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Interviewee: Peg Welch

Interviewer: Debby Gable

Date of Interview: March 22, 2015

Location of interview: York, Pennsylvania

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Abstract:

Peg Welch was born in December of 1951 near in Chester County, Pennsylvania to her father, a carpenter, and her mother, a candy maker. A young mother to two children, Peg did not graduate from high school, but received her GED and worked at various jobs, eventually joining Parents Without Partners where she met her second husband, Phil. With his help supporting their family, she was able to graduate from Millersville University with a degree in social work, afterwards working at Big Brothers Big Sisters, the United Way, the YWCA, and Planned Parenthood. At the YWCA, Peg met her future wife Delma, whom she lives with today in York, Pennsylvania. Peg was an active member in York Area Lambda and helped to establish the Lesbian Alliance. In this interview, Peg describes her experiences as a single mother, her involvement in activism to get LGBT ordinances passed with the York City Human Relations Commission, her three marital ceremonies with Delma, as well as her belief in the importance of women's spaces. Today, Peg is optimistic about the evolving opinions of the younger generation towards LGBT-identified individuals.

DG: Okay, so, this is a—an interview for the LGBT History Project of Central Pennsylvania. I am the interviewer. I am Debbie Gable, and I'm here with Peg Welch, the narrator. It's March 22, 2015, and we're in York, Pennsylvania. Peg, do I have your permission to do the interview?

PW: You do.

DG: Thank you. Alright, then we'll just go ahead and get started.

PW: Okay.

DG: So why don't we just start... just tell me—well, your name again, if you don't mind. And your date of birth, and where you grew up, and just start there, if you would.

PW: Okay. My name is Peg Welch. I was born in December of 1951. And I grew up about an hour from east of here in Chester County... near Gap, Pennsylvania. And my family lived—oh down at the bottom of the lane, sort of in the country. I played in the woods every day, I played in the creek and all that. I have a brother and two sisters, and I am the oldest in the family, and my parents are both deceased now. So, I have one older relative, and ya know, when she's gone, I'll be like the matriarch of my family, which is an odd... sensation, to see that coming down the road.

DG: What kind of work did your parents do?

PW: My father was a carpenter, and at some point when I was fairly young, he joined the Union, which was a very good thing for my family, because that gave him steady work. And he worked for a Union—they sent him to New Jersey for jobs. He built mostly sewer treatment plants in public schools, and he often worked in New Jersey, and he would come home late Friday night and leave very early Monday morning. So, my mother was, for many, many years, my mother was the one. You know, she was there with us, all four of us, all the time. My mother didn't work when I was young, but when I was a little older—I would say a young teenager—my mother got work within walking distance of our home, because we just had one car. My dad had the car, of course. So my mother worked as—she actually made candy by hand. She worked in a place that sold handmade candy. So she worked with the marble and the chocolate and made the little chocolates, and that's what she did.

DG: Wow. You say with marble?

PW: Yeah, you work on a mar—you put hot chocolate on a cold marble and work the chocolate to a certain temperature, and then throw in the little vanilla cream and then make a little do-dad on top of it, and that's what my mother did. She was very fast and very accurate. My mother was very good with her hands with things.

DG: Wow. Nice. So tell me a little bit more about just your early childhood, and what school was like for you and just growing up and things like that.

PW: Well, as I said, my father had the car. We had one car so, I didn't go to kindergarten because if you went to kindergarten, your mother had to have a car to drive you to kindergarten, 'cause kindergarten—kindergarten was all half day at that time. So I started school in first grade. I could read, someone had taught me to read. I was five when I learned to read. And I went to an elementary school in Ackland, Pennsylvania, not too far from where I lived. By the bus, of course. I lived in a very rural school district. Everybody went by bus. And that's—that apartment—it's now an apartment building. The school building is still there, I saw it not long ago. It was kind strange to see the, you know, the—what would use to be my schoolyard, and now it's the—the lawn of an apartment building. I went there first through fifth grade. In sixth grade, because there wasn't room in my school for a sixth grade class, it was held in the fire company, which—the fire department was—we walked down the alley to the school, and they had a big room in the fire department set up for sixth grade, and that's where I went to sixth grade in the fire company building. When I got to seventh grade, I went to the high school, because at that time seven through twelve was high school. There were no middle schools at that time. You left elementary school, and you went to high school, and... I went to Octorara High School at seventh grade.

DG: Thank you. So what did you do after school?

PW: After school—well, I was a young mother. So, I did not finish my senior year. I got my GED [General Education Development test] as soon as my class graduated, and I was a young mother. My daughter Cindy was born then in 1969, and my son was born in 1972. And at that time I was married, and that marriage was—like a teenage marriage, it did not last terribly long.

It lasted seven years, and after that I was a single parent for... I don't know, 12-15 years. I mean, I basically raised my kids on my own is what happened.

DG: So what kind of work did you do?

PW: I did, oh my, I did—What didn't I do might be a better question. I worked in an ammunitions factory and made hand grenade fuses. I was an Avon Lady. I worked in a restaurant kitchen. I sold shoes for many years. I worked in an insurance company on a key punch machine... that's all I can think of right now, but just, ya know... any different job that I could find, any steady work that I could find. I remember applying for a job at Lukens Steel. Lukens Steel in Coatesville was the big local employer, and everybody wanted to work for Lukens Steel. That was a Union shop... ya know, people had good salary and good benefits. I remember applying at Lukens Steel for a secretarial position, and I went for an interview, and I remember the man looking at me and saying, "Tell me about your babysitter problem." And that's how he began the interview. It was not a time when women had opportunities to get any kind of job except secretary and kitchen work and selling shoes. At that time, in fact, classified were "Help Wanted: Female" and "Help Wanted: Male," so I had responded, of course, to a "Help Wanted: Female" ad, and that led me to that interview with Lukens Steel. I didn't get the job—I didn't have a babysitting problem. I had sisters who watched—we watched each other's kids and so forth. And my mother of course helped, but I didn't get that job, but that was how he began the interview.

DG: Wow.

PW: Those were—that was—in that—in that time that's what... that's what it was like for women to get jobs. You answered a segregated classified, and an interviewer would say to you, "Tell me about your babysitter problem," assuming that if you had children, you weren't gonna be at work.

DG: Right. Did you find any particular challenges around being a single mother with the job search?

PW: I don't remember that. That was so natural. I was so unhappy when I was married then—and I was married to a man who was not, I thought, a fit father, so it was a good thing that I was not with him any longer, and it was certainly a good thing for my children. I don't know, I don't know how to answer that. I think I'm one of those people that just, ya know, like, I just soldier on when—when circumstances present themselves, then I just make the best of it. I don't think about it like that, I just do what needs to be done. And that's what I did for many years.

DG: I guess I was wondering from the interviewing perspective, if you felt judged because of that—the way the man asked the question about the babysitting problem.

PW: Yeah, I was very taken aback at that, because I felt like he had already decided that, ya know. I mean, they ask you if you had children, and nowadays you can't do that. Ya know, we have laws that make interviews and the application process—it's supposed—some things are not included, because they can be used to discriminate against you—clearly he was discriminating

against me, because I had children. So, yeah, when he said, “Tell me about your babysitter problem,” he already knew that I had children. I guess that was part of the application process. I don’t really remember that. But yeah, he assumed that because I had children, I would not be a good person for that job.

DG: Right, right. So you talked about a number of years as a single parent, so then what was next?

PW: What was next was—my sister—I was a single parent. I lived in Ackland, Pennsylvania in Chester County, and at some point I began taking some college courses, and it was something I always wanted to do. I was 16th in my class or 11th in my class. I wanted to go to college, I wanted—at the time—going back in time a little bit further, when I asked my parents about that, I remember my mother saying to me, “Well, we think it’s more important that Stevie go—my brother—because men need a college education more than women.” So that shut that down. At some point I was interested in getting a college education. That was something I wanted for myself. What I wanted was to work in an office and carry a briefcase. That was just sort of how I thought about it, ya know, like to prepare myself for that. I don’t know if I ever thought I’d ever really get there or not but, that’s what I started to do. I took one class, and then I took a second class. I was a single parent with my kids, and of course they were in school and my son was in Scouts. Ya know, we lived in a neighborhood there. I worked various jobs... that would have flexibility, so that I could schedule around a class, because as I got—kind of got rolling with that, that was kind of something I wanted to do. And then my sister one day gave me this little clipping that she had carried around in her wallet for a very long time, and it was about an organization called Parents Without Partners. And she said, “I thought you might like this,” ‘cause I was the only divorced person in the family, so ya know, she felt—she felt that I might like that. And then I carried that clipping around for a really long time. And then at some point, I just called the number, went to a meeting, and I start—joined that organization, and it was for people who had children, single people who had children. There was all these activities, you know—they did a newsletter, and... there was just something to do every weekend with your kids, and my ex-husband made a lot of promises to my children, ya know, like “I’ll come and pick you up,” but he was very interested in setting me up so that I would make plans to do something, and then not be able to do it, because he didn’t show up. So there was, ya know, just kind of nasty stuff. I felt bad for my kids. So it was really good for me to join that organization. And, ya know, my kids—we went camping. We didn’t have any camping equipment, you just went with people, and they loaned you stuff. We went camping, my kids went to camp, we had dances, we just had all kinds of things going on, and I met the man that I married from my second marriage. I met Phil through Parents Without Partners. And I was the President of the Lancaster Chapter, and he was the President of the York Chapter. And everybody thought it was so cute that we were dating each other because, ya know, we were both presidents, and so forth.

DG: Right.

PW: So yeah, that’s how I met—that’s when I met Phil. And I knew Phil for, oh my, ten years before we decided to live together, and that’s when I—my kids were teenagers at that time, and that’s when I moved to York County, and we bought a house. 1984.

DG: Okay. And how were your kids about that?

PW: I don't remember any big issues from my son about it. My daughter was—my daughter was 15 years old so, ya know, like [shakes hands for emphasis] 15. There's no good answers for any kid that's 15, and she was very rebellious, and... she came with me, and of course, I promised her the moon. This house we moved into, when you went up the steps, there was a large bedroom in the front. She got that bedroom, and it was funny, because after we moved in, and we were still getting settled and everything, it was like, I couldn't find any mirrors. We had mirrors on the doors in the apartment and everything. Every mirror we owned was in my daughter's room. I went in there and there was a mirror here, and a mirror there, and a mirror there. [laughs] It was too funny. But she was 15 and very involved with how she looked. So, she had every mirror in the house. So ya know, we made it. It's—it was not her. It was not something she wanted to do, but she did. So, my kids went along with me. She was 15, and my son would've been 12.

DG: Oh okay. So she felt happier with the mirrors? [laughs]

PW: As long as she's surrounded by mirrors she was fine, yeah.

DG: [laughs] Oh my. So then—did you get a job then when you moved to York?

PW: I did. I was—I was still going to college. I was going to Millersville [University]. So where I lived before, it was about a 40-45 minute drive, and when I moved to York, it was about a 40-45 minute drive except I was driving east instead of driving west. So, I just continued with that. By that time, I had enrolled part-time and... again, I had a job. I worked—oh I did a couple different things. Gosh, I worked at York Snacks, in a factory for a summer making cheese curls. And I worked for a Turkey Hill. There was a Turkey Hill convenience store right down the road, and I worked at the Turkey Hill convenience store. And... I just kept plugging away at school, and then I finally got to my senior year, and Phil and I worked it out so that I could go full-time, because I just wanted to finish at that point. It had been six years, and I was ready to finish, and in my senior year, I had a 480-hour field placement, because I was getting a social work degree, and you do a lengthy field placement, which I did at York Hospital, and... I just remember thinking, you know, when I graduate, all I have to do is work 40 hours. 'Cause, you know—I was working, I was doing the field placement, and I was going to school full-time. So that last year was very kind of tumultuous, I would say. And stressful. And close to the end of that I got a job at Big Brothers Big Sisters as a ca—part-time case worker. I actually went in to volunteer to be on the board, because I thought I, ya know, needed to know more about the community and so forth, I went in to volunteer to be on the board, and they told me a job that they had, and wasn't I interested in this job? So I said, "Well I'm not out of school yet," and that—that didn't matter to them. I mean, you needed a degree, but I was this far [holds up two fingers, about an inch apart] away from the degree, ya know, so I got that job at Big Brothers Big Sisters. So when I graduated, I did—did have a job.

DG: So it became a full-time job?

PW: It became a full-time job, because the full-time person left and I, ya know, was offered the full-time job and took the full-time job. I worked there for about a year, and then I heard about a

job at The United Way as Director of the volunteer center that they had there. A small volunteer center that coordinated volunteer opportunities for the county—the whole county, and I applied for that job, and I got it. So then I left there and went to work for The United Way.

DG: So that was an opportunity to learn a lot more about the community, I would think.

PW: That was very, very much so. Because I was plugged into many, many agencies just because we had their job descriptions for volunteers and, ya know, I learned how to interview people, and we did kind of a match—it's funny, because we did a matching process at Big Brothers Big Sisters with Bigs and Littles, and we did a matching process at the volunteer center, too, with people who had various interests or “this is the time I have available,” or “I'm doing community service, because I was arrested for something,” and so we would find a placement for them that they could try out and see if that was a satisfactory volunteer experience for them. And... at the—at the volunteer center, when I worked in the United Way Building, I worked with a woman who left the United Way and went to be the Executive Director of the YWCA and when she got there, she called and told me about a job, a new job they were creating at the YW, and urged me to apply for that. So I did, and I got that job. So then I worked—went to work for the YWCA in 1990, and that's when I met my now wife Delma in the lobby of the YWCA, because she was the massage therapist there.

DG: So in full disclosure, of course, now there's a story about the person that she said you should come and work at the YWCA, and she said there was someone there.

PW: Yes, yes, yes. I was very excited about applying for that job because, ya know, I didn't really know much about the YWCA. I had taken a class there, like an exercise class. I didn't know what a strong mission they have about, ya know, peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all people. And ya know, the more I learned about that it really spoke to me. All the jobs I've had in my life, I thought the job at the YWCA was the best job I ever had and fit me the best. But yes, Helen said to me, ya know, there was someone she wanted me to meet, and she had—and that was Delma who is now my wife—and she has said to Delma, “I can't wait for you to meet Peg. Ya know, you're just gonna love her.” So as it turned out, she did love me [laughs] and ya know the rest is history. The rest of the story that I will tell you comes after that, because when I met Delma, that really changed my life, and I think we were only a few months into our friendship when I realized that I had really strong feelings for her in a way that I had never had feelings for any woman before, just had never been that way for me. I mean, I'd been married twice. So, Delma and I had many barriers. One of the big ones for me was that it was very astonishing to me that I would feel that way for a woman, so it changes your whole, ya know, it puts you into a place where... it takes your whole identity, which you felt was pretty firm and fixed, and you felt comfortable with it, and it just like, blew it up. So, there was a lot of difficult times involved with that as well, because ya know, I was married for the second time. I had married Phil, we had only been married a couple years, and I became aware that I could not stay married to a man... that Delma and I wanted to be together. So, I had a new job, a new lesbian identity—it was just all—I had just become a grandmother, it was like all those things that cause stress, ya know—they say add up your stress, well I was like off the scale with the stress. That was a really, just amazing, terrible, wonderful, all at the same time... time of my life, I would say.

DG: Where did you find support to help you through that?

PW: Well, of course from Delma, I found support, and you know, at that point I became aware—and this is something I'd never had been really proud of but, evidently I knew a lot of women who were lesbians, only, I didn't know that about them. So, as I moved more into the lesbian community then I—you know, there were people, women that I already knew that I just didn't know that about them. So—and Delma was involved with—or, we became involved with York Area Lambda, which was an organization of men—gay men and lesbians in York that—you know they—they had meetings, they had outings, they had—they produced a newsletter. there was an activist part of that organization, and so we were involved in that. I can't say I got a lot of support from my family, because I didn't. They weren't—they weren't hostile. I wasn't disowned or anything like that. My daughter was more upset than anybody I would say expect my husband. He was quite upset, of course. My son was very calm and accepting for some reason, and I said to him, “Would you help me with your sister?” and he said, “I will.” So, you know, my sister—daughter was very upset, and he kind of calmed her down, and it took a while for us to work that out. And we did, and things got to be okay. I had to leave my husband. And I did that. I just picked a date at some point. What was happening was so stressful. I mean I had this new job, and I was working, and it was just a lot of really big things going on all at the same time. Delma and I rented a room in a gay man's house three doors down from where we live now, like right here on this street. And we just needed a place where, I don't know, I feel like we just needed to recover a little bit, because we had both left our families to be together. And I feel like we just really needed that place where we didn't have any responsibilities. I mean, we just rented the room, and that turned out to be a really important—really important thing for us. We were only there three months, but that was a really important three months 'cause we were just kinda shredded up by that time with everything that was going on. It was challenging.

DG: So it just gave you space and time to just be together?

PW: It gave us space and time to just be together, because yeah, when we—we needed to find a place to live and all that, but ya know, we had left some... wreckage behind, I would say. And at the beginning of that three months that we lived in that house my family was like freaking out, because of what I was doing... and it was funny, Delma's family kind of presented—pretended that she still lived there with them so it's like... both of those explosions didn't happen at the same time. They happened a little—a little space from one another, which was actually pretty helpful, because it was—it was very, ya know—I keep using the word tumultuous, but that's what it felt like. It was like an emotional roller coaster, absolutely. And at the same time, ya know, I'm trying to be a professional person, and I have an office, and I had all this work to do, and all these new people I was meeting, and ya know the YWCA is a very busy, happening kind of place, and so it was just all happening at once.

DG: And what was happening at work? You said you both worked together, so were people at work aware of what was happening?

PW: Well, we had—shortly after we were together, very shortly, they circulated this paper through all the mail boxes, so that they could form or update, I guess, update an employee list.

Like people's phone number—names and phone numbers, and it was a contact list, and it was a very natural thing to do. It was a big building, lots of departments. And so almost right away, we were faced with the question of, like, "Do we both put the same phone number down there?" This was long before cell phones. "Do we both put the same number there?" And we decided to do that. Thus—and I don't know how big a secret it was at work but—thus outing ourselves at work. Ya know, it's the kind of thing—that was the time when you had to think about that kind of thing, you had to think about whether you wanted to hide or whether you didn't, and it's not my nature to hide but, ya know, does it make sense to do that at times? I'm sure for some people, for their occupations, it makes a lot of sense. And we decided not to do that, which is kind of a testimony to the YWCA, because in the—ya know, billed into that acceptance of diversity, we felt like we were probably gonna be okay there. And there were a few exceptions to that okayness, I would say, but on the—for the most part—I mean we didn't make an announcement. We just put down the same phone number. And I think there was probably enough talk about us at that time that ya know, it wasn't any big secret anyway, and we just went forward from there, 'cause by that time we were living together.

DG: Okay. So when you say there were some exceptions to the okayness, so you're talking about a couple of individual people, maybe were rude, but you didn't feel like your—your employment was in jeopardy?

PW: I did not feel that my employment was in jeopardy... and again, I think that's because it was the YWCA where every single day we articulated that mission and saw our work as clearly relating to that mission of, ya know, equality and justice and acceptance of all people. And it's a very powerful mission, and I just felt that the organization would be supportive—itsself would be supportive, meaning the executive director and the board of directors and that kind of thing, if it came right down to it. So yes, there were a couple people that were... I guess they were unhappy knowing about that situation with us, and took that opportunity to gossip about us, and ya know, speculate about us, and... yeah, there were a couple exceptions, but I would say for the most part people just—we just blended right in.

DG: Were there other out people at the YWCA?

PW: I don't remember any. And—if that were true, I don't remember that.

DG: All right. So, what started happening in your life then?

PW: Well, let's see... Delma and I had a room. Delma was still the massage therapist at the YW, and we lived in the room for three months, then we felt like we needed to get an apartment. We got an apartment on East King Street in York, and we were actually only in that apartment for a short time. We were in an apartment building with very loud people above us, and ya know, we were too dumb to know that that telephone right below our bedroom window was where the drug dealers were on the phone, making their—ya know, that was before cell phones, and there was just a lot of night time activity. Lots of noise from upstairs. It turned out to be not such a great place for us. Then somehow we heard about an apartment on East Market Street, which was right down from the YWCA, and we went to see it. It was—a doctor owned that building, and he didn't really rent the apartments, but he wasn't a dedicated landlord in any sense, but the

apartment came open, we went to see it, and we decided to take that apartment. If that apartment had a washer and dryer, we would probably still be in that apartment, because we loved it, and we loved living on Market Street. I was a half of block from work, if that. Bill Clinton ran right under our window when he came to York, and whatever year that was in the early—in the 90's sometime, when he was campaigning here. The parade went right by under our window, ya know, we just—we really just enjoyed living in that place. We had a little balcony in the back, and we would sit out there, and on Sunday mornings and read the paper, and the neighbor would play opera, and you could hear it, and it was just—it just felt really cool to have that place, but because of the laundry situation, we had to go to the laundromat every time, and we offered to put a washer and dryer in and the landlord said “Great idea,” but he never put the hookups in. And that's when we decided to just, ya know, buy this house. So, we knew what kind of house we wanted, and when this came on the market, I mean we had lived three doors down here, so we knew what this house would look like inside, 'cause it looks exactly like the one we lived in when we were first together. So it kinda just felt like we came full circle on that.

DG: So you had mentioned about being involved with Lambda, so talk to me more about what kinds of fight groups or activism and that kind of thing you were involved in.

PW: Well, we had all kinds of things going on, I will say. There were social things, people went out to eat. There started to be at some point... festivals, like summer festivals, pride—gay pride festivals. I don't know if they were called—if the pride was really involved at that time. But we went to a couple things like that. There were women's music festivals, which I had never known existed, that were almost completely lesbian, and that—we went to some things like that. York Area Lambda became very involved in—there was a movement to change the ordinance through the human relations commission for York City to include sexual orientation, and we became very involved in that as York Area Lambda. We—I remember meeting and organizing around that issue. We took out a full page ad, and we asked people to help us pay for that ad, and it was a signature ad, so we asked people in the community to state publicly that they supported the addition of sexual orientation to that ordinance. It was just a really big thing, and there were—

DG: About what year was that?

PW: That was 1993, I think. That was 1993, as I recall, when we got that ordinance changed. So of course, there was a strong, anti-gay element of the community. They were supposed to bring in this man named Paul Cameron who is famously anti-gay—I mean that's how he makes his living is going around talking about gay men and gerbils, that whole kind of thing, that you don't hear so much about anymore, although Paul Cameron is still around—anyway, he came to York, and we really just organized around that in many ways. We had little pink triangles, and we went down the night of the vote for city council, and we either had pink triangles or we had rainbow ribbons with pink triangles with a pin in them, and there was a long line of people waiting to get into the city council meeting to state their opinion about whether or not that ordinance should be passed. So we went down that line and offered people our little pink triangle, and our rainbow ribbon and said, “By wearing this, you show support of the change in the ordinance.” So some people cursed at us, and some people accepted that and pinned it on, and it was a visible symbol of their support for the ordinance. I mean we really tried to do some things to move the community to understand that it was something—that it was a good thing and a needed thing to

be able to add sexual orientation protection to the human rights—human relations ordinance for York City. We also managed to get—this was a pure fluke, and it was because I knew some people through my job at the YWCA, we also managed to get gender identity, and the best we could do—we couldn't get it into the ordinance, because the attorney, the city solicitor, was against it. And I remember saying to him—I had him on the phone, and I remember saying to him—I guess it was—we got in gender identity under sexual orientation, but the word transgender is what he objected to, and I remember saying—he said, “Ya know, that should not be in this ordinance,” although he was supportive of sexual orientation, he was not supportive of transgender. And I remember saying to him, “Well, we really need to get in gender identity ‘cause those folks are really discriminated against.” Because he didn't know that gender identity—transgender is a part of gender identity, we were able to get in the words “gender identity,” although not as a separate protected class—it's folded into sexual orientation. Sexual orientation—the definition of sexual orientation included “or other gender identity.” So, it was kind of a coup to be able to do that, and it was a little sneaky but, you know, it codified into law for the York City—York City protection based on sexual orientation and gender identity that if you were discriminated against for either of those classifications, you had recourse by going to the York City Human Relations Commission. And, of course at that time, and even today, there is no state protection through the State Human Relations Commission for gender identity or sexual orientation. So, it really felt like a triumph to be able to get that into the local ordinance. We worked really hard on that, and we were successful.

DG: That's amazing.

PW: That was great. Yeah, that was in 1993.

DG: So, you mentioned the rainbow flag and the pink triangle, so if anyone is listening to this interview, and they are not familiar with that, can you explain what those symbols are?

PW: Yes. Those were symbols, strong symbols, and the pink triangle, ya never hear anything about that so much anymore, but evidently at the—in the [19]40s in Nazi Germany, everybody knows that... Jewish people were systematically removed from their communities, many were placed in concentration camps, and they had to wear a yellow star. They had to wear a yellow—it was the law that they had to wear a yellow star stitched to their clothing. Homosexuals—and this would be men, because at the time, I don't think anybody even knew there were women who were homosexuals. Men in the concentration camps had to wear pink triangles. That was a serious crime. They were undesirables as Jews and Gypsies and other groups were, and they had been rounded up and also put in concentration camps and made to wear the pink triangle. The pink triangle then became in... I don't know, the [19]50s or [19]60s or whatever, and the [19]70s became a symbol of gay people. Pink triangles were on everything. Ya know, they were on peoples newsletters, they were—people wore pink triangles. It was kind of a way of taking that back, and it was a symbol. And the rainbow flag—I don't remember there being a lot of rainbow flags then, although... rainbow symbols of other kinds—and we had rainbow ribbon, I remember... but the rainbow, anyway, was symbol also of gay people. So the pink triangle used to be very prevalent. You'd see pink triangles on a lot of things. We still have buttons that have, ya know, a pink triangle on them. Nowadays I'm not sure that young gay people would know what the pink triangle was. They may not, because that symbol is sort of faded away, but at that

time, and certainly around the time of the AIDS crisis, there was the rainbow flag, and there was the pink triangle.

DG: So, how long did you work at the YWCA?

PW: I worked at the YWCA from 1990 to 1997. I left there in 1997.

DG: And what was next for you?

PW: What was next for me was I accepted a job with Planned Parenthood of the Susquehanna Valley, I think it was called at the time, and I began to work in Harrisburg. And I was in charge of—I mean I was not a medical person but, from an administrative point of view, I was in charge of the medical operation for several health centers. And I worked there for... five years? Close to five years. And then that same position running the medical operation came open here in York. And, of course, working in Harrisburg was, ya know, 40 minutes of driving up a very dangerous highway, and the job here in York was 7 minutes from my house. So I did accept the job here in York, directing the medical operation for Planned Parenthood here. I was there for almost five years.

DG: So what other kinds of community building or activism and things around the LGBT community were you involved in?

PW: Well, at some point, and you know, I don't remember when this was but... we started—oh, I guess it was when—I don't know the year, but I know the event that triggered it. York Area Lambda, sort of, after many years, I guess sort of faded away. And some of us women got the idea that we would start a lesbian organization. We started our own lesbian organization called the Lesbian Alliance, and as York Area Lambda was coming not to exist anymore, then we had a new organization for women. So we—What did we do? Well, we had a newsletter—we had a core group that met, we had a newsletter, we set up tables at festivals and that kind of thing about the Lesbian Alliance, and what we tried to do was for this whole area, we were [emphatic tone of voice] *the* lesbian organization, because there really wasn't anything else. That was a time when—I don't... it was hard to find—it's hard—a little hard to explain now, I think, but it was very hard to find out about things. Like so much of what we did was just like, you knew somebody who knew somebody, or it was all word of mouth. You didn't—you didn't read in the newspaper about lesbian and gay organizations, you know. Things were still pretty underground in this area anyway. I mean, we're not exactly San Francisco here in York, so, ya know, there were lots of places where the gay movement was just exploding, and people were out and proud and ya know, rainbow flags and all that. There wasn't too much of that here, every once in a while you'd see a flag flying. We had a flag in our backyard. We started this lesbian organization, and one of the things we decide to do was to help other women having gone through that experience ourselves, Delma and myself, we decided to help other women who were trying to—who had come to that realization for themselves, and needed some support as they were leaving a marriage and coming into the lesbian community. And so we deliberately wrote a little press release and sent it into the newspapers and low and behold they printed that, and we gave out home phone number, and we just said that the Lesbian Alliance was sponsoring a confidential discussion and to call the phone number. So we had—we did that several times, and

women would call here and ya know, scared to death... big hush hush going on, because ya know people at that time—people still have a lot to lose, if they come out at times, it can still be held against women and especially affect them and their profession, and as a mother, if they have children, but at that time, it was a terrifying thing. You didn't know who was gonna try to take your children from you or that you were gonna get fired and that kinda thing. So it was a very—it was a very con—we created in this living room a very confidential setting for people to come in so that they would feel safe, and then we had some women from the Lesbian Alliance who came, and what we did was just tell our story. Ya know, we just like to tell you our story so people that are sitting there, you don't really know what's going on with them, but you want them to get to a point where they feel comfortable enough just talking about it, so that you can try to figure out a way to help them or just support them emotionally. And so we would just tell our story and ya know, I did not have the experience of always knowing that I was a lesbian, but there were women who knew that, and that was really valuable if you were talking to a woman who has always known and was just tryna figure out how to come out. It's a very different experience when you have a husband and children than when there's just yourself, and you're working on that for yourself and trying to live a more authentic and honest life. So we had all kinds of people in this living room. We had high school students, and we had, you know, women that were just, ya know, just ordinary women that just read that little blurb in the paper, or someone told them about it, and then they came here. It wasn't on any kind of large scale, but we knew early on that if you just helped one woman, well, then it was all just worth it. So we would create these little gatherings and that was part of something that the Lesbian Alliance did, and even after the lesbian alliance kind of faded out of existence, we continued to do those gatherings for a while. So there was that, and then for many years, even as I came into the lesbian community, women's pot lucks in their homes was just like—that was just like a major transmitter of lesbian culture that I don't know if that still happens or not. It certainly was going on here a long time before I was involved. But that was something I found out about was, you know, to go to pot lucks. And again people would call one another up, and ya know, it was just this kind of stuff wasn't in the newspaper, you just found out about it. And you went to somebody's house with a dish of food, and you shared ya know, everybody just shared their food and talked to one another. And that's what—that's what the lesbian pot lucks were about. And that was another place to really feel women's space and a lot of people are not familiar with the term women's space, because I think nowadays, we are much more—we can be much more open and count on being welcome most everywhere, and we don't have to create women's space in order to have a safe place to be yourself. But there was a time when you did. And of course that predated me, certainly. From—before 1990, that goes way back, but that was something that felt really important to us is that there was a pot luck every month and you always went to the pot luck. Because that was your women's space. When we went to those women's music festivals that was your women's space. And I remember being at one of those festivals, not too far from here, that I had never even known existed. In fact it wasn't far from where I grew up, and I remember that there was this snack bar that always sold Dove Bars, and I was doing my volunteer service at the festival, and I was in the snack bar and the freezer stopped working. Well, it's filled with Dove Bars, so we've gotta fix that freezer, right? 'Cause otherwise all those Dove Bars melt, and Dove Bars were a big thing then. And I just didn't know what was gonna happen, and except I found out really quickly, because the truck backed up to the snack bar all these women came in picked up that freezer and took it out and loaded onto—I mean I don't know I thought that was gonna be accomplished, except in my experience it was never women

that picked up the freezer and took it somewhere and brought you another one. But at the women's festival that's exactly what happened. Women solved that problem, picked up that freezer, took it out of there, and brought another freezer in. We loaded the Dove Bars in. Everything's cool, right? That's what it was like there to be in that women's space that everything that was done and set up for you and administrated and the entertainment and the attendees, all of that, it was all women. And we went to a number of different festivals, a couple of which are still going on today. But at that time it was just really important that was a really, really important thing for women to get to those kind of events, because there was nothing there but women. Women took care of everything. And we don't have that kind of—just as a feminist, ya know, we don't have that kind of world that we live in where women's space is considered needed or important. But to les—a lot of lesbians it is. It's very important, it's when you are your truest self. So the—the festivals were one thing, but the pot—the local pot lucks were just very important as transmitters of lesbian culture, I mean that's where you went. And I remember being in somebody's home right after my mother died, and somebody had told me that her mother died, and I said to this person, “You lost your mother not long ago, didn't you?” And she said, “I did.” And I said that my mother just died. And I remember that she just—see now I'm gonna cry [waves hand to air dry oncoming tears]—I just remember that she just like reached out and took my hand, and we just sat there and held hands and talked about our mothers. And it was just... like I said, it was a safe place where, ya know, you met other people, and we just had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun with that. [wipes eyes with tissue] Now, I think it's more—I mean we certainly have lesbian couples that are friends of ours, and I still feel so strongly that that's, you know, a bond that we need to continue to have. But because there's so many of us are out now, I think that that's one of the things with our visibility has come many, many rewards. It's much safer, it's much more real, you can be yourself, you—people don't have to worry as much about losing their children or losing their job. But to me, one of the things that we lost is that close connection with other women that were living lives like we were or who wanted to live lives like we were and weren't sure about the next step, and that there was that—there was that desire to help people, and because we all have that in common—we all had our orientation in common—is that we loved another women.

DG: So when you were talking about the groups of people that come here, you mentioned about young people.

PW: [wipes eyes again] Yes. We had—and this was a surprise—I mean you put this thing in the newspaper, and you really don't know what's gonna happen. But we had someone call, who was in who was in—oh, I forget which grade they were in, but they were in high school, and that was a little scary because, you know, at that time to have a high school student in your home who [wipes nose] believed that she was a lesbian... well we did it anyway, I mean we told her to come on in. So, she came and she brought what she called her two mothers, and her two mothers were—I guess we made an assumption that her two mothers were two women, that, you know, one of them were perhaps her biological mother, and the other mother was her mother's partner. But actually, there was the mother that was raising her, and then her biological mother that she was not living with, and those two mothers came. It was really kind of a wonderful thing because those two women appeared to get along well, and they were here for her, they were here for her. And it was—it was—I thought that was pretty powerful. She brought a couple friends. She brought a male best—her best friend was a young guy. I forget who else she brought, but we had

these kids here in this living room. And we're telling our story, ya know, about being married and all this and the kids. And I don't know how relevant any of that was, but it was... it was important for that girl. And I remember saying to her that being a lesbian is actually a good life for a woman. Ya know, I think it's—I think there's a health aspect to it. I think it's—it can be easier for many women to have a close emotional relationship with a woman in a way that non-gay women really may not ever get to experience. I mean, when you're with a woman, you accept everything about one another. So, I remember saying that to her and following that gathering, we were having a pot luck here. So the timing was we were having the discussion, we had our discussion, and then women started to arrive for a pot luck. And we asked her if she would like to stay for the pot luck. Well, she did. She stayed—the teenager stayed, her young male friend stayed, nobody batted an eye. It was all women except these teenage kids, and this guy, who traditionally at lesbian pot lucks you didn't have guys, but he was her best friend, and it all just worked out fine. I don't think I'll ever forget it. It was wonderful.

DG: Nice.

PW: I don't know when that was. That's been—it's been some years since we had that kind of discussion group, and from time to time, I think that maybe that's still needed, and maybe we should just take another stab at that. At the time, it was part of the Lesbian Alliance, so we said, you know, "sponsored by the Lesbian Alliance." The Lesbian Alliance doesn't exist anymore, so I'm not sure how we would do it, but I imagine that it's—there still may be a need for that in some way. And that's something I think about sometimes is should we be doing something about that.

DG: So is there anything else, any other things you were involved in that you can think of that you'd like to share?

PW: Well, I guess that—okay, I'm going back to 1990. Delma and I would have loved to have been able to marry each other. We were not able to do that. I don't think people really thought about that as anything that was ever really gonna happen. It was just like, I guess some people did, but I don't know that I ever really thought it was gonna happen, not certainly in our lifetime. And the way that it has unfolded here, we married in 1993. There was a large March on Washington. It was for Lesbian and Gay rights. [wipes nose] We went to the march. And at the march there was what they called the wedding. And Reverend Troy Perry, who was part of the Metropolitan Community Church, which was a Gay and Lesbian accepting church, he stood in front of the IRS building, and there was a couple thousand of us there. And we had registered ahead of time, so we got a certificate. And he performed, and of course it wasn't legal in any way, but he performed a marriage ceremony for us. And so we were part of the wedding, and we still have that certificate upstairs. I guess I felt like that was—that might be as close as we'd ever come to really being able to marry each other. And we had these hats, and I remember that, we have a picture over here with the hats. We didn't wear fancy clothes or anything for our wedding in 1993, but we did have hats, and we bought them here at York in a hat shop, a women that made hats. We went down and tried on white hats. So, we had these bridal hats that we wore to our wedding in 1993. When we left the IRS Building, we were meeting friends, and we walked away from there, and I just remember that we were surrounded by reporters crouching down and taking our picture. I mean, it was the closest I have ever come to being involved with anything

like paparazzi. But that's exactly what it was like. I mean dozens and dozens of them were taking our pictures as we walked along with these hats. So... that was in 1993. In 2004—do I have the date right? 2004... same-sex marriage had become legal in Canada. First in one province, in British Columbia, and then the entire country adopted the same-sex marriage in Canada. Made you think about how far behind the United States was and what in the world would it ever take until we were that far—we were that progressive in this country. [coughs] So Delma and I... I proposed to Delma, and she accepted. So we planned a trip with four of our good friends, and we went to a bed and breakfast in Toronto. And we had made all these arrangements through the Canadian government, and because we were divorced, we had to produce evidence of our marriage, evidence of our divorce—[coughs] excuse me—and so forth. We worked with an attorney in Toronto, and we all just picked the date, flew to Toronto, made plans for a wedding, and we went to the attorney first, got that all squared away, and then I just remember feeling—'cause planning a long-distance wedding is a little nerve wracking. [coughs] Excuse me. A drink of water might be helpful. [clears throat] So, we went to Toronto to City Hall, got that all squared away, got our license, and got married in the backyard of this bed and breakfast. Now that was a legal wedding in 2004, but of course, it was not legal in this country. So, in Canada, no matter where we went, we were considered married—legally married. [coughs again] Excuse me. In this country, when we came back, we were still legally unrelated to one another, which raises all kinds of issues for people who can't marry. [is handed a glass of water and drinks] Thank you. Like, can you inherit from one another? Can you list one another on your insurance? There's just all kinds of legal issues that stood in our way here, because we could not legally marry one another. So that was back in 2004, and you know, in the past five years—now here we are in 2015, but in the past five-six years, just to think about how that whole... issue, the distinctive issue of the movement, became marriage. And I have heard that the way that came about was that somebody said, "Well, at some point you know they're gonna wanna marry one another," and they said it like a joke. But of course, people in our movement kind of seized on that and started working for marriage rights. And ya know, Massachusetts passed a law, and New Hampshire passed a civil—civil union law, and ya know, they fought hard in California and all these states in the past several years, it just really just started to happen. So everything we had said all those years about, ya know, "Not in our lifetime. Ya know, we're too old to ever see that. We're too old to ever really see equality for that piece, for marriage." It just started to happen, and in the past couple years of course, it has just absolutely snowballed, and you could just see one state after another, after another. We never thought it would happen in Pennsylvania. We thought Pennsylvania would be one of the last states, because Pennsylvania, even though it's a blue state, is a fairly conservative state, and we live in a conservative part of the state. And then in 2013, there was—I guess you'd call him a rogue, Register of Wills in Montgomery County [Pennsylvania], who began to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, and we read about that, and it wasn't very long after that that we decided that we should go and get one of those marriage licenses, and just go ahead and marry. Because somebody has to go first. Ya know, we didn't know if it would be legal. We thought it might be legal, we thought it might not be legal. Delma proposed to me. I accepted. We called Montgomery County—she must've called them several times because day by day—and I think this is something that non-gay people don't really understand, because, ya know, they can get married anywhere. You can fly to Tahiti and get married, you can get married next door, you can go get your marriage license, there's no questions asked. But for us, because that was happening, and it was causing such a flurry in this state, and there was a lot of talk about shutting him down. So we felt like we had to do it fast. So,

I don't know, it was only a couple weeks after he started to issue the licenses that we made a plan for—I think we decided on a Friday that we would get married the following Wednesday, because we both happened to have the day off, and that was just our criteria. There wasn't any—we just never thought about, ya know, planning a big wedding or anything like that, because it felt like it had to happen right away, because once that window of opportunity closed, we didn't know if we'd ever get it again. So, on Monday we called a pastor that we know, a Unitarian Pastor and said, "Would you marry us on Wednesday?" She said sure. We went down and got the marriage license on the Wednesday of our marriage, got the license, called them in the morning to make sure they were still issuing the marriage licenses, drove to Norristown [Pennsylvania], got the license. We were followed throughout the process by a reporter from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who approached us in the Register of Wills office and said ya know, "Are you here for a marriage license?" and we said, "Yes." And he said, ya know, "Could I kinda stay with you as you go through the process?" and we said "Yes." So he stayed with us, he had my camera, he has his camera. He took his pictures, he took pictures for me. And we got that marriage license. So we, ya know, we had our marriage license in our hand, we were very excited, and we raced home. And then at 6 o'clock that night that's when we had our wedding, right here in this living room. And we just had a couple friends with us. And the pastor married us, and ya know, we considered that legal, because we paid for our marriage license in the state of Pennsylvania, we paid extra to have the 3-day waiting period waived, and we came out of there with an actual license issued by an entity of the Pennsylvania government. So, it was a very exciting time. I thought lots more people would get married at that time that chose not to. And I guess maybe the uncertainty was difficult for them, because ya know, we really didn't know if that would ever really stand up, because it was not—it was against Pennsylvania law. Pennsylvania law... the Pennsylvania constitution included a statement about—well there were a couple vulnerabilities in the Pennsylvania constitution. Which is what happened in other states, where the laws against gay marriage were overturned, because the constitution in the states was vulnerable. When the constitution states that no one shall discriminate against anybody else's civil rights, well, marriage is a civil right. It's a civil right—you pay money to the government, they give you a license, then you can get legally married. So, if your constitution states that no one can take away any Pennsylvanian's civil rights, well then, obviously those anti-gay laws should have never been passed in the first place. The Defense of Marriage Act in Pennsylvania should have never been passed in the first place. It's anti-Pennsylvania Constitution. So, our Constitution was also vulnerable, which we knew, so we married in July of 2013, considered ourselves married, and then, all of a sudden, the following spring, which would be May 20th in 2014, Pennsylvania became one of those states where the anti—the Defense of Marriage Act was overturned in Pennsylvania, and same-sex marriage became legal. And I was in an—we all knew it was coming, we knew there was gonna be a decision soon. I was in an all-day meeting in Reading [Pennsylvania] of all places. Delma was home. This was on May 20th, 2014, and I was sitting in a meeting, and right across from me was a woman—a young woman who had her phone, and she kept looking at her phone, you know, and then she said, "Oh, we have gay marriage in Pennsylvania!" and I said [leans forward and raises voice] "WHAT!?" [laughs] She said, "We have gay marriage in Pennsylvania." And I knew that might be the day, and so, well, I just couldn't stay in the meeting. So, I got my phone—we weren't supposed to use our cellphones in this meeting—I get my phone out, I finally—I started crying, for one thing, and the guy next to me said, "Are you all right?" And I said, "Well," we had just heard that announcement from that young woman, and I said, "Well," I said, "that affects my family. I have

a female partner of almost 25 years.” So I got out my phone—I just finally had to leave the meeting, because I couldn’t stop crying. So I left the meeting, went and found a quiet place, and called Delma, and as soon as she answered the phone, I knew from her voice that she had heard, and we had heard all along that there was going to be a rally at Harrisburg the day the decision came down. It was going to be at a certain time, 6 o’clock, I think, and I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to get back from Reading [Pennsylvania] in time, and I was—I had carpooled with somebody, and they turned out to be a really fast driver, so part way home, I thought to myself, “I’m going to make it. I’m going to make it to York in time for Delma and I to run to Harrisburg and be part of that—be part of that rally.” So we did. I just made it. I ran in here, we got our little headpieces we wore to our second wedding in Toronto [Canada], and we got our sign—because I have a large sign that says, “22 years is a hell of a long engagement!” Well, by that time, it had been 24 years. That was our marriage rally sign that we took around to rallies. And so we took our sign, and we raced to Harrisburg, and we got there right at 6 o’clock and stood right in the front of that rally, and they featured some of the couples that were part of the legal challenge to Pennsylvania’s Defense of Marriage Act, and you know, just speeches and happiness and all this stuff, and it was just a really big day. May 20th was a really big day. And I’ve always had that question about whether our marriage was legal on July 31st, when we married the year before or whether it was legal on May 20th—I just read recently that our marriage became legal on May 20th, 2014, so that’s another anniversary. So, we have several anniversaries built in there, and one of them is May 20th, 2014, which is when it—our marriage became legal. So, we were grandfathered in. We didn’t have to marry again for a fourth time. The third time was the charm, even though we had to wait awhile, but our marriage—our third marriage became legal in Pennsylvania on May 20th, 2014. Now, of course, we are planning to go on vacation soon, and we are going to Louisiana. In Louisiana, we will not be married, because Louisiana does not have equitable marriage laws. So, we still have this—even though there are like, I don’t know, what is it? 35, 36 states now where marriage is legal, we are still waiting. This year, we hope for the U.S. Supreme Court decision, which we certainly hope will be in our favor, that will do away with anti-gay marriage laws and that everyone will be able to marry in every state. But it gives you an odd feeling to go from a state where, in this state and this community and in this state, my state, I am married to Delma. When we travel to Louisiana, we are unrelated strangers. So, it brings back that whole thing about you “travel with your papers” that says that she’s my power of attorney, she’s my medical power of attorney, you know, if anything happened, and I had to go in the hospital, they might say, well, where are her real family? And want to talk to my daughter or my son, you know, instead of my wife here in Pennsylvania, but we will be unrelated strangers for the time that we are in Louisiana, which is not a very comfortable thing to think about, so... there you go. This year will be the Supreme Court decision, probably in June. And that’s when we’ll find out. So there it is.

DG: What do you think’s gonna happen?

PW: I think what’s gonna happen is is that the Supreme Court, since they accepted the case, I think the Supreme Court will find for us, and that they will do away with—I think there’s just been such a large body of momentum—and I mean, 35 or 36 states, that’s—that’s more than half of the states. That’s a large part of the country, so the issue of marriage equality really came—became the bellwether of our movement in a way that I don’t think any of us ever expected it would be. We just really didn’t think that it would be marriage, but it was marriage. So, you

know, we've participated to our best effort, you know, we went to rallies, we gave interviews, we married—we've married three times. So, I really do think that's it's gonna come down in our favor in June and that that will be available to anybody that would like to marry, which is as it should be.

DG: Are you going to get special hats made for the party? [laughs]

PW: [laughs] Oh, I don't know. We're gonna celebrate. I don't know about the hats.

DG: It seemed like a theme.

PW: Yeah, it seems like a theme. We had hats, and then we had those [motions over her head with her hands] those halo things with the stars and the ribbon streamers coming down from them, and yeah, we'll have to think about what we're gonna wear when we get the Supreme Court decision, but oh, well, that will be a happy day for sure.

DG: [laughs] Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to share?

PW: I don't think so, I think I've talked long enough. I can't think of anything else that I wanted to say.

DG: Thank you so much. You're delightful.

PW: I think I do want to say something else. I want to say something else about being a grandmother, because, you know, you—I talked about having my children, and, you know, how they dealt—each dealt with what was a very big transition for me, and—but then, my daughter had a child when this all happened to me. Very little, he was only about a year old, but that—that young person has grown up with having a grandmother who's in a relationship with a woman, so to him, it's just the most natural thing, you know. I'm his nanny, and she's his Delma, and he used to say to his mother, "I want my Nanny Delma," and it was like we were one person. "I want my Nanny Delma," he would say, and my daughter would call me and say, "Mom, he wants you two!" And, you know, he wanted his Nanny Delma, so to him, it's just... there's nothing weird or strange or—he doesn't have to accept it. It's just who we are. So, that young man is going to become a father himself, and we're going to be great-grandmothers, so we share our grandchildren. There are three from Delma's side of the family. There's one from my side of the family. And, you know, we'll both be great-grandmothers to this baby that's gonna be born, and so, part I think—part of the... part of the beauty of a movement like this is that generationally, every generation is more accepting, because they just see you as a regular person. I mean, it's your grandma, so it's—it's not anything strange or even unusual, and I know it's not that way everywhere, but Pennsylvania is a very con—a rather conservative area and just look at the ground we've made here and the end roads we've made here and the acceptance, so, you know, the whole thing is really just completely headed in the right direction. You know, we're... we're each other's partners and wives—beloved wives, we call ourselves, but we're also people's mothers and grandmothers and now great-grandmothers. That's it.

DG: That's great.

PW: It is. It sure is. Oh, we're over the moon, are you kidding?

DG: [laughs]

PW: We're shopping. [everyone laughs]

DG: Of course!

PW: We don't even know if it's going to be a boy or a girl yet, but we are ready for anything, I would say.

DG: [laughs] Well, thanks again.

PW: You're welcome.