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Interviewee: Mark Stoner

Interviewer: Mary Merriman

Date of Interview: August 29, 2013

Location of Interview: Lancaster, PA

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Abstract:

Mark Stoner, born in 1959, grew up and currently lives in Lancaster, where he has worked as a graphic designer for the past 30 years. He came out as gay early in his college years at Penn State University and thereafter became involved in Lancaster's gay community, both socially and politically. He was among the founders of the Pink Triangle Coalition and worked extensively with the organization for years. Additionally, he has been involved with establishing the first Central Pennsylvania Pride and Lancaster Pride, the Lancaster-area gay publication *Inquery*, and the Lancaster City Human Relations Commission's protections against anti-LGBT discrimination. In this interview, he discusses gay life from the late '70s to the present and its influence on his personal life, including his experiences coming out in a supportive environment, his personal relationship with religion over the years, the impact of the emergence of AIDS in the '80s, and political efforts to end anti-LGBT discrimination in Lancaster.

MM: Okay. And, just by way of—okay, it's ready to go.

MS: Hi, my name's Mark Stoner. I'm from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I live in the city now. My birth date is July 28, 1959, so that makes me 54. Today is August 29, 2013, which makes it the day after the 50th anniversary of the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington, and that's kind of apropos because I—since I was born in 1959, that's kind of my era, and I'm getting more into that later. My background—my parents both came from Mennonite Lancaster County families. Neither of them ever joined the Mennonite Church. My father was Charles R. Stoner. He was born in East Petersburg to a family of 12, and my grandmother would have worn a covering and [gestures] a grey yoke dress—she always reminded me of *Whistler's Mother*, when I—the painting—when I was a child, she was in her 90s then. He never joined the Mennonite Church because he was the World War II generation, and actually signed up to fight, which is—most Mennonites are pacifists, and then when he came back from the war, he met my mother, who was a Dellinger (?) that grew up east of town. Her parents would have gone to Mellinger's Mennonite Church. She always was a non-conformist and questioned things, so she never joined the church as a youth. Kind of during that time, the Mennonite Church was lowering the age—originally they were like the Amish, where you didn't marry—I mean, you didn't join the church until you married, but there were a lot of revivals in the '20s and '30s that kind of lowered that age to puberty, and she resisted throughout high school, and she did get to go to college at Penn State, and before she left for that, her father let her join a Friends Church, which was the Methodist Church, and so I ended up growing up in the Methodist Church. I have five siblings—two sisters and three brothers, and they kind of came in groups, so the two oldest are the two girls, Sue and Marsha, they're 10 and eight years older than me, then there—two years later there's the first son, Fred, and my next brother, John, and then there's a gap, 'cause there was a miscarriage in there, and so there's five years to me, and another year and a half 'til my youngest brother was born, and despite the birth policies of that time, when it was very hard to

get sterilized for not having a medical reason, my mother said six kids was enough. [chuckles] So I grew up—I think in a very—I was the baby with four older siblings from five to 10 that gave me lots of attention. I think I got more attention than my baby brother did, ‘cause he was just another one. [both laugh] And...other things, like, I think that my parents not—they always attended church and took us to church as kids, but they didn’t have a—a real strong—they, they believed in free thought, especially my mother, so that some of the challenges about being gay and religious views and parents, I never really had to deal with that, I always felt very lucky with the fam—with the fam I had, and lucky in a lot of ways. So anyway, I was born in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, grew up in Akron [Pennsylvania], lived on a small farm right out of town. My father was a butcher by profession but a farmer by avocation, so we had five acres, usually grew tobacco and corn. My mother was a public school teacher when she wasn’t having children. [chuckles] And so—soon, when I was five, she went back to teaching, and as a child, I was always—I guess, I’ve always been kind of a Pollyanna? That was a sh—a movie from the ‘50s of this little girl who goes around town and just does good things for all the people, then falls out of a tree, which as a third grader, started—I was crying in the school, which I knew was a very bad thing, I couldn’t let any of the other boys see me cry over *Pollyanna*, but it really touched my heart, and I often think back to some of those things—or, or we got a lecture about litter, and I ended up picking up all the trash the whole way home from school. Things like that, I’ve—as I have trash pickups for Adopt-a-Highway programs, lately, I think, “Oh, I’m still doing this stuff.”

MM: Mhm.

MS: So during the s—I grew up during the ‘60s, like I said, that was right in the middle of the Civil Rights efforts, and Vietnam, towards the late ‘60s, so kind of as I became politically aware, a lot of the things just seemed given. [claps intermittently] You know, you know, blacks should have equal treatment. I remember debating with a good friend of mine in, like, fifth grade, about interracial marriage, where his—his parents’ and his view was like, “Well, it was okay to have interracial marriage, *but* for the children, you know, you really shouldn’t do that—‘cause of children.” And—and you know, it’s great to see all the change there and just have tons of interracial couples and no one blinks an eye anymore. And that’s become very relevant the last couple years, is marriage, gay marriage has become such a big issue. And so I feel kind of blessed to live during this time period because I’ve seen so much change. I also think I, you know, would have graduated from high school in 1977 and went to Penn State, so that was after some of the gay issues started to break a little bit. Like, I feel like a lot of people 10 years older than me grew up with nothing but negative comments and negative opinions about being gay or lesbian, and at least for me, there started to be a body of literature and things like that that people questioned that. Another thing I always thought was funny—Stonewall was in 1969, and one of the issues there was that it was—partially started because Judy Garland had passed away, and I actually remember the news announcement that she passed away, and I think—it’s just such a weird thing that that’s one that I remember from being, like, 10 years old.

MM: So you started to get hints early.

MS: Ha, well yeah, and it’s just funny—

MM: You figured out...

MS: —Before you ever knew or what—had any awareness of being gay, I—I know the first time I heard the word ‘homosexual,’ and it was ‘cause my older brother-in-law, who’s, again, 10 years older than me, had gone to grad school in Cleveland, you know, this is earl—early ‘70s, I would say, late ‘60s—partially to avoid the draft, because that’s what you—that was one of the ways you could do that back then, but he was not used to being in a city, and so there were some crime things that bothered him, and the other thing that bothered him is he invited someone up to his room who put his hand on his leg. And that really freaked him out, and soon after that—I don’t know which freaked him out the most, but in combo, he decided to leave drag—grad school and take his chances with the military.

MM: Mhm.

MS: And so, it’s—it does kind of amaze you that, like, I remember that, but that’s—and I remember my older brother, who would have been in college in the early ‘70s, coming home during the—this is the David Bowie glitter phase, where being bisexual was kind of trendy, saying, “Oh, why would anyone not avail themselves to half the human population for their love?” and things like that.

MM: [laughs]

MS: So I did find out later, he did have some experiences in college, and it’s—but it is—honestly, I had some kind of awareness that those things stuck in my mind. I would say other than that I was a pretty late bloomer [laughs] sexually and didn’t really deal with it much at all in high school, late high school. I mean, by the time I was 14, then I—there were—was when I think things, sexually, I started thinking about, but for a long, long time, I didn’t really have any idea—I thought I kind of admired guys a lot more than women. I didn’t really have any interest in dating anyone that was at all sexual, I liked very platonic relationships with—I had a—you know, with those long-suffering girls that dated gay men, and nothing ever happened, and there were quite a few at my high school that went through a series of gay men to the point that, once I came—once I was aware and came out in college, some of them—you just meet their next boyfriend and think, “Oh my god, here’s another one.” [both laugh] And then 20 years later, you meet them at a Pride parade, or something like that, and you find out, “Oh yeah!” [both laugh] When... So anyway, I grew up in Ephrata, lived in the same house, same place the whole time. I feel very rooted in Lancaster County. When I—I went away to Penn State, like I said, in ’77, I started out as a biochemistry major. I ended up switching into graphic design for a number of reasons, and I think being gay was one of—I just didn’t want to be in a—in a lab my whole life, and I wanted to do something a little more creative, and before college I had never really thought about art being an occupation. I had a friend who was trying to get in the graphic design program, and I would help him with his projects, and then he kept saying, “You should try out for this!” and so I went and talked to the one professor, who talked about graphic design being logical thinking, and that was exactly what I needed to hear, that it wasn’t just do-whatever-you-want. And so that’s—midway I switched into graphic design, that’s what my degree was in. I worked up in State College for a few years after I graduated—I had interned somewhere called Media Magic, and then worked there for about a year and a half to two years after I graduated. I

found out about a job offering in Lancaster. I wasn't—I was thinking about looking somewhere on the East Coast, was kind of what I was thinking—probably not New York, I didn't really want to go into the big city, and I had visited there a lot, and I felt like New York was, in one way, people defined themselves so narrowly to fit into whatever bar they were going to or whatever, you know, whatever level of society they were trying to fit into, that's where they fit, and I—I had a friend that lived there, and I just got the feeling in some ways it was a very small town. Like—[both chuckle] people would still find out where people were from and where their background was, things—things like that, but—that didn't really appeal to me, where I much more liked having a—an area where, at that time and still now, you're kind of forced to deal with a lot of different people in a bar. You don't just have—well, you do somewhat, but you have gays and lesbians in the same bar. In New York at that time, I felt like there were [gestures to indicate separate entities] gay bars, there were leather bars, you know, there were all these different identities, and you kind of molded into the identity of the bar you were attending, or something like that.

MM: Mhm.

MS: So anyway, I—I didn't really wanna go to New York, which would be the one place you'd think about going with a design degree. I found out about the job in Lancaster, I applied here, and 30 years later, I'm still at Godfrey Advertising.

MM: Wow.

MS: It's a regional—it's not quite 30. It'll be 30 years next spring. Where—this is a business and advertising agency, you know, there are all—there are all the issues about being at one place for so long and not being an owner, but for the most part, it's given me a good base to do a lot of different things. When I started here in 1984, there were other gay people, not really anyone who was out at the time, some were just in the process of coming out. They were out enough that I could find out that there were gay people before I started here, and after I was working here, it was a fairly young staff, that like—40 and under, for the most part, except for a couple long-term employer—employees, and about a year after I started, I was asked if—what the right wording would be in their nondiscrimination clause if they wanted to add sexual identity—and by then the words weren't 'sexual identity,' it had already gone to 'sexual orientation,' and so they put it in their nondiscrimination clause, because the thought was, "We don't do that, so it might as well be there." So it was not even something to ask for, and, you know, most people at that time did not have that protection around here, and that was a blessing to let me do a lot of different things, and I do appreciate that. So I kind of—I really hadn't come out at all in high school, I had some friends—the one guy I mentioned before, Michael, was—was a very close friend that was two years younger than me who ended up going to Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. In high school, he was already kind of a fashion designer, sewing his own clothes, and even though he was way underage, he was six foot seven, so he was disco dancing and going around to local bars—he could get in because he was tall, and I could get in because I was hairy.

MM: [laughs]

MS: And I don't think they were strict back then, as far as carding people, but the—the drinking age was 21 in Pennsylvania, and we—we were 18 or younger. I—and he was the first person I came out to, but it was a long, long process. I thought about talking to him a lot about it, there—especially, there was one summer he was talking about, you know, being in all these disco competitions with his—this girl friend, who wasn't a girlfriend, and she was kind of frustrated about that, and he was talking to me about that, and I wanted to ask him if he was gay, but that was such—that was just something everyone else in Ephrata already thought about him, so how could, me, being his best friend, ask him if he was gay. Even though I'm thinking I'm probably gay. [chuckles] And so that went for a while, like, probably all through my freshman year at college. At Penn State, I didn't think I met anyone that was gay my whole first year at college, except—there was a group called HOPS, which stood for Homophiles of Penn State. They had been founded in the early '70s, and there's a battle that—to found them originally, but that was, even by 1977, kind of an antiquated name, but they would always have a table at registration. In those days, to register for classes, you did a pre-registration where you might get some of your classes, but then to really work out your schedule you went into the gymnasium, and there were tables for all the different courses, and you have to go to that table, see when they had an opening, and figure out your schedule, and get the classes that you needed that you hadn't gotten yet. So there were always—all the different organizations had tables on your way out that you'd go past, and there was always a table for HOPS. So you knew they existed, but you never thought you really talked to—and of course, that was [laughs] some of my favorite people now, but, you know, [laughs, uses deep joking voice] a nice stocky lesbian.

MM: [laughs, repeats:] A nice stocky lesbian.

MS: A nice little meek gay boy sitting beside her. [both laugh] That they—they were great people, but they did look very stereotypically gay. And then my sophomore year, I—I finally came out to my friend Michael. We had gone to New York for a weekend one time, and that time, we didn't mention at all that either of us were gay, it was the first time I went to a Broadway show. I got to go—we took the bus up, and my mom let me go because she thought Michael would know what he was doing, 'cause he had been there before. On the way, he had this bag that—from a travel agent who I didn't know, but it ended up he was gay [both chuckle]—and we didn't discuss this then, but it was kind of just weird that he had this travel bag from this older guy. There had been a movie called *The Eyes of Laura Mars*, which was about modeling in New York and some kind of intrigue, but some of the scenes were filmed down at the end of Christopher Street, in what were the dots and things, and at that time, at the end of Christopher Street, there was a—the West Side Highway was still raised, so—during the day, while we were up there together, he suggested we walk down this street to—'cause he knew where *The Eyes of Laura Mars* was filmed. And it just happened to be at the end of Christopher Street, and I had heard about Christopher Street, so we did things like that—we walked down Christopher Street until it looked so deserted and rough and there weren't any people on the street that we were afraid of venturing further, and we turned around, but that was my first venture there. But other than *The Eyes of Laura Mars*, we didn't talk about gayness 'til...later in the year, friends that—it probably would have been around Thanksgiving, we all got together—this is, like, the group of theatre and band kids that I hung around in high school with—we all get together, and of course, this is late '70s, so drugs are an issue, pretty common in college, so we had a talk, like—by then, we had all drunk beer, we knew that, but everyone's talking about what

drugs they had done. And Mike said he had done poppers, and the only time I'd ever heard about poppers was—by that time in the '70s there actually were some publications—one was called *Blue Boy*, there was another, a less overt one called *After Dark*, which was kind of a New York theatre and nightlife magazine, but that did deal with gay issues, and in stories there was the only place I had ever heard 'poppers.' No one—no one I ever met had said that. So soon as he said that, I was like, "Who did you do poppers with? Who did you do poppers with?" [both laugh] And so he said, "I'll tell you later," and after the group broke up, we went out together, and then he said, "Well, what would you say if I did poppers with a guy?" And—poppers, I had just—it was either amyl or butyl nitrate, it was an inhalant that kind of just gives people a rush and a flush and was very popular in the gay world then—you'd be out dancing, and it'd have a very distinctive smell, you would smell it. But at that time, I had never—well, I'd never been in a gay bar at that time. I had picked up some magazines—there was a paperback about a happy—a male happy hooker, in the local kind of pharmacy card store that I had looked at so much when I was maybe 16 to buy that I think she thought I was gonna steal something. [both chuckle] And so there were things I read—oh, you could find books in the library too, so peruse—under 'homosexual,' of course—[both chuckle]—so I had done some reading but never really talked to anyone. But coming out to him was a really great way to come out, because I immediately had a friend that was a good friend and not a sexual relationship, although by the time I was 19, I was very ready to have sex—I had had sex with a woman before then to kind of find out how that all worked, and it was the '70s so you know, free sex, everyone was supposed to be having sex. And then he immediately introduced me to other friends of ours that—there was another friend who was a mortician so he had gone—he was older than us and had gone away to school for two years, so when we were seniors in high school, or when I was a senior in high school, he already had his own apartment, and it would always have a copy of *International Mail*, which was a clothing catalogue with scantily-clad men in very gay outfits, and a mortician book that had...nudity, and that—even though they might be dead. [Both laugh] And they were his coffee table books! But it was a place that, you know, we could drink a little bit and things like that, and so it turned out he was gay, so there were a number of people I met locally, then, through them. I had—like I said, I hadn't thought I met anyone at Penn State, so—but I was going to join University Choirs at Penn State, and so people here said, "Oh, there'll be tons of people in choir. Just..." You know. And they were right. So I joined choir and in the spring, the Pennsylvania—the Pennsylvania Choir would always sing with the Pittsburgh Symphony, with André Previn, and we would have a road trip that you'd be in Pittsburgh from like, Thursday through Sunday, or something like that. And you were either housed with families that would house you, and a certain amount of people were in a hotel right downtown, so that very first time I went and stayed with a family for a couple nights, but one night doubled up with someone that had a room, who happened to be this Puerto Rican gay man whose mission, I think, was to get people to come out. So he had invited several people to stay over that night. We ended up going out to a gay bar, so the—I went to a gay bar called the Tilden in Pittsburgh, it was the first gay bar, it was...exciting and scary, oh, and I didn't know if these were men or women, or anything else. I was entranced. We ended up meeting one of the grad students at the—from the choir, who was—his name was—he was in his 30s, his name was Tommy, and he was über-gay, like, anyone would know now, but back then, [mocking voice] no one was sure and it was really discussed whether he was gay or not, like, did you see the guys that came to pick up Tommy tonight, blah blah blah blah.

MM: [laughs]

MS: Well anyway, he was at the bar, so, I met another gay contact, and so then I had a circle of friends up at Penn State, too, but I never went through, I think, what so many people at that time went through, was random, anonymous sex with people they didn't know and things like—Penn State at that time, there was a place called the Wall, which was right along College Avenue. People would sit out there until someone stopped by with a—in a car, and, you know.

MM: Mhm.

MS: So I think that was a very healthy way to be introduced to the gay community, and I never felt like I had a lack of friends. There were some funny situations—I—I started dating another one of the grad students in the choir, who was—I was 19 and he was 28, and I just didn't know what he saw in me, because I was so young and he was so mature. [Both laugh] And that—that was my first “love,” and that lasted about a year and a half, ‘til he broke my heart, and—but during that, I started coming out to roommates—well, my one roommate, and one other friend on the floor, and this was a roommate that I had already lived with for a year and a half before I came out to him. His basic concept was, if he lived with a woman who was at all attractive, he would want to have sex with her, so I was living with him—either he wasn't attractive... [both laugh] Or I'd wanna have sex with him. [Both laugh] And neither was the case. So that always was a concern for him—without my knowing it, there was a whole situation—well, earlier that year, you kind of were—I had been in the dorms for two years living with him, I wanted to live off-campus the next year, so we were kind of forming what roommates we'd live with and things like that, and he was a constant pot smoker, so there was always, like, this smelly bong, and I didn't—I tried it, but I never really liked it, and I didn't like it having—happen constantly, so I had decided I didn't wanna room with him the next year, and that broke his heart already—he was really upset about that. Then he found out I was gay, and then he was concerned about my other roommates, because he was worried people would think—if they found out about me, they might think he was gay. So he decided—my other roommates for the next year ought to know that I'm gay, but he didn't tell them directly. There were—there were—my one roommate had a sister who was friends with kind of the circle of girls that—that hung around with our dorm floor, so he told the friend that I was gay, so she told the sister, and over the summer, the sister told my one roommate that she knew something about one of his roommates that he oughta know. [both laugh] That one of them was gay, but he wouldn't tell her which one. So about midway through the next year, when I came out to him, he had been thinking the whole year it was another one of the roommates, the one that he actually roomed with, ‘cause we all had shared bedrooms—it was a two-bedroom apartment with four guys in it—and so he—I—I was always impressed, and it turned out fine, except that my one other roommate then got jealous that I had told him before I told the other one. [both laugh]

MM: Mark, what year were you—are we at?

MS: This is like 1979.

MM: Okay.

MS: Okay. And so, at that time, kind of my typical—at school, there was a bar called Mr. C’s that was gay on Monday nights—

MM: [laughs] I love it.

MS: There had been some previous bars, one was called the My Oh My, the kind of hat—but they kind of pre-dated me. There were gay organizations and during—I volunteered, like, they had a phone line, and things like that that I volunteered for. I ended up being in school five years because I had switched majors, so my final year there I got a roommate from—like the board at the—at the Gay Center, which was in the HUB, which was the Hudson Union Building, it’s still in—at Penn State. So yeah, they had a small office there, I used to help with a newsletter, and like I said, they had a phone line, things like that, and really some great people. Then—and then so I was out pretty much—not totally, because nobody was out totally [laughs] but I really didn’t—by my senior year, everyone knew, I would say as far as friends and things like that. And I—I kind of always thought I sounded gay enough that if someone didn’t have a clue—I just kind of always assumed people knew I was gay. That was kind of a defense then too, because it meant you didn’t always have to tell people—you weren’t the one that always had to bring it up. And there would be a lot of times when you didn’t bring it up, but I—I just kind of assumed people would talk and find out—like I—I kind of welcomed the normal talk that goes along anyway [laughs] any circle of friends, thinking that they’d know, they’d find out.

MM: Mhm.

MS: At home, I—with my family, I—first person I told was my younger brother Dave, who was just—you know, a year and a half younger than me, so we were always and still are, I think, the closest. And then gradually then, you know, my brother Fred, who was the one that made the bisexual comments... And then for a while I didn’t really go beyond that. And my family—it’s a big family, it’s always welcoming, so people bringing friends to family functions or anything like that, whether they were same-sex or opposite sex, it never really got questioned, they were just welcomed in, so that never really became an issue, and you weren’t really questioned about—I remember once when my older brother was dating a girl for a long time, and they were actually living—I think living together, but not in town, they came to visit, and my—my mother said they weren’t allowed to sleep together on our house. [both laugh] That kind of surprised me, because it meant that someone was bumped—just the way the numbers worked out, someone had to sleep on the couch, rather than if they could have coupled up, everyone would have had a bed. And I just thought, “Oh my gosh, when she finds out if I’m gay, am I not going to be able to sleep with anyone?” You know, what’s...what’s the deal here? [both chuckle] And so through college, my—most of my family didn’t really know, but I pretty much considered myself out. Any weekend I would come home, I would go out with Michael, like—if it—‘cause usually when I was home it was either over the summer or a break, so he’d be off school too. That was kind of my standard—“I’m going out”—I’d just say, “I’m going with Michael,” and then we’d come in—at that time, it was the Tally Ho, which is still here in Lancaster, so I would have been about 19 when I started going there.

MM: Was that the only bar in Lancaster then?

MS: I think the Sundown was around, but I never went there.

MM: Okay.

MS: There was a restaurant called the Hoar House, spelled H-O-A-R, I think? Or W-H—anyway, it’s a family name that they used. But that was kind of a restaurant-bar and was a little mixed, ‘cause there’d been a place previous there called the Fiddler that was a gay bar. And then the—the bar that I loved and of my dreams was called the Railroad House, which was in Marietta [Pennsylvania] at that time. And it’s an old brick colonial building that sits right beside the railroad. It was a restaurant and they had some rooms upstairs, and in the basement they had a bar. And eventually then they also had kind of an outside area that had a bar also, so over the summer, it was, like, the only place around that actually had an outside bar, but the—the basement was an old basement that had a dance floor that was stainless steel and a lighting and sound system that was really good, and when people would dance, it would get so steamy and hot there that the moisture would condense on the ceiling and drip down and make the stainless steel dance floor all slick. [both laugh]

MM: I didn’t know that.

MS: Oh yeah, so you know, shirtless men, all that kind of stuff. And then you could go outside—‘cause of course, every place was smoking then—and—and it was, Sunday night was the night to go to the Railroad House, and it had something to do with the Blue Laws, which—Blue Laws were still around Pennsylvania. They were laws restricting shops being open and things like that on Sundays, but for some reason, I’m not sure what the combina—but because they were a hotel/restaurant/bar, they could be open Sunday nights, so when other—when all the other bars had to be closed, people from Harrisburg, York, Lancaster, and beyond would converge at the Railroad House, and you could always count on there being tons of people there. You got some Washington [D.C.] and Baltimore [Maryland], New York people there, too, there they were—there there were older houses that people had redone, that there were several New York group—New York individuals that actually lived there as a vacation home, and things like that. And so even if I came home for a weekend, I would usually leave—make it that my parents would think I’m driving back to Penn State, I would go on a Sunday night there first, and then stay there ‘til two o’clock and then be back at Penn State by four or five. [both laugh] Yes. So that was my—that’s well-spoken about by many, many people from that time period, and I still wish there was a bar like that here. And I would occasionally go to Harrisburg but not too much, other than that it was usually local, and just occasionally maybe Philly, or I—once my friend Michael was in New York, I visited him, but that was, again, just once in a long while. Although I—I did visit him with his—he ended up having a boyfriend who was 40—that was just so old [both laugh]—who was an interior designer in New York, who was, like, from Iowa, you know, moved to New York, totally made sure he had no accent, and, you know, the word back then was [drawls] fabulous, and you could say anything was fabulous, and I kind of decided in the end the reason that was used is ‘cause you couldn’t really tell if they were being sarcastic or serious, so they were never wrong. [laughs] And so, he was your typical implanted New Yorker, that—the one thing—and this was one of the reasons I decided I didn’t want to be in New York, but I had gone to visit their summer house, they had a house in Southampton [New York], that was perfect—

MM: Very nice.

MS: —They had this Cape Cod cathedral ceiling, little bungalow with a pool and then they had a membership at the private beach club, but of course, no one knew that this 40-year-old man and this 19-year-old friend of his were gay, like that could not be spoken about by this interior designer [laughs] who, I couldn't imagine that anyone would not, like, from the get-go assume was gay. So it was interesting to see that whole mentality in New York at that time, because you kind of—not being in New York, you thought, “Oh, it wouldn't be an issue”—it was a big issue. ... Yeah, so there were some trips and things like that. I—the first time I went to Rehoboth [Delaware] was soon after I graduated, but was st—and Rehoboth—Beach is—well, it used to be a Methodist...kind of, not Chautauqua(?) but that kind of idea town that became kind of a gay beach place outside Washington, so like, New Yorkers would go to Fire Island [New York], or Boston would go to Provincetown [Massachusetts], Washington would go to Rehoboth Beach, and still does. That was just kind of dead reckoning—I found the beach there because—they used to have these things—one was called the Damron's Guide, which was basically a listing of gay and lesbian bars—a published listing, so it was a solid—it was back in the days of books, no internet or anything like that—so of course it took, you know, a year or two to get all the stuff collected and then put into the book, and then of course the one I'm looking at is two years old because it's at the Gay and Lesbian Resource Center, the HOPS office, so I'd looked for—I knew Rehoboth was kind of a gay place, I had a new—my first new car, I had purchased a little Subaru, and I decided my first road trip was going to go to Rehoboth, and I found where gay bars should be. I got there and I found out it had burned down. [laughs] So it was no longer there, and it was actually down in Dewey Beach, which is south of Rehoboth, but there's—when I was driving into Rehoboth, I noticed there was this kind of lake that cut off beach access for a while, and I thought, “Well, if there's gonna be a gay beach, it's gonna be at the end of some place, it's either gonna be a peninsula that it's at the very tip of, like, Provincetown—“ [both laugh] So I thought, “I'm gonna try there to see if there's a gay—“ so I walked straight out from where this bar was supposed to be to the beach, and that was the one—it was the south edge of where there is still private beach, like the Du Ponts and things owned a couple private homes there, and I was absolutely right for the time—there had been, that's where the gay beach used to be, and it was just transitioning, so that—that last year or so, after this bar had burned down, the gay beach transitioned to the northern end of that section on the Rehoboth Beach side, but there were still people showing up on the southern side, so I found a gay couple and kind of asked—well, I don't remember if they talked to me or if I talked to them, but I found out the information of where the bar was now, which was called the Renegade—at that time, it was a huge dance bar down there. So there were things like that. Or I—the scuba club that I was in went and camped right outside Key West [Florida] one year, so I did have some ventures to places like that at the time. So, you know, college—I graduated, moved back my—my senior? Yeah, my senior year in college, which would have been '81-'82. That's when “gay cancer” started to be an issue. And I'm really not sure when they started using the term AIDS, but that was—that was just starting, no one had any idea what it—what it was—

MM: In '70 (?) you think.

MS: Right. There were all kinds of rumors. And, you know, Ronald Reagan was elected, never used the word, Rock Hudson came out... [laughs] Unwillingly, I think, was—he had kissed someone on the TV show *Dallas*, that was a huge thing, that someone with AIDS had actually, two years before, kissed a—someone. [takes a drink from a bottle] So that was all just kind of starting when I was leaving college. I moved back to Lancaster, because I had this job at—at Godfrey. Like I said, I already knew people in this area, somewhat, and there were other people that already worked here that were gay, so during the last half of the '80s, I wasn't as politically involved. I did—there were some volunteer things that I did, there was a phone line at that time run by Earl Custer, who I think was a Vision of Hope member—

MM: He was a founder.

MS: —and for years had done things, and that was basically set up, that they had a phone number that would get transferred to your home line every night, so there were different volunteers that would staff it, and it was really just a—a help line, to help, like, if someone had problems, to either talk them through it or try to connect them with someone that could help. Vision of Hope was probably the only gay organization that was—that I was aware of then. There weren't really any—I—earlier on, there were some political groups here, but not at that time, nothing that I found, at least. So I volunteered for that. The AIDS issue was coming up, so there were groups forming around that—

MM: Which was '90. (?)

MS: Lancaster AIDS Project formed in the late '80s. Another home that I helped with was called the Eagle's Wings, and I did a logo and things for them, so I would kind of volunteer that kind of design work and things like that, and maybe some other volunteering, but nothing—it's funny, I wasn't directly involved in any political groups—

MM: I don't— (?)

MS: —But I felt like there really weren't any. In fact, I remember being a little bit—I felt like there were all these gay men that were kind of being forced to become active because of the AIDS issue. Either they had been diagnosed or had friends that were diagnosed, so there was a definitely—a need there, and it was an important need, but I kind of felt a little resentful that it took an illness to make people deal with things, you know? Because there were tons of people that led a full gay life but lied to society—they lied—“they weren't gay at all.” And, you know, I—even going out to bars, bars picked up at 11 o'clock or later. It wasn't much of a daytime crowd, and I think that some—because you could do everything you needed to do for your regular life, and then you'd go out and do your gay life. And I never really liked segmenting my life that—I kind of felt like I was the same person everywhere, I didn't want to have little boxes, and I—again, when I talked before about New York, I think that's kind of the same thing, I wanted to just be me. And then locally, the big kind of watershed moment for me was the—when the City Council voted to include sexual orientation and marital status as protected classes under the then-joint Lancaster City-County Human Relations Commission. And that would have been 1990, 1991?

MM: '91.

MS: So it led—basically the City Council almost immediately voted unanimously to include sexual orientation and marital status. There was a county commissioner—well, there were three county commissioners. One of them was Brad Fischer at the time, and Jim Huber was another one, and I forget who the third was. Brad Fischer had run as a Democrat to become county commissioner...

MM: Was it Terry Kauffman?

MS: Terry Kauffman, that might be right.

MM: I think it might have been.

MS: He had—he had run as a Democrat. He was a very ambitious politician, very young, and then switched to—you had—there—for county commissioner, there are always two majority commissioners and one minority. So he was elected county commissioner, but once he got in, he switched to Republican, and he thought his career arc would be up the Republican Party then. So he came across as being super conservative, just had all kinds of statements against the ordinance, ended up supporting dissolving the joint City-County Commission and having the county start their own commission, rather than at all letting the city cover sexual orientation and marital status. So—and then the other issue with him is that he was always rumored to be gay, so when he was initially elected, it was with a lot of local gay and lesbian support. I never really knew if he was gay—I have very good friends that I trust very well that used to say he would cruise them, they worked at Park City, or something like that—

MM: [laughs]

MS: —And he would constantly kind of flirt eyes at them, and stuff like that—young, attractive men. And then you'd find people on a bar, at the Tally Ho, who weren't the most trustworthy that you knew that insisted they had sex with him, but I never met someone that I felt was totally credible that said he had had sex with Brad Fischer. But it left a really bad taste in my mouth. They—the other thing is, at the time, I lived at 505 West Walnut Street, my next door neighbor, Russell Pew(ph) was active in the Republican Party. And I'm a Republican, too. We can get into that later. But they would have campaign meetings on their back porch in the sun, where I'd have my windows open and they'd be over there, discussing the issue of Brad's being gay and how they were going to deal with it in the campaign. So it wasn't just us that were saying it. In the end, he ran for mayor in the city against Janice Stork, and so part of his planning was he blamed all these rumors about his gayness on Janice Stork, which wasn't true, it—they were many, many other places. We did a—I'm getting a little ahead of myself, but an organization that had started 'round that time was called Pink Triangle Coalition. We made buttons with cute sayings, like, "I've said no to Brad, have you?"

MM: [laughs]

MS: That was the most popular one that we would give people in the bar, just to be able to discuss the issue. I got a call about it from a—from a newspaper reporter who was just dying to have me out Brad on the...and I wasn't about to take that bait, 'cause I kind of felt like it was—he was—[laughs] doing it for the—that. But I, you know, I just said, “No, this is about his issues and things like that. We've said no. What else could it possibly mean?” So there were fun things like that. He actually never got elected again, which is... He did have to get married though. He—he got one child in the marriage and then had one of his own. I think that marriage has ended in divorce, if I—if I have the facts correct, but we don't hear much from Brad anymore. So anyway, as a result of this whole turmoil over the City Human Relations—or the City-County Human Relations Commission, you know, there were many, both County and City Council meetings where—City Council meetings you'd get tons of church groups from out of town, people like—afterwards, in discussion, beating other people with a Bible [gestures beating and laughs] while they're talking. It was—it was really bad, and then it was topped off by—the Klan decided to march in Lancaster in support of the opposition to their protection of gays and lesbians. And so, again, that led to a counter-Unity rally, the Klan actually did march, and then—but overall, I thought the community responded pretty well. It's a little embarrassing to have the Klan march in your town, but it's their right, and it's our right to make sure there's some counter...

MM: [laughs]

MS: They're the impetus for a lot of good things. A lot of good things came out of it. And so, from that, one of the things was—and it was talked about in some of the other interviews—Lee Stoltzfuss talked to Mary Merriman about running—about getting a group to finance an ad in the paper that said that the local gay and lesbian community thanks the community of Lancaster for their support. It had a red rose, it was very simple, but I think it's the first time there was an ad in the paper that said “gay and lesbian,” even though there's some other connections to gay and lesbians in Lancaster. I think later on I'll try to get into some rumors that I've heard—I'm not as old as some of the people, but it's interesting what you find out. And so the ad ran—there was a counter-ad in some little merchandiser paper, saying, [mocking voice] “We don't support gays and lesbians.” [laughs] It was made to look like the original ad, so it was nice to know you're having an effect. That—because of that, it was realized that there wasn't any non-religious gay group so that—

MM: And we've got about three minutes left on this, and I'm wondering if we want to put it in the next tape.

MS: Okay.

MM: Okay?

MS: Yes, I'll talk a little bit more about the organization that came out of that. There was something else that I was going to say was a good that came from that, but I can't remember now. So yeah, that was really the roots of their—of the '90s having some kind of a group here that was broader-based. You know, the religious side at that time, there were a lot of people that

had been really hurt by religion, so going into anything that was called a church was just something they weren't going to do at all. I talked a lot.

MM: [laughs] It goes fast, doesn't it? I'm gonna go—see, it's starting here. You see it flashing?

MS: Yeah, it is flashing.

[End of tape. On a different video:]

MM: Okay, there you go! We're back!

MS: Okay, tape two already!

MM: And name, birthdate.

MS: Yes, I'm Mark Stoner, I'm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and I was born on July 28, 1959. And on the last tape, we just ended up talking about the happenings of the '90, '91 period, where the city—the joint City-County Human Relations Commission, which had existed since 1964, was dissolved so that the county did not have to cover sexual orientation or marital status or be in any way connected with the city's coverage of that. So for that decade of the '90s, Janice Stork was mayor—she did not want to revisit the issue at all, so there was an ordinance on the books of the city saying that you were protected by all the—you know, race, all the regular ones, plus sexual orientation and marital status, but there was no entity to enforce that. And so that was pretty much the—that was the case through 2001. But in the meantime, the Klan had marched in '91 to support discrimination against gays, I would think.

MM: That's the way to go.

MS: Yep. And as a result, one of the things—there was talk, and Mary Merriman, who's interviewing me, was one of the people instrumental in pointing out that there was a need for some kind of a group or a coalition that wasn't religiously based. She was involved with the Vision of Hope Metropolitan Community Church. So there were several people, and I—I'm not even going to remember all the names. Some instrumental ones were Nancy Helms(ph), and there was a guy named Tommy(ph), I'm not gonna remember his last name, but—and others—Mary was—you were involved at that time, too, but we chose the name Pink Triangle because of the Holocaust and the prisoners in concentration camps that were gay or lesbian—well, gay being forced to wear pink triangles, and then there's some discussion about whether lesbians wore black triangles or what. And it was kind of a—all-over group. It was somewhat political, somewhat social—we tried to plan things like roller skates, we had a prom once, that we made a high school na—oh, it was called the Bal—yeah, Bali High, was the name, and its mascot was the poodle, and—

MM: [laughs] I don't remember that at all.

MS: And there were—yeah, events like that that we did, and again, started out '91—at that time there were some—assaults outside the Tally Ho, so there was kind of a Neighborhood Gay

Watch group, kind of a Pink Panthers type group that—oh, we'd sit outside the—with [gestures] I'd say mixed success, whether some [laughs] some of the people—there was another neighborhood Neighborhood Watch group that came out earlier and was erased by this other group later, who would actually talk to people on the street as they were going inside or out of the bar, so there were other issues then with the neighborhood groups that we had to deal with. I—I tend to be, I think, someone that can hear both sides of an issue, and once I'm involved in something, I just stay there forever, I just don't know how to—[laughs]

MM: Walk away and extract yourself, gives you something else...

MS: Extract myself, so I end up being, like, the mediator that sticks through forever, and I guess that's why I've had a long-term membership in a lot of different organizations. Yeah, so we did the neighborhood group, then kind of our first big public thing was the 1993 March on Washington. And so that was something that, you know, we did a lot of organizing before—I think we had six buses go.

MM: Mhm. I think that's about right.

MS: Yeah. Just getting the word out to people we knew that we wanted to get—oh my god, an article in the paper that people would have to actually take our pictures, so that's also kind of what led me, maybe a year before that, to make sure that everyone in my family knew. I had talked to my mother a couple years before. She was fine with it, in fact she got a little frocktor(ph)—like a script writing thing that said, “Let every bird sing its own song,” and one day she's like, [mimes pointing to it and acts excited] “Look, look what I got!” You know? [both laugh] And I think she knew before, probably, because she found pornography stuck in my mattress, but I'm not sure if that actually happened. And—but at the time she told me not to tell my father—my father was a World War II veteran, very much an Archie Bunker-type person, so that, even though on a face-to-face level, he was very accepting and very welcoming to anyone I ever met him with, he had every stereotype of the generation, whether it was from Jews having large noses to—he, you know—that was all just kind of the—the way the jokes were then. The whole society kind of had these built-in stereotypes to go with any person. One of my first boyfriends was African-American—they didn't know this—he came to visit over college, and they sat down at the table—I'm in the kitchen with my mom, and my dad's talking to my friend Tony, and there was one black family in all of Akron at that time, named the Lockleys(ph)—my father proceeds to say, “You're not related to the Lockleys, are you? You look so much alike!” [both laugh, MM starts coughing intermittently] But my father was a very loving person, and, despite the normal teenage resentment of your father, he always was really good to me—I was not a hunter, he was always fine with that. And so anyway, when I eventually told him—

MM: [after coughing again] Sorry.

MS: Do you need...? [gestures away]

MM: No.

MS: Okay. When I eventually told him, he [snaps fingers] accepted it like that. It was like we talked about it once, he always had a garden and always gave frozen vegetables, so then he said, “Well, do you want some vegetables?” and we went down, I got my vegetables, everything was back to normal.

MM: [laughs] That was the end of it.

MS: And he later that night said to my mom, “Oh, that must have been really hard for Mark to say,” and that let my mom know that he was thinking about my point of view and not really dealing with—and so it was always fine. It never really, in my family, not—was an issue. I think for my—my family runs the gamut as far as political and religious beliefs, so it may have been a little more of an issue with some people who are in-laws of sisters and things like that. I—I had a sister whose mother-in-law always would invite me to her church where I could get a free Bible if I showed up, until she found out, like, I was gay, and then that was never, ever mentioned again. And I think my sister was under a lot of pressure not to let the grandkids hang around our family, but that was ignored, so. Anyway, so Pink—back to Pink Triangle, so I was out to them, everyone in my family, we did a PR thing of us painting signs to go down to the march. I was involved before the march—each state had a delegation, and I got involved statewide to send—it was an interesting process. You had to send four representatives from every state, and you had to have gender parity and 50 percent self-confessed people of color, was the rule. Which—most of the people that showed up at the meeting were white men, and some of them really had an issue with that, but it did force that out—it was great, ‘cause you did—that was adhered to, and my partner at the time was African-American, and his name was John(ph), and so the very last meeting before the actual march, someone dropped out and couldn’t go, so he was brought in as an alternate representative, and I got to just go along for the fun of it, down to Washington, for the final planning before that march. And it was the best—it—it was a group of people that was so diverse—you just walked into this room, and you thought, “These people are never gonna agree on anything.” [laughs] And they had to figure out what order—who gets to march first, there were just so many—you know, and that—different, there had been some things going on in Oregon and Colorado and—just all, all kinds of viewpoints and concerns and they actually—they had to reach consen—they had modified consensus. So anything was discussed, you’d ask for consensus. If consensus could not be had, then it was discussed again, they would ask for consensus again, and then it would go to a vote, which was like a formal vote, where every state had to stand up, formally give its number, so that took at least 20—

MM: [laughs] It’s sounding like a convention.

MS: It was! It would take 20 minutes at least, at least, to go through the voting process. And there were just so many things that had to be decided, and these people actually had consensus. Like, when it finally came that, okay, we have all these things we have to get done today, it was amazing, and it was—I—just the most democratic process I was ever in, and—it was so obvious how important those gender parity and 50 percent self-professed people of color issues were, because it really—it just made it a more diverse group than I had ever seen, and I had the same reaction to a lot of other gay groups. The MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] in Washington was really a church that was diverse as far as race—and, you know, there just aren’t many other groups that show that diversity. I think that’s one of the things that have—has been

really good to me is that, you know, being a white male, being gay, it forced you to break down a lot of barriers and not be in the box that you would put yourself in. So '93, that was a really great year, it was really neat to be involved on that level—through that I met some other people in Harrisburg and stuff—Dan Miller was one of the organizers, Patrick Whalen(ph). Dan had been a person that was fired for being gay and had a court case at the time, there was a Dan Legal—Dan Miller Legal Defense Fund.

MM: Oh yeah, forgot that.

MS: Yeah, I have one of those t-shirts somewhere, too. [both laugh] But then, because of that, I—they asked me to be involved in the first Central Pennsylvania Pride festival. For a while, there was a place called Ski Roundtop, which had—kind of a Pride festival out in a mountain, you know, in an unused ski slope in the middle of summer. [laughs] I had never been there, but they finally had some kind of controversy that they didn't want it there anymore, and so Dan was one of the people that thought, "Okay, the time is now to have a public Pride event in Central Pennsylvania," and so—again I got—he asked me to be involved with that, so I was—helped with that that first year, that was fun. Other things those first couple years—oh, we started a—publication, we called it *Inqueery* [holds up *Inqueery* paper], which is kind of a play off of the *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal*, was the morning paper, and it's kind of funny—I didn't know this at the time, but there's—the other paper was the *Lancaster New Era*, and during the '70s, there was a publication that was the *Gay Era*, that I think was—

MM: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

MS: Yeah, and actually, through this project, I think that's the first Central Pennsylvania gay publication. Anyway, so it was always a little two-sider thing that we'd fold up and mail. Of course, on the outside, you didn't have anything that said "gay" or "lesbian"—

MM: [talking at the same time] Nothing gay-related, or—no.

MS: You couldn't have anything that would say it was gay or lesbian, so the one thing I started doing was making all these little—[gestures to the paper and laughs] something that would be on the outside, like, this one says, "You're welcome and we're always glad to see you!" You know? [both laugh] Just—because it would get mailed out. Things—email's a lot easier than newsletters. [laughs]

MM: Yes it is. It's much easier now that...

MS: And this is kind of a—I gal—a lot of the stuff was kind of fluff, just to kind of get people to want to pick it up—there's a silly horoscope, and things like that. We also did some political poll—not polls, but polling the candidates on their views and doing things like that. As I said, I'm a Republican, because I grew up in Akron, Pennsylvania; when I originally registered to vote, my mother said, "Well, you know, everyone that's elected is in the primary, so if you really want to make a decision, you might as well make—be Republican in this area," so that's what I did. And then when I got involved with gay causes, I loved being bipartisan, I loved saying, "I'm a lifelong Republican"...things like that. [laughs]

MM: Log Cabin Republican.

MS: I've never—no, I've never been a Log Cabin Republican—

MM: [talking at the same time] Oh, weren't you? Oh, I heard you were.

MS: They're too conservative. [phone buzzes, he reaches to grab it] No, I've never, never, never. [both laugh] But I am a lifelong Republican, and I will remind people of that, especially if I'm talking about how this is a bipartisan group, or something. [both laugh]

MM: When you were talking a minute ago about Pennsylvania Pride didn't have, I guess—

MS: [talking at the same time] Central Pennsylvania.

MM: Harrisburg.

MS: Yes, that was based in Harrisburg.

MM: Okay, and what year was that, that they were trying to...

MS: That was '93, I think, if—oh, no, it would have been after '93, so maybe '94. 'Cause the March on Washington was '93.

MM: Right.

MS: And that's when I would have first met...

MM: And Roundtop was right after that, I think.

MS: Yeah. So there probably was a Ski Roundtop in '93, and then—that's one thing I didn't check my dates on, but.

MM: But Harrisburg Pride Fest...is that what you were talking about with Dan Miller and...?

MS: Yeah. And it's actually Central Pennsylvania Pride Fest, was what it was called...

MM: Okay.

MS: And I think they still call it that.

MM: So that would have been about '94, then. Something like that.

MS: Yeah.

MM: Yeah.

MS: And it originally wasn't Reservoir Park. Since then, it's been moved down to right along the river, on Front Street. Yeah, so the—there were a lot of groups like that, so we—we did the March on Washington, '94 was the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots—25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, so we took buses up there. That was fun, 'cause we, again, had a banner and marched in the parade. I also know during the '70s, a friend of mine whose partner at the time and then later friend had a buggy—had started a buggy ride in Intercourse, Pennsylvania, he originally was from Georgia, his name was Conrad(ph). He was a wrangler for *Little House on the Prairie*, and came to Lancaster originally for carriage repairs, 'cause there was an Amish guy who did really amazing carriages, things you'd think the Queen would be in. So he—he came here from Hollywood, decided to move here and start this, and he used to take a horse and buggy up to the Pride Parade in New York, is what—I never saw it, but that's what I was told. Like I said, we did a lot of—we had a prom, over the years—just any kinds of events that people would come up with. We always still tried to advocate for the Human Relations—the city having its own Humans Relations Commission. Then every year—so there'd be another controversy that—one was Vision of Hope purchasing their first church, that got everyone all riled up. Then E-town school board passed a pro-family resolution that pretty much barred any advocacy of homosexuality and got quite a reaction to that, that got—the students had a walk-out because of it, and then there were numerous school board meetings.

MM: Yeah, I think that's maybe one of the first times...despite the Vision stuff, everything that went on, that was the first civic action I think I've seen in this region, where the students were starting to rise up, the boards were getting involved—people were engaging in a different level, from—it went up from all of our [indiscernible, MS and MM talk at the same time]

MS: [talking at the same time] Right, and that was like...1996, I think.

MM: Yeah.

MS: And yeah, I do think they got this kind of conservative school board that thought they were gonna pass this thing and no one was gonna bat an eye, and there was a lot of opposition, and it ended—I think the main core of the people who were up for reelection that supported that, none of them were elected the next time, so that was a—a success in the end, and another thing—the '90s, things changed rapidly. In the 90's is the other...there was a TV show called *In the Life*, which was privately produced, but it was basically distributed through public television stations, so we tried getting that on WITF, and as a result, I ended up being on their community action board or whatever it was called, and it was just so obvious that the program director, Tom Keck, just, like, having a gay-related show—it was kind of a—an interview show that, you know, would have several short segments within an hour. So he finally caved, and they did put it on, but it came on at midnight, and in their listings, they stopped covering what came on—like, like, they had a listing of what was going to be on, but that would stop at 12, so it was never publicly listed or—the only way you would know it was on was if you found out from someone that it was on specifically at that time. And so at that time, public TV wasn't really doing what I think it should be doing—public radio, the same—WITF, was one of the first places where I thought there were stories that actually involved gay and lesbian people that were normal stories. One of the shows there was *This American Life*, and that was the first time I ever heard, like, a general

documentary that I thought treated gays and lesbians as if they were just in the mix. You know, it wasn't an issue, it was just part of the story, like you'd say someone was married, or they were a woman or black or anything. So I—I always thought the radio was kind of ahead of the TV, and then it was really network TV that had all kinds of shows dealing with gay characters, gay subjects, so for a long time, I think they kind of helped people feel more comfortable than some of the—some of the sources I would go to first now. 'Cause I do think that after a while, public television caught up, when they—they were worried about their funding. [both laugh] As a lot of groups needed to be. And another big controversy that got my picture above the fold on the front page of the paper—was the Lancaster Library had a window—the front window was open to any group to make a display about anything they wanted, so there had been—dead fetuses portrayed [both laugh] and put in the library window...

MM: [indiscernible]

MS: Yeah. So there had been all kinds of groups that had used that. It was pretty easy to get a window. And so in—I think '96—we did a window, where we took pictures of all kinds of families, so there were—single mother with two kids, a gay couple, a lesbian couple, me and my partner with a friend and her dog—you know, so every combo was up there represented somehow, and I think it said “Love makes a family,” or something like that. So that one went by no problem—no one heard anything about it. The next year—this was after, I mentioned before, we did a prom, so we had stars left over from the decorations for the prom [both laugh] and so we did one that said, “Celebrating gay, lesbian, and bisexual stars.” And so we picked a couple people, you know, balanced by race and gender—some local, and some national. And so locally there's Charles Demuth, who was the painter, he's known for being gay...I'd have to I—off the top of my—but anyway, celebrating—you were celebrated—saying you were celebrating anything gay or lesbian—the shit hit the fan. Someone protested it, the county commissioners had just funded the library's renovation, so the library immediately took it down after it was up—after someone complained. Then they put it up and had public meetings to discuss what would happen, and eventually they took the brave stand of letting it go up again in a room inside the library and having an opposing display next to it. [laughs] So at that time—so much for the librarians. But again, that was another issue that just bubbled up, had all kinds of newspaper play. The newspaper itself, there was a comic book called—comic strip called *For Better or For Worse* that was basically about parents and teenagers, and one of the teenagers in one of the strips had a teenage friend, and if you know anything about newspaper comics, you al—they always let anything controversial like that be previewed by the editor, so it had been approved. But when the first one ran, again, the words ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ in the paper, they decided they were gonna pull it and put in a—an alternate strip for those days, which, if they would have agreed beforehand, no one locally would have ever known we missed it, but that was another controversy that we brought up with the newspaper, the newspaper having classified—

MM: Classified ads.

MS: Not being willing to put any classified ads that said ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ in it—

MM: In the personals, and...

MS: In the—yeah. So there were a number of those types of things that would surface every year. [takes a drink from a bottle]

MM: And what was always interesting was that, while it was a public controversy—within the community there was a lot of controversy going, “I don’t know if I like this type of the—personal ads. I don’t know. I don’t think—“ [laughs] You know, and everybody was having different discussions.

MS: Right, and any group you were in—whatever was out in front and did get their picture in the paper, there’d be someone saying, “Oh”—like, Nancy Helms was a perfect example. She—she was one of the founders of Pink Triangle. She also, at the time, had a bookstore called The Closet, which was a tiny little bookstore on Prince Street that was bombed twice, basically a stick of dynamite—small stick of dynamite was put against the front window and would blow out everything. So she was a spokesperson in the paper, and—I can’t tell the—“Oh, I would be involved if it wasn’t—I don’t want to be associated with that person.” [both laugh] And with white men it was always the big—those lesbians that were too loud, and there was always... [both laugh, MS unfolds newspaper]

MM: There was those interesting.(?) [laughs]

MS: Yeah, and actually, some of the people that I really, like—Anthony Lascoskie is a person that was one of the—not from maybe the very beginning, but close to it, always active, always a person could just depend on to be wonderful without a lot of controversy. [laughs] Andy Spedden was involved, my partner John, Kim Evans—I mean Nikki Evans and Kim Werner(ph)—Nikki was another African-American, short-haired lesbian that people just, oh, couldn’t—and you know. [laughs] Lily Rizak(ph) was a founder, oh, who else—

MM: Laura Rutt?

MS: Huh?

MM: Laura?

MS: Laura was never involved with Pink Triangle. She—Laura Montgomery Rutt started a group called People’s Alliance for Tolerance and Freedom that dealt with a lot of issues—like, progressive issues, but a lot of—she had a gay brother, and so she was always very supportive of the gay and lesbian community, kind of pushing that political agenda, and, you know, through the late ‘90s, she was very active. One of the stories about—when Pink Triangle was founded, one of the guys that—I won’t mention his name, but when he—he was younger, and at that time, Park City and places would entrap gays—gay men, and I’m not saying that—there probably were some things going on in certain places that shouldn’t have been going on there, but with—Andy was a prime ex—always what you would hear is I—they hadn’t really done anything. The charges would usually be harassment. Andy was—I think—16 or less at the time, was at Park City in one of the restrooms, started talking to someone in the bathroom, which is a pretty gay thing to do for the most part [both laugh] but talking is allowed, and this attractive young man, or—asked him to follow him to the other side of the mall, and when An—well, I shouldn’t—I—

when he went with him, he was arrested for harassment. And Andy was smart enough to fight it, and it was thrown out of court. And, you know, that's just the type of thing that did happen, you know, I thought, I'd just love to see, if you got a young, attractive girl, to see how many teenage boys she could get to walk across the Park City Mall, how many you could get a ticket for harassment, if that's what the grounds were. There were a lot of adult people that just would cave and not fight, because they didn't want the repercussions.

MM: The publicity, and...

MS: Yeah. Right. Yeah, so things like that did happen around here. Then finally in 2001, under Charlie Smithgall, a Republican mayor, and Steve Diamantoni, and—or—he was the city councilperson, also Republican—they wanted to help have this ordinance passed, to have it be enforceable, and figuring out how you're gonna do that without much money, or—they were willing to do that, and, you know, for the rest of the Stork administration, they did not want to talk about that at all, they just said, "Go talk to the county commissioners." [laughs] And so we reviewed the wording, there were some changes. In that time period, when the ordinance was first updated with sexual orientation by the city, transgender rights weren't really thought about at all, and I kept thinking, "Okay, I really wanna get this in there, but I don't really wanna make a big deal out of it." So what I ended up doing is, we defined 'sexual orientation' to include gender identity, so it was changed in the definition, no one ever said 'boo' about it, you know, it had two public hearings, like, before... We kept kind of waiting for this group to just come up and thump us with Bibles, that never happened, it passed. And so 2001, 10 years after the dissolving of the joint commission, there was a City Commission with enforcement powers that covered sexual orientation and marital status. And that's—there were other cities in Pennsylvania then, but not many. I would say five or six.

MM: Pittsburgh, yeah.

MS: Yeah, at the most. And I don't think Har—a lot of them didn't have transgender protection at all at that time, so that's one thing I've always been proud of, that that got in there, though.

MM: And the commission is still going.

MS: Yeah. And so, I was like—okay, 2001, that was done. By then, it was kind of the same group in Pink Triangle doing everything. I kept waiting for someone to be pissed at us so they'd start their own group of younger, cuter people, but they—[both laugh] but that never happened, so we decide, 2001, we—we have this commission now formed, it was time to let Pink Triangle fade into history. And then I wasn't gonna be active in too much stuff, but then I ended up getting—being asked to be on the commission. I avoided that for a year. So I've been on the commission Board ever since, and the chair of the Board, like, a year in, or something like that. So the city has a commission of five people and a board of 13, we've never had—we usually have about six people at—on the board. And so Lancaster city has protection from discrimination. In, I would say 2010, there started to be some efforts—there's a House Bill 300 and a Senate Bill 300 that are, again, coming up, but they were around in 2010. The commission did a forum at City Council chambers on it to kind of educate people. We got the Chamber to be involved in that. And we st—well, there was a group, not the commission, but we started to

write letters to the County Commission to ask that they would include sexual orientation. Then it was really interesting, because we were going to have a public meeting, where we were going to go to advocate for that, and a week before that, suddenly Commissioners Scott Martin and Stuckey come up with the plan that the County Commission needs to be cut only for budgetary reasons, but it was amazing because the very first public commissioner meeting, there were already anti-gay protesters there to speak, so obviously that had been discussed with those groups before that initial meeting, because they knew about it before we did. And so—in fact, there were even some sta—I think the—there’s a family a—what, American Family Association of Pennsylvania—she was writing blogs about it immediately. So that year there was a major effort—Don Leighsus Loren (ph) is a local union organizer, and he was wonderful in getting some protests...all kinds of commitment to people to show up at City Council—not City Council, at County Commissioner meetings, you know, just a huge turnout by the public, saying they want the commission to remain. We got the Lancaster Chamber to come out really strongly in support of a local commission because it really had been a history of businesses being able to resolve differences a lot more easily locally than the state, which was already strained, and this is kind of the beginning of—well, not the beginning, but—it was obviously the State Commission wasn’t gonna get any extra funding or anything like that. But in 2010, the County Commission was disbanded. And again, my personal feeling is that was mostly done to avoid the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected class. If they got rid of it, they didn’t have to deal with it locally.

MM: They wouldn’t have to worry about it in the future...

MS: Right. And, you know, that’s the way things—locality after locality after locality—Equality PA, which is a state organization, has been very successful in adding many localities—adding sexual orientation, or in starting Human Relations Commissions that will cover that. Lancaster, I think, is the only county that disbanded its 45-year-old commission. And during all the public hearings, the anti-gay forces were there, and that was always a prominently talked-about issue, although the commissioners, Stuckey and Martin, were smart enough never to go there and say it was just a budgetary issue. So that was about 2010, the other thing that happened in the last couple years, in 2007, there was a person that wanted—that got in contact with me because they wanted to start a Lancaster Pride. And I knew other local people that had talked about that whole i—years, I kind of said, “Well, I don’t want to be on the board [laughs] but I’ll support you,” and talked to the other people. There was this great initial meeting. It was amazing. It just had diversity of race, of gender, of age. I was so happy with that first meeting. But the person that was the main organizer—they were—had major issues, which led to, within two months, over half of the people that were originally interested in being involved not being involved. There was a major exodus. There was, then, another group of people got in, some of them stayed, some of them left. [chuckles] And so it became a very painful spring in planning for that. I kind of backed away from it, like, I was willing to support it like I would a group I didn’t know about, but I didn’t feel like I could vouch for the group to say, “I think this is a great thing.” I felt like everyone just had to kind of decide on their own. They never really got funding together at all, so it ended up, like, a month ahead of when it was supposed to happen right downtown. The city hadn’t gotten any money to reserve anything. [pauses] I got a call from the city asking, “What’s up with this?” [laughs] And I just, like, “I—I don’t really know!” And it just dissolved from there.

MM: This is a lot of work, a lot of dream.

MS: [wipes at eye] Well, it was a lot of work and—not being able to vouch and say, “Yeah, you should really do that”—I kind of said, like, “You guys have to decide based on what you have, because I can’t, from what I’ve seen—I can’t—I can’t make you feel any better about the organization of this.” And then—so it went that the city denied their permit—again, this was all on the front page, that here. Then they were gonna take it to Millersville, so one of the students that was involved applied to Millersville to have this event. Millersville didn’t have a clue what the event was, and it was over the summer, it’s in June, so they get permission to have it there, so then it’s going to be switched there. Then there’s a religious protester named Michael Marcavage, who’s based out of Philadelphia, but has had umpteen court cases where his—his basic modus operandi is he will go protest somewhere, hope he will be arrested, so he can have a court case and say, [mimes crying exaggeratedly, in a mocking voice] “They stopped me from preaching!” [both laugh] Now, he might tell you that he has pictures of dead babies by the Liberty Bell, or whatever, but his two things are abortion and anti-gay things. So he contacted Millersville and said he wanted a permit to protest here—just be careful, because—you touch the cord and—[reaches toward camera]

MM: Yes, yeah, it’s blocking this here...

MS: So he got out, he said he was going to come to protest, they said they didn’t have enough time to give him a permit. He said, “Yes, you sure do, because you gave them a permit. Here’s my lawyer’s number.” [laughs] And so Millersville was like, “Oh my god, we don’t really have a police force, we didn’t know this was going to be this big of a thing,” so they backed out of it. That was, like, within a week of when it was supposed to happen. And then this person that organized it disappeared completely, so I got called to a meeting of the people that were left trying to figure out what they were going to do. So that was a very—just a really, really painful thing that I wish never had happened. [chuckles] That led to a group of people saying, “Okay, there’s no reason Lancaster can’t do a Pride, this was just stupid, we have to do this.” So in 2008, we had a Pride. And our biggest fear was that the person that—oh, and the other thing that happened is, immediately after it didn’t happen, this person disappeared—suddenly there’s articles and letters in the paper talking about mo—there being moles that subverted this whole thing and how the city didn’t support them, and then I was like, “The city loved this idea and wanted to do it until they weren’t sure what was going on.” So...I—I’ve always—Rick Gray was the mayor then—total support from the city from day one in 2008. It went off great, it was in Buchanan Park, we had great weather—it was a lot of work [chuckles] but it happened and we’ve had Lancaster Pride six times since then, so I was involved in the first three years of that. By then, we had kind of figured out financial stuff, we had it under—brought under the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania so that we have—we’re 501(c)(3), and all those kind of things. So since then, other people have been on the board and done a really good job, and now that seems to be an annual event that will continue to happen. So that’s...you know. That was a lot of fun too when it actually happened—like I said, hard work, but fun. Lately, there’s just so many things. It seems like every day there’s another article in the paper—this is the year that—well, in the past two years, gays accepted in the military, gay marriage—gay marriage is a huge issue—oh. One other thing that I’ve been involved in is—in about 2007, the First United

Methodist Church on West Walnut Street—I mean East Walnut Street—there’s a group there, kind of led by Revere—retired Reverend Bill Cherry, that had been advocating for more acceptance in that church, and kind of wanted to ask some gay people and lesbian people what—what would make them want to come to church, I guess, basically. And it included, like, some people from Mennonite churches, and a couple other denominations, from that, a group named Embrace started whose goal is basically to encourage local churches to be more accepting, and that’s been an interesting process, and through that, I’ve also now got involved in church again. Which, if you had asked me that six years ago, I ne—it would have not been on my list.

MM: Made me follow you this year. [both laugh]

MS: Yeah, but that’s so interesting to see all the major Christian denominations dealing with—maybe not dealing well, the Methodist church has a big challenge because it has a huge African population now that’s very conservative. And the conservative part of the North American church almost funds the conservative part of the African church and together they’re—they have enough people that—this past year, in general conference, they still couldn’t even make a statement that you could agree to disagree about homosexuality. They—there was language saying homosexuality was incompatible with being Christian that was put in, like, in the ‘70s. It hadn’t been there before. It’s—it’s interesting the things you find out. I also found out that my—the first Bible I was given at Confirmation was the first one that got the word ‘homosexual’ in it—it was the—I think the Revised Standard Version that came out in the ‘50s? But through that, like, things—the Mennonite—there’s a core group of Mennonites—and Mennonites, I—they run the gamut from very conservative, like, Amish basically, to very liberal, but they have a really strong belief in—if something’s right, fighting for it, and standing up against—like, not joining—not blindly joining society’s beliefs. So many times you’ll find the Mennonite church is more liberal politically because they don’t really believe in nationalistic agendas, things like immigration, all those things. And gay and lesbian rights has been, for a certain group of Mennonites, really strong, and I—I think overall, like Lancaster in general, has that heritage where it can be somewhat conservative, it doesn’t—just protesting for a protest isn’t what people are into. [chuckles] They—they’ll advocate for a victim, but, you know, but they don’t want—there’s an acceptances of differences to a—to a point. That’s kind of always—kinda made Lancaster, I think, not as political in some ways. But having some really strong people be really really really committed, and people you wanna—like, in the churches now, most of it is people in their 70s or 80s and the younger people are the ones that are really—you know, that either don’t care or really feel strongly that—

MM: And things’ll change every time because of that.

MS: Yeah.

MM: We’re at about nine minutes.

MS: Okay.

MM: What are the important things here yet that...?

MS: I'm trying to think, what else?

MM: Are there major things that you see here in Lancaster that are needed at this point? We've come through a lot of eras, in a way, in Lancaster.

MS: Well, yeah. Like, on the church side, I—okay, I still think there's a lot of just mainstream support that needs to come through. I still think most legislators, especially, you know, Lancaster County—not Lancaster city, Lancaster city's democratic for the most part now—but once you get out of the city, I think, like on the issues like marriage and discrimi—Pennsylvania still has horrible law—no protections, pretty much across the board, which is unlike any other state in the northeast.

MM: Well, even at this point, HB 300 [House Bill 300]—

MS: Right, still has not been... [takes a drink from a bottle]

MM: —Is still being held up in committee by one person that is just not letting the agenda come despite a lot of—a lot of people signed onto that bill.

MS: Right.

MM: And that's amazing that that—that that kind of power can get in the way here.

MS: Right. And I—so there's still a need for people to really pressure their representatives as to—so that the representative knows there are actually people that support equal rights and marriage equality.

MM: And—and just by way of explaining a little bit, 'cause I'm not sure how much is getting hit on these interviews, what's the state of Pennsylvania in terms of marriage equality?

MS: Well, right now it has a state ban. There's been some interesting things lately since the Supreme Court ruling, 'cause Montgomery County...the clerk there started giving marriage licenses, the—Kathleen, what's her last name? K—the state attorney general came out, who's democratic, said she would not support a court case against them, so now Tom Corbett, our most unpopular governor, is coming out to fight that court battle.

MM: He's trying to put every vote he can find. [chuckles] Any vote.

MS: So yeah, things are kind of in disarray—actually, there was an article the other day in the paper of a Lancaster County lesbian couple that got a Montgomery County marriage license, so that will all be in the courts and things like that. I mean—and—and I think everyone on both sides feels like it's gonna happen, and it'll happen nationally, it's just how long can they keep their heels in the sand and hold on from the change.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.

MS: And it really does impact so many people. It's—it's not something that, for people that it makes a difference, it's a huge difference. But that, you know, I equate that to interracial marriage and the discussions I heard back then. [chuckles] It's so funny, it—it's the exact same discussion.

MM: It's kind of funny, yeah.

MS: I mean, I think one of the arguments back then was that God put different races on different continents, and it was people that messed that up, but if we had lived according to the—God's plan there would not be interracial marriage. [takes a drink from a bottle]

[siren sounds outside]

MM: I know you've brought a lot of photographs and artifacts and things like that that you've already put into...

MS: Oh, yeah—other things we did, that we had an Adopt-a-Highway program, that—

MM: There we go. What did that do?

MS: That started in the early '90s, and that was basically to get the words 'gay' and 'lesbian' up on a sign—

MM: [speaks over him] Up on a sign on the highway! [both laugh] Yay!

MS: Yeah. And that's come full circle because the Pride Youth have taken that over, and I was sad to see that the first thing they did is they changed the name, so now it says "Adopt-a-Highway program: Pride Youth."

MM: Oh, does it? Oh... [unintelligible, both speaking at the same time] put the word 'gay' up there...

MS: It doesn't say 'gay' and 'lesbian.' So that's a generational thing, because that was a huge, huge deal to have—and it would get painted over occasionally, and they would have to put up a new sign, but through the '90s that was one of the only places that the word 'gay and lesbian' was prominently posted next to Route 23 going out of the city.

MM: And people used to drive there just to see that. [laughs] Became a tourist destination or something for gay and lesbian people in the county. It was weird.

MS: Yeah.

MM: It was funny.

MS: Well, do you think we did enough? I sure talked enough—

MM: [speaking at the same time] I think so—

MS: I think I talked longer than anybody else—

MM: I think I have four minutes left—

MS: Obviously, I guess. And things are starting to blink here, too, now.

MM: Are they? Okay. Okay. That's it. All right, well, I guess then we're going to...close it up, huh?

MS: [talks at the same time] I know I'll think of something as soon as I say—

MM: I said, "I'm gonna do another tape after this." I kinda went, "Oh, my, could have gone that direction," and...I think I might actually think about that, so. Okay, well, thank you very much.

MS: Thank you!

MM: And we are— [tape ends]