he realize what this means? And then, my third thought was, basically, oh, it's in Norristown, he doesn't want anyone in Harrisburg in the press corp to see this so we're doing it in Norristown.

**BB:** Did he – did he give any indication of, this is just gonna be you and him and nobody else? No aides, no...

**MS:** He knew I was bringing – his staff knew I was bringing Harry Langhorne, who worked with me on issues at that point. And I...

**BB:** Who's Harry Langhorne?

**MS:** Harry Langhorne at that point was president of Gay Activists Alliance of Philadelphia, but he also was a member of my group which was – the official group that was meeting with Governor Shapp was the Gay Raiders which I headed, and the Gay Raiders were very well known for disrupting TV shows. And that's how he got to know my name which I learned in that first meeting.

**BB:** Did he say no press? Did he say...

**MS:** No conditions whatsoever, just if you can make it, we'll meet, and I assumed it was the out-of-the-way, secret meeting.

**BB:** So, what were your memories of that very first meeting?

**MS:** Oh.

**BB:** What was it like? What happened?

**MS:** I can remember almost every bit of it today like it happened today. We walked into the room, he had a big smile, put his hand out, shook my hand, and the first line he said to me: "I think I saw you on the Cronkite evening news".

**BB:** Yeah. "Who's that..."

**MS:** Yeah, and from that moment on I knew this was a man who felt comfortable with us. And no politician at that point felt comfortable with LGBT people. And we talked for a while, he says "What can I do for you?" And our first line was "There's a lot of discrimination going on in the state of Pennsylvania. Gay men and lesbian women are being discriminated against. And we hope you'll help us do something about it." And he says, "Well how can I help?" And I had this habit in my life to always go in for the brass ring, the best thing and figure I'll negotiate back later. And I said "Well, you can issue an executive order not allowing discrimination in state government or you can let us work with the various state departments and see how we can help – make each of them help the gay and lesbian community." And he said, "Well, you know, let's work on that."

**BB:** Did he – so he wasn't hesitant at all? He didn't say...

**MS:** He had...

**BB:** He didn't say "I don't know, there's going to be difficulties with that, or there's politics involved" or "you don't understand, there's hills to climb on this," or...?

**MS:** He treated us as though we knew the political system and that we already knew what would be tough and he was willing to fight the battle. I mean, the perfect example of it is, as I said – your question was, was it a private, off the record meeting. So after – and I thought it was – after the meeting he called his assistant in, his press assistant says "Bring them in". They open the doors and the entire Pennsylvania press corp came into the room and photographed the Governor and I. He wanted – *he* decided he wanted it on the record. He became – that, those photographs are the first photographs of any governor in America meeting with gay activists. That was his decision, not ours. And that was in every newspaper in the state of Pennsylvania the following morning.

**BB:** And what was the follow up on that?

**MS:** Follow up was...

**BB:** Those, those press...

**MS:** Well...

**BB:** What was the reaction?

**MS:** At that point, I was probably the best known gay activist in America because I had done all these TV disruptions and along the way, therefore, you do every American talk show at the time. I've done Phil Donahue at that point two times and every other talk show you can think of in America. So, I was getting headlines constantly which was the goal of the Gay Raiders. [The] Gay Raiders theory was to make us public, to do any stunt whatsoever to get us headlines because there was incredible censorship toward the gay community at that point. You know, again, before 1969 newspapers didn't write about gay people. You didn't hear gay people or see gay people on TV. You didn't see us in movies unless we were committing suicide. You didn't hear us on talk radio stations. There was no discussion of us. We were censored, period. Gay Raiders decided to take us out of the dark, to take lessons I learned in gay liberation front and say, we are in your face.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** And, the concept of that is, if you bring us to light, people will begin to see that we're not the green eyed monsters that they thought we were. They would discuss us, talk about us. It might not be polite at the beginning but, gee, the fact that we have gay people now as anchors on TV, the fact that we have lesbian people with TV shows on TV, and that - the fact that we have gay marriage all comes from us being visible. That's what that campaign was all about.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** Governor Shapp would've never taken that first step without those TV disruptions. He wouldn't have known about us.

**BB:** Right. So the – after this, there were, like, no negative editorials?

**MS:** Oh yes!

**BB:** Or whatever, after the governor, in the Harrisburg Press or the Philadelphia Inquirer, or Pittsburgh, there was no like, “What is the governor doing? What does he think he's doing?”

**MS:** Yes, and if you Google it...

**BB:** ...Like, was there any negative reaction?

**MS:** Yeah, if you go to the newspaper archives you could find a lot of that but, first – the first reaction was basic journalistic news items. “Oh, the governor meets with homosexuals.” And the word “homosexuals” was always used. And...

**BB:** Yeah and that was the was the day before “L-G-B-T”.

**MS:** Correct, and my line to the governor in – in those meetings were gay men and lesbian women. But the interesting aspect from those parts, at the beginning, the articles the first day –

and they were the first – were “Governor Shapp meets with homosexuals.” And the negative editorials didn’t begin until the work began.

**BB:** Oh.

**MS:** So from the proposal that Harry and I wrote to the governor on how to create a governor’s commission for sexual minorities – which wasn’t called that, that was – the governor literally said that he wanted the word minorities in the title. That’s how that came about, “sexual minorities”. He created many members of the staff to work with us to create this counsel. But before he created the counsel he issued the executive order which stated that there couldn’t be discrimination in state hiring. That created the first negative wave of some editorials in the paper, but it got even worse when the governor insisted on proving his point because “Colonel Barger”, the state police, barged into the governor’s office and started banging on his desk, says (pounding on desk), “I will not have homosexuals state troopers! I will not! I will not!” And so the next evening late into the evening I got a call from Lieutenant Governor Ernie Kline that said, “Mark, we want you to sign up to become a state trooper”.

**BB:** I know, but let’s – wait, hold on now because I’ll come back to that.

**MS:** That’s where the first negative came out, yeah.

**BB:** So, let’s go back. After the first meeting, you attended a task force of LGB activists and agents and representatives that held a series of meetings prior to the creation of the PA Council for Sexual Minorities. What were your memories about developing that task force? To develop the thing...

**MS:** I – well most of the department...

**BB:** Just on that task force, on the activists that you remember...

**MS:** (Sighs) God, I really can’t remember all the people to be honest with you. Various people came and went.

**BB:** Were they from, like, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh?

**MS:** For the most part Philadelphia and Penn – and Pittsburgh. We had one guy I know from Harrisburg and I can’t remember his name, lived on Bose Street.

**BB:** That Joe Vernon?

**MS:** Might be. Bill somebody or other? Rings a bell. But, they came and went, members of the LGBT community. But it was very stable in state government, who was there. At the first meeting, I remember, most of the department heads or deputy heads who came to that first meeting were like – you looked at them and you looked at their faces and you thought – thought they were saying in their head, “Why am I here? What am I doing? Wh-” They didn’t believe this was actually happening. And my reaction was, “Great, this is terrific!” I – Even I didn’t realize how extraordinary this was.

**BB:** So, what was your, what was your – did you just decide – the governor says “Okay, I’m ready to help you.” Did you and the task force – did somebody said we’re gonna focus in on hiring or what did you decide you were gonna focus in on?

**MS:** Well the first meetings – first meetings that we had were very small. It included Harry, myself, Terry Delmy from the governor’s office, and Barry Cove who is from the attorney general’s office which was run by the governor. Those were the two pivotal people in the governor’s office who...

**BB:** They were straight?

**MS:** Yeah, well, Terry was. Barry later – at the time Barry claimed to be heterosexual, he was married, had children.

**BB:** Hadn’t found anybody yet. [laughs]

**MS:** Well, but, well, it’s very famous because he later came out as bisexual and he and his wife – you might wanna look this up – wrote a book called “Barry and Alice”.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** About – “Barry and Alice” – which was his wife’s name. And that became controversial but that, that was years later.

**BB:** Okay. So again - so what did you decide to focus in on for the governor to...

**MS:** Well the fir – the first issues – the first public issue was non-discrimination.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And how do we achieve that? And the governor wanted us to broaden it department by department and to see what we could do in each department. And we started – once we got a larger group and once we became the actual Commission of Sexual Minorities, each of us became chair of a committee which specifically dealt with an individual department. But that was when we became basically a bureaucracy.

**BB:** Oh really?

**MS:** Yes.

**BB:** So, it was a...

**MS:** An unpaid bureaucracy. [laughs]

**BB:** Huh?

**MS:** Well those of us who were activists weren’t paid for our service.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** Yeah.

**BB:** So leading the departments would be like...

**MS:** I dealt with the insurance department.

**BB:** Of the state?

**MS:** Yes. And I also dar – dealt with the Department of Corrections. And on the side, the governor had me lobbying the legislature.

**BB:** Okay.

**MS:** Which was kind of comical.

**BB:** How?

**MS:** Because they – well, the legislature, just like it is today, is not as liberal as maybe the governor is.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And they were not happy with what the governor was doing and we had lots of problems, some of which still haunt me to this day.

**BB:** Really?

**MS:** I was called everything you could possibly imagine, every slur that there was. And this was on the floor of the legislature of the Senate. The people couldn't understand why the governor was doing this and the blame primarily fell upon me because I'm the one who asked him to do it. It wasn't a very polite time. People – there are articles in the Harrisburg Press where characterizations of me were being passed around on the floor of the Senate and the legislature. Luckily, I didn't have time to concentrate on them but now it's – now I realize the anger and the hurt of it.

**BB:** Yeah. So, you realize that the best you could probably get was really a non-discrimination agreement in all the state agencies like Corrections...

**MS:** That was the best we could do, yes.

**BB:** Department of Revenue...

**MS:** Yeah, but...

**BB:** Department of Motor Vehicles...

**MS:** And it took various forms depending on who was running that department. For example, insurance was – I believe Sam Denenburg was the commissioner of – what a memory – of insurance and I dealt directly with him. And he put out a statement himself that insurance companies cannot discriminate against gay men and lesbian women in any way shape or form. And that was revolutionary at that time because at times gay men or lesbian women, if they were



out - which was few people - sometimes couldn't get life insurance. Amazing, isn't it? Sometimes couldn't get health insurance. And this is long before AIDS.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** But there was an impression that they were more susceptible to STDs or whatever.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** So therefore it was a problem and Mr. Denenburg said, "no longer". And this was sort of a surprise to all of us. This was something that we uncovered as we were going through this motion. We also discovered how trans people were being treated in correctional institutions. Again, early on, in the 1970s - this is pioneering work that wasn't being done anywhere else in the country.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And this – you know – all being done out of Harrisburg.

**BB:** So - so tell me what role at this point in the formation of this, what role did the Rural Gay Caucus play in these committees or did they play a role later?

**MS:** I think the role was much later. We in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh for the most part had problems dealing with getting people in rural areas involved. Best example - best example of that – it really was difficult finding people from other than Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to be on the actual council when it was created.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** One of the best examples and I don't – I don't want to speak for rural Pennsylvania, that would be impolite of me. I would strongly suggest the people in Harrisburg who now are doing an incredible job and also speak to the people – speak to people like Sam Dietz who is an incredible hero. He was organizing at a place called Northumberland, Pennsylvania which I'd never heard of until he called me one day and said, "Hey, we want to organize in Northumberland!"

**BB:** So, well we can come back to that. So, we kind of talked about the specific issues the committees got involved with like insurance, and that was really interesting. Any other issues like the insurance thing cause that...

**Unknown:** Can I move one thing out of the shot? Just there, thank you.

**BB:** So let's go back to the state trooper issue.

**MS:** Sure.

**BB:** The state troopers – when you applied to be a state trooper. Let's go back to that story that you touched on in the book.

**MS:** Well, I was pretty well known for doing anything whatsoever to create media noise so that people would look into gay issues. And we were going along pretty easily with the issue until the governor issued his executive order at which point the Colonel Barger barged into his office and said, “I’m not going to have homosexual state troopers.” That’s the way I heard it and the way I heard it was through Lieutenant Governor Ernie Kline who called me that night and said, “The governor is telling you he wants you to sign up to become a state trooper.” And that was one of the weirdest requests I’ve ever received in my life. So he said, “Tomorrow morning at nine A.M. you’ll show up to Belmont Plateau offices of the state trooper. We’ll be prepared for you. Just go in and sign up.” And I said, “But I don’t want to be a state trooper.” [laughs] He says, “Don’t worry, just” – he says “The governor wants you to do it, just do it.” That was one of the only directions I had but as I think about it now, this is the governor doing as what I would call a zap.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And, you know, calling the bluff of his own Colonels, of his own state police. So the following morning, I showed up at the barracks – police barracks, and again, the entire press pool - the governor’s press office had called the press out to watch me sign up to become a state trooper. So as I’m going into the police barracks, a reporter stops me and said, “Mr. Segal, you’re a homosexual aren’t you?” And I said, “Yes, I am!” And she said, “Why do you want to be a state trooper?” And just flippedly I said, “Cause I like men in uniform.” And everybody in the press pool laughed. Her name was Jessica Savitch, by the way. And then I said, “In all seriousness, if I can do the job I should have the rights to sign up for the job. I have a right to make a salary, I’m a taxpayer, I also have the right to do any job that anybody else can do.” And I then went in and signed up to become a state trooper, filled out the paperwork. They had – waiting for me there and I came out and took some victory photos and left. But what’s unusual about that is, I was wearing jeans, I had a shirt with a peace sign on it, my hair was down to my shoulders – this was street theatre at its best. And the street theatre was created by Governor Shapp, not by me.

**BB:** So what – whatever happened to your application, whatever happened after that?

**MS:** Strangely enough, I never heard a word on my application. But strangely enough, Colonel Barger never ever spoke of the subject ever again.

**BB:** So, I would take that not many homosexuals went down and applied...

**MS:** Yes, they did.

**BB:** Really?

**MS:** Yes.

**BB:** They just didn’t say they were homosexual.

**MS:** The question was never asked. So it – I guess you might say it was first don’t ask, don’t tell.

**BB:** Right. So...

**MS:** But we do know that gay troopers did appear on the scene.

**BB:** So, so there wasn't...

**MS:** Just not me! [laughs] And I'm very thankful of that!

**BB:** Yeah, I don't think I would've applied. In your book, you talked about Tony Sylvestre and Barry Cohn and the governor – they were the head of certain committees. And the government said – didn't want you on certain committees because of your image.

**MS:** Didn't want me to be chairperson of the entire group, yes.

**BB:** So, what was it about your image and were you offended by that or – what was the committees and did you – did you take offense to that or...

**MS:** Being the person who came up with the – being that it was my baby, of course I was, at the moment. I was hurt. But, at - by that point, we were way into the process and I realize, in hindsight today, the governor was actually correct. I was long-haired, I was a person fighting the establishment, and we were now going to work within bureaucracy. So it was my turn to take a back seat. And he was correct. I mean, in a sense, he – you know he personally talked to me about it, he told me before he did it, he did all the right moves, he was very polite about it. He said, "Mark, if you really want this to proceed, if you want it to be a success, you know that you're not the right person to head it." He said – you know, "You came up with it, it's a great idea, we're moving on it, but don't you want it to be successful?" He was right. He was absolutely correct. Me dealing with bureaucracy at that time was sort of ridiculous. On the other hand, he had me for some strange reason – he said, "Look, you'll have a couple committees which you'll head and you'll also work with trying to pass legislation in the Senate, the Senate and the legislature." Which was kind of strange since I couldn't – wouldn't work the bureaucracy, I was now going to be lobbying with state representatives and senators. That was sort of a consolation prize. But – and what he knew would go over nowhere, quite honestly. But, he also was kind enough to say, "Now, you also have to start fitting in properly. If you're going to represent the governor and go and talk to state representatives and senators, you need to wear at least a blazer. I mean you don't have to wear a full suit, but you have to have a blazer." I didn't own a blazer so the governor went out and got me a blazer.

**BB:** Right. You talked about that in the book.

**MS:** Yeah, he is my political mentor. An incred – he, I think he literally is the first political ally this community anywhere in the nation has ever had.

**BB:** Right. He was the first...

**MS:** Let me, let me tell you how advanced he was. He's doing all this before the first congressional non-discrimination bill was ever introduced, and that was introduced by Bella Abzug and later Mayor Koch of New York. This is amazing.

**BB:** And that was in the eighties, wasn't it?

**MS:** No 1974, mainly 1974.

**BB:** In New York?

**MS:** No, the congressional billing in congress – what we now call ENDA [Equality Non-Discrimination Act] or the Equality Act. It's been sitting there since May of '74. And what led from the governor's council to this day we're just beginning to realize some of – of the outrageous arm span it had. Example, Governor Shapp ran for president in 1976 and because of his being – status as an ally to our community, I signed up to run Gays for Shapp, which became the first LGBT presidential campaign. There had never been a – a “Gays for” any other political candidate. And he only run – ran in Florida and I took Leonard Matlovichs with me and we campaigned for the governor and there was a T. – a televised debate between him and another candidate running for president that year, a peanut – a peanut farmer from Georgia by the name of Jimmy Carter. And moderating the debate in Florida for the primary was a man by the name of Walter Cronkite. [laughing] And I was on stage and before the – the cameras rolled, Cronkite saw me, came over, and we started talking and he says, “Why is Shapp running for president? And, and by the way what are you doing here?” And I said, “Well, I'm helping run part of his campaign,” and I explained why and he said, “He's doing all these things in Pennsylvania?” I said “Yes.” And he said, “He's known for what he did for the independent truck drivers.” I said “That's correct and he's also done as much for the, you know, gay and lesbian community.” So when Governor Shapp was introduced that night by Walter Cronkite at the presidential primary, he – Walter Cronkite stated, “And Governor Milton Shapp who helps to create a coalition of truck drivers and homosexuals to win this primary.” [laughing] But after that – that primary when the cameras went off and Shapp went over to talk to Jimmy Carter, Jimmy Carter said, “What about that introduction you just did?” And Governor Shapp started talking to Jimmy Carter, the future president, about the work he was doing with the governor's council of sexual – sexual minorities and the executive orders he – he did. That led to Jimmy Carter appointing Midge Costanza to become the first liaison to the LGBT community nationally when he got into the White House. That led to the first meeting in the White House with LGBT leaders.

**BB:** That's amazing.

**MS:** People don't realize how Pennsylvania has been a vanguard in the gay rights movement since day one.

**BB:** Yeah. And you can trace it back to that first phone call and your letters to Governor Shapp.

**MS:** What I just told you – I just recalled that whole thing this week when I was writing an article for LGBT Media on how LGBT people have gotten involved in the political system from the 1970s to present day.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** And that's just amazed me. Just eight years ago – eight years ago! – when I interviewed then Senator Barack Obama, I discovered that his deputy campaign manager Steve Hildebrand was a gay man! Think about that. There's David Axelrod, there's Senator Obama, David Axelrod, and this guy by the name of Steve Hildebrand, deputy campaign manager. There's never been an out deputy campaign manager for the presidential race in the history of this country. It was eight years ago. And so I said, “Steve, can I do an interview with you?” And

Steve said, “Well, let me check.” And so he asked David Axelrod and Senator Obama and both said... [recording cut off] ...manager to ever be interviewed. Well, eight years later, this year, Hillary Clinton, her campaign manager is a man by the name of Robby Mook. He’s an out gay man.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** The progression is – of our – our struggle for equality is absolutely amazing. And I watch it in...

**BB:** And our influence is growing too, so.

**MS:** I did my little bit.

**BB:** I think it’s a good little bit. [laughs] You talked about your lobbying efforts...

**MS:** It taught me a lot.

**BB:** Did you take part in the lobby education day of legislature?

**MS:** Oh absolutely.

**BB:** What was – what about that? Talk a little bit about that.

**MS:** I have a picture of me by the bus we rented to bring people from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. And I remember we – we opened the doors to that bus at whatever time of the morning it was and I forget how many seats the bus had but I think we had fifteen people on the bus. That shows you – I mean most of our community at that time wasn’t willing to really go up and be identified as gay and talk to their legislature. It was a – it was a success because it was the first time it was ever done. Just doing it was successful. And that was primarily organized by the Rural Caucus and I think you know, by members of the Rural Caucus.

**BB:** Really?

**MS:** Yeah, I think it was their idea more than it was Pittsburgh’s or Philadelphia. And they – we, primarily because we felt that we could get the votes in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia from the legislature and it was the rural areas that would be difficult.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** So we needed them to take the lead on that, and they did, and they did it very well.

**BB:** So, what about your – the reactions from the opponents of the governor’s initiatives? What about the...

**MS:** Well that’s where the pain comes in. You had legislators and senators passing around cartoon figures of me and the governor, or me and somebody else. We called every slur we could be called. Editorials were written in newspapers around the state. But basically, never anywhere did the governor stop his advocacy. No matter what situation occurred. He was a brave man. Unbelievable. He’s one of my heroes.

**BB:** The – talk about the first state-wide gay conference in Harrisburg, the state museum [The State Museum of Pennsylvania]. What are your memories about that experience? When was that?

**MS:** I believe it was after – after the council was created. My memories are not so great on it to be very honest. It was chaotic -

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** - is all I can recall.

**BB:** Who created that? Do you remember?

**MS:** I don't remember, I'm sorry. I – I mean it was covered by the press so you could go back and take a look through archives.

**BB:** What about the, the...

**MS:** You know, another person you should be talking to is Jason Goodman, he's a young gay activist. Very important. He's somebody who's really done research in the state archives. He's the one – about a year ago, I had totally forgotten about the – about the – the paper I wrote to the governor asking for the – the advisory council and setting out how to be run and what to be done. I didn't know it existed anymore. Jason Goodman found it.

**BB:** Wow. Now where is Jason Goodman?

**MS:** In the archives. If you'll email me, I'll introduce you via email.

**BB:** Okay.

**MS:** Yeah. He's done considerable work on finding those papers and that information. And he gave me a xerox – I had a xerox copy of it now which is something that amazes me.

**BB:** That's – what about the – the idea of the Gay Pride Week Proclamation? How did that come about and the reaction of the gay community, that first proclamation – and the reaction from the legislature that...

**MS:** Several – several of us sat down and tried to figure out what should be...

**BB:** [indistinguishable]

**MS:** I believe '85 if I'm correct. And I would show it to you but unfortunately I have it – I do have a copy of it but I believe it's on view now at the Harris – at the state museum in Harrisburg. I loaned it to them for the display they're doing for the fortieth anniversary. But you can read it there. It's – we sat down to try to write a document up and we pieced it together.

**BB:** This is like fifteen years after Stonewall...

**MS:** Well no it's – no, it's yeah. Yeah, fifteen years after Stonewall.

**BB:** ‘Cause Gay Prides have been going on in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Gay Pride Week Proclamation.

**MS:** Oh yeah. Right. But nothing stating, “I hereby Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania do – create Gay Pride”...

**BB:** Who?

**MS:** Governor Shapp! This is again another Governor Shapp initiative. But, if you look over there – Oh, I can do this. Which one do I have? Not only did – now, the Governor Shapp’s were special ‘cause they were the first.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** But we became so powerful as a – as an LGBT political bloc in the state of Pennsylvania that after the governor left office, we were able to get his replacement, Governor Thornburgh, to issue a Gay – the republican – a Gay Pride Proclamation. This is the actual one. [Holds proclamation document]

**BB:** Now is that one where his secretary slipped it in and he signed it without knowing?

**MS:** For – you did your research, yes. Dr. Ethel Allen, secretary of the commonwealth. Now, this one was written by Ethel and myself.

**BB:** Ah. [laughs]

**MS:** [Laughs] So I helped write this. And it was based on the Shapp original Gay Prides. But a little stronger. And yes, she did slip it in. I had warned her not to do that. I said she should let him know what he’s doing and he refused, he refused. So this has special meaning to me.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** So because – one of the great things about that is, is – what that showed me was that we were getting people in our own community who wanted to then be involved and get things done for their own community, because Ethel was a lesbian.

**BB:** Yes.

**MS:** A closeted lesbian.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And this was – this is her contribution to the LGBT community. And it – and it’s historical in the sense that this is the first republican governor in the nation that ever signed a Gay Pride resolution.

**BB:** So he couldn’t have rescinded that...

**MS:** Oh, no, he couldn’t. There was a debate – again, when I did research for my book, one of the things I discovered was – so I was going through newspaper archives around the state. And

after – at first, inside the governor’s office, political opponents were saying that they wanted to rescind it. And unfortunately what happened was there were more editorials around the state of Pennsylvania in support of it than not. So they decided not to do anything whatsoever but a few months later they fired Ethel – Ethel Allen.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** She knew – she knew that was gonna happen. But that was her taking a bullet for her community. That was her way to finally contribute.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And she was so proud of that. I met with her the day after she was fired and I think it was one of the happiest days of her life.

**BB:** Huh. Good for her then.

**MS:** Yeah.

**BB:** That’s quite a legacy.

**MS:** I expected we were gonna have a lunch and she was gonna be very depressed. Contrary.

**BB:** So.

**MS:** And – and that’s one of the joys of what I’ve been able to do. The most hurtful statement in my book that – and I didn’t realize it when I wrote it, but when I read it now, it’s painful. I talk about when we’re doing some of the early activism, 99.9% of our community was in the closet and they hated what we were doing, and they hated us. And when I wrote that it didn’t bother me. But when I read it, it really affects me. Overwhelmingly, yeah. Because when they were passing around those characterizations of me and the governor on the state floor in Harrisburg, when people read about it in our own community, they laughed at us.

**BB:** They laughed at you?

**MS:** Yeah. Our own community. And when I think about that now, that’s painful. It’s painful now. I didn’t have time for it to be painful then. It is what it is.

**BB:** And it was because they were still in the closet, they were afraid to...

**MS:** Yeah they were afraid – the line that any gay activist would tell you they heard – we all heard the same exact line. “You will ruin it for us.” It is etched into my mind, how many times I heard that. “You will ruin it for us.”

**BB:** Because they’re afraid to come out. They’re afraid...

**MS:** They’re afraid our actions would force them out of the closet somehow, or they would be discovered, or whatever.

**BB:** I think it took a long time for the gay community to understand that you can’t make the rest of the world understand that we’re just like you until...



**MS:** Until they see us.

**BB:** Come out and they see us.

**MS:** Right. Well you know, the old line. We are your brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles, and aunts.

**BB:** It took all that change to happen. The AIDs crisis, the assault from the community – the religious community, and the concern of politics to make everything change. How long did the council last and how long were you a member of that? The duration – how long did it last?

**MS:** It sort of fizzled out, I'm not sure when. It went through – it fizzled out by the time we got to the Casey administration. It – I, I believe it existed for like the first year and then fizzled out.

**BB:** Under the what administration?

**MS:** The Bob Casey Sr. Bob Casey Jr. is now Senator of Pennsylvania. But Bob Casey Sr. became governor after Thornburgh. So you had Shapp, Thornburgh, Casey.

**BB:** It lasted during Thronburgh's administration?

**MS:** Yes.

**BB:** Oh.

**MS:** And Bob Casey when running for governor did an interview for Philadelphia Gay News and stated in the interview, if he becomes governor he will continue to council and continue the issue Gay Pride Resolution.

**BB:** So how active was the council during Thornburgh's administration? Was it...

**MS:** At that point, I basically was not really tuned into it very much. If I was doing anything, it was minimal. So my memory of it – Tony Sylvestri would know better. I believe Tony Sylvestri was its chairperson till the end.

**BB:** Okay.

**MS:** I believe. I could be wrong.

**BB:** Alright. Now we're gonna interview Tony, so. I guess what was the most memorable experience that you had while working on the coun - on the council? When you look back on it now.

**MS:** The – the two, the two most important for me was when the governor issued the executive order and asked me to become a state trooper. And, I mean how bizarre is that? And I guess dealing with Herb Denenburg who was our insurance commissioner, another progressive guy who understood what gay people were going through and wanted to make change. He knew more about the issues than I did when we first met. And that was impressive and I really appreciate the fact of who the governor brought into his administration. But the most surprising

statement for me – or event that ever took place was when the governor was leaving office. We had a personal moment. And I wanted to personally thank him for everything he had done and the change he'd made. And I created a list of cities and states that now were doing similarly what we were doing and explained to him what he created nationally. And I read this off, whatever, and I said, "Governor, why did you go through all of this and the pain and suffering that we went through during all this?" And he looked at me and he laughed and said, "Mark, you know what, I'm in the closet as well." And I looked at him very strangely and he started laughing and he said, "My real name is Shapiro. In order to run politically in Pennsylvania, I had to change it to Shapp. I understand discrimination." I didn't know that.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** I mean, I – I'm friendly with his family and no one had ever told me about it.

**BB:** Now, you didn't know – nobody knew he was Jewish or...

**MS:** Well, they knew he was Jewish but you can be Jewish but don't push it on the public.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And I guess, he said - and we can go back to me not being named chairperson of the commission. Don't push it on the public, go easy.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** Although he really didn't. [Laughs] With gay issues, he was really out in your face.

**BB:** Yeah. Looking back, what do you think is – is kind of like the legacy? What is the most importance and significance of Governor Shapp and his initiative of advancing the cause of gay rights at state level and as a political figure on the national level?

**MS:** We could state that Henry Gerber was the first gay activist in America. We could also state that Milton Shapp was the first governor in America, or the first chief executive in America, to take LGBT rights or equality serious and fight for them, stand up for them. He became the first LGBT elected official ally in the nation.

**BB:** I think what's important is that I don't think the gay community really knows that.

**MS:** They don't. When you see histories of the United States written up, Shapp is a footnote. That is extremely unfair and you – that's because of the bias of historians and media who are basically based in New York and Washington D.C. and don't do their research.

**BB:** Right. And I guess that's the importance of your story about what happened here in Pennsylvania and what happened with Governor Shapp and what happened with you and...

**MS:** There are three pivotal – there are three pivotal stages of the gay rights struggle. And each of them, Pennsylvania has played a major role. So, the first – the first role is showing ourselves publicly. Well, in Pi – Philadelphia, we had the Janus Society, we had Daughters of Bilitis, and then in 1964, a restaurant in Philadelphia refused to serve gay people if they were dressed extraordinarily. And that wasn't accepted very well by the gay community since this was a

restaurant in the heart of the gay community and basically that was their business in the evening. So they literally held a sit-in and handed out flyers outside that restaurant. That was the first of its type in the nation. Never happened before. The first picketing ever in America took place 1965 through '69 every July 4<sup>th</sup> here in Philadelphia outside Independence Hall. The first time any LGBT community seriously worked with the government to change policies happened here in Pennsylvania with Milton Shapp. Those are three monumental changes in the history of LGBT. And they all happened in Pennsylvania. Compton and San Francisco came later. Stonewall came later.

**BB:** And this all happened...

**MS:** Gays in the military came later, but we had gays in the state troopers!

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** Think about it, all those issues happened here in Pennsylvania first. Amazing.

**BB:** It is. It's actually very phenomenal so...

**MS:** Yeah, just connect the dots.

**BB:** Yeah.

**MS:** And those dots went all the way to the White House. Those dots went all the way – all the way to the Equality Bill that's now before the Senate in Congress. When Bella Abzug introduced it in May 1974 and couldn't figure out how to get the bill moving 'cause she had just four – four sponsors herself, Koch and Congressman Burton from California, and I forget the fourth. She sent it to me and said, "What can I do on this thing? Why can't I get it moving?" And I looked at it and I said, "Bella, you realize that all the sponsors are white?" And she – she said – Bella Abzug – "Get me a black member!" And I said, "I'm not a member of Congress" so I thought for a while and I realized that we had African-American Congress people here in Philadelphia. So I went to see my local Congressman. His name was Robert N. C. Nix. And I said, "Congressman, I'd like you to sign onto a bill that will stop discrimination against gay men and lesbian women." And he looked at me and said, "Why should I do that?" And luckily for me I smiled and said, "Because my grandmother, Fannie Weinstein took me when I was thirteen years old to march with you around City Hall for civil rights for the African-American community. I'm now asking you to help my community." And Robert N. C. Nix became the first African-American to sign onto the Equality Act. Now, what's important about that? Robert N. C. Nix was also one of the founders of the Congressional Black Caucus. Again, Pennsylvania coming to the rescue.

**BB:** Right. Let me ask one more question. Why do you think that Pennsylvania has yet to pass a state-wide anti-discrimination law?

**MS:** Because as Jim Carville, political pundit, says so well, you have Philadelphia on one side of the state, you have Penn – you have Pittsburgh on the other and in the middle you have Alabama. So, the middle part of the state is a place that is rich with state representatives and state senators and they're basically conservative and Republican.

**BB:** Do you think we'll ever get it passed?

**MS:** Yes, I do. But, let me say something that is a little – you know I don't shy from controversy, so let me say it very clearly. There's one reason we don't have it on the books right now. And that's because we don't have a strong governor. The governor has power. The governor can say very simply, "I will not sign the next budget of the state of Pennsylvania and I will not let it become law until I have an Equality Bill". We are only one of 22 states that do not have an Equality Bill. And I won't allow it. Give me that legislation. What that says to me is we're not a high priority.

**BB:** Right. So.

**MS:** We will be eventually. I mean, it took...

**BB:** It takes the right person.

**MS:** It takes the right leader. We are, as Obama said, Selma, Seneca Falls, Stonewall. What that sentence meant very simply was that our civil rights movement is as equal to any other civil rights and therefore, we should look at how those civil rights movements have progressed. Perfect example, it was President Kennedy but more importantly President Johnson who told the Senate if you didn't pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act, no legislation would go across my desk.

**BB:** Right.

**MS:** When do we get a governor with that kind of leadership?

**BB:** Right. So, I think you're right Mark. Alright, so...

**MS:** Alright I've never said that before. And I'm sure Wolf is not gonna be happy with it.

**BB:** So, well I wanna thank you Mark...

**MS:** Did I give you what you wanted?

**BB:** You did. And more.

**MS:** And I wanted to say some stuff I have not said before.

**BB:** So, I think it's a – you can go on...

**MS:** Yeah, but I didn't want to speak for – for all of Pennsylvania. That's not my right. You know, they have their own voices. They've suffered more than we in cities. It's easier – it's sometimes easier for us in cities to get the...

**BB:** Well thank you so much...

**MS:** Oh, well thank you! And they made it before... [video cut off]