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Interviewee: Tammy Del Sol

Interviewer: Corine Lehigh

Videographer: Catherine McCormick

Date: Thursday, April 20, 2017

Place: Harrisburg

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Abstract:

Tammy Del Sol was born in 1963. In this oral history, she discusses her college experience at several institutions, playing racquetball, her father's (now her own) dental practice, her close-knit family, her artistic side, her relationships with different girlfriends, and her continuing friendship with her ex Jen. Tammy also talks about her relationship with their three children who were conceived through several different sperm donors, all of whom were friends of the couple. Tammy discusses the importance of the extended LGBT family that includes friendship and relationships with exes and how this network has helped her and her former partner raise their children. Tammy identifies as a "New Ager," someone who enjoys many aspects of different religions, but who primarily is drawn to spiritualism. Though she has run a dental practice for 22 years, she would like to pursue other business ventures after the next five or six years, which may include screenwriting. Tammy also hopes that her business will become a "home" for people in the LGBT community who otherwise would not find a place where they could feel safe. The interview also touches on current politics and the future of social justice under the Trump administration.

CM: Okay. If you will just go ahead and give us your name.

TD: Tammy Del Sol. And what else did you need?

CM: Corine, could you talk so I can go ahead and check your microphone?

CL: Oh, yeah I can. So, Tammy why do you not tell us where we are?

TD: Okay, we are in my dental practice at Colonial Dental Group on Linglestown Road in Harrisburg.

CM: Okay, then top there so that... [Video cuts off]

CL: We are now officially recording.

CL: So I am Corine Lehigh and we have videographer—

CM: Cathy McCormack.

CL: Okay. And we are here to interview for the LGBT [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender] History Project. Is that okay?

CM: Yes.

CL: Okay. So if you just want to start with your name and where we are?

TD: Okay. My name is Tammy Del Sol and we are at my dental practice, Colonial Dental Group on 4940 Lingelstown Road here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

CL: Great, okay. And oh, today's date is the 20th of April, yes [CM: 20th]. Yes, thank you [CM: 2017]. Yeah, okay. First, we are just going to start with biographical information so we can get talking [TD: Mmhmm]. So, if you want to tell us about your family? And your childhood, how many....?

TD: So, I mean, I grew up just down the road here in Mountindale [Pennsylvania]. I am 53 so I was born in '63 and older sister, younger brother. My mom was a Finn, she came over as a—I do not even know how much detail you need or would like.

CL: As much as you would like to give is fine.

TD: But, so she is from Finland and she passed away. It is 12 years now and she died of cancer; but, my father is Arab, you know, so I have Arab and Finnish blood. I kind of always say I am a mutt of sorts and—but you know, we are a close-knit family. My sister, who is two years older, teaches in University of California Santa Barbara. Her specialty is torture, which is kind of interesting. She is into human rights issues [CL: Laughs] and things like that, but that is her specialty is torture. And I have a younger brother two years younger and he is not doing a lot but... And then, my parents raised our younger— my youngest brother—and he is just 27 I believe and his parents were Liberian I believe. And it is a long story and I will not go into it, but he is my brother too. So his name is Paul, so—but he is in Shanghai now. But anyhow, my dad is still around. He just turned 85 yesterday, so you know it is good and right now, I with my ex we share three children and my ex's name is Jen and our children are Maijan, Ocean, and Bella. And Maijan is 13 going on 25 [CL: Laughs]; and my son Ocean is 11 going on 6 [Laughs]; and my little one Bella she is adorable, so she is 5. She is all of 5. So...

CL: Okay. So—and what did your parents do?

TD: My mother was a trained to be a hygienist, but she did not practice a day in her life you know. She ended up, you know, after marrying my dad, just becoming a homemaker. And my dad, this is his practice he started it on 4th Street in 1947 and he had been practicing up until a couple years ago when I took over this practice. And I have been here; I have been practicing myself for 22 years and—but I took over this practice in '07 and so, I kind of turned it into a wellness practice. It is not as traditional as it was when my dad had it, but...

CL: Do you want to explain what you mean by turning it into a “wellness” practice?

TD: What I mean by that is that we do not place mercury fillings, you know. We are not fans of water fluoridation. We give people the full scoop of what is entailed in root canals. Pennsylvania does not mandate that dentists eliminate the mercury that goes into their waste water systems, unlike New Jersey and New York which mandate that dental offices have to have an amalgam separator; but, we do because we care about the environment and whatnot. We try to create a really relaxing Zen kind of atmosphere. Patient experience is optimal. We don't— many practices get new patients in and they go right into the hygienist schedule and the dentist meets them for the first time at the end of the hygiene; whereas, in this practice, new patients all come

into the doctors schedule first where we can really talk to them and just assess where they are, you know, kind of make— create a relationship. So....

CL: Cool. So where did you go to school?

TD: [Laughs] [CL: Laughs] There is no easy answers to any of your questions. I started out going to school at Marris College in Poughkeepsie, New York, primarily because my racquetball coach was a trainer in the Racquetball Club across the street from the college. And I went there for a year and a half and was successful and I played racquetball competitively for thirty years and was on the national team and did a lot of national titles and intercollegiate stuff and that was fun; but, after a year and a half of college not really knowing what to do, I had a really good friend and she was going to go on this you know, transcontinental bicycle trip and so in '83, I quit college. And I first asked my dad and I said, "Dad do you mind if I quit school for a little bit and go on a long bike ride with a bunch of people who I do not even know?" and he is like "uh okay." And so I was really surprised that he said that, but that in April 10th of '83 eight of us started in Poughkeepsie [New York] right in that parking lot of the All-Sport Racquetball Club, where I played and we started. And you know, it was 6.5 months and 10,500 we did a figure-eight around the country, so it was probably the best experience I ever had; but, it was hard because my best friend and I just split you know we had, it was anguishing. I turned, you know, 20 on that trip and so it was a lot of growth, psychologically, physically, spiritually on that trip. So, it was a great experience.

CL: That is awesome.

TD: Yeah it was good. Oh, so college. So sorry. I get distracted so easily.

CL: That is fine.

TD: So, after that, I went to Muhlenberg [College] thinking I might be pre-med, you know although my love was really writing. I have been writing poetry since I was 12. And— but for whatever reason, I went to Muhlenberg was pre-med then a cousin from Brazil who was a little slow called and said that he after a year at Muhlenberg, he called and said that he got into— so he lives in Brazil but he also wanted to go to school in the states— he got into Wichita State and so we are thinking— my dad and I are thinking— how is this guy going to make it you know? You know from Sao Paolo to you know, breadbasket— how is he going to do this? So I thought, "okay what the hell? I will transfer." So, that was my third school and I transferred out there. And ironically, he got into like Elizabethtown [College] and I am like "I cannot transfer again." So, I end up finishing my degree in creative writing and I finally just like said "screw it I am just going to do what I love." And I got a degree in creative writing and came home with absolutely no job prospects at all because there are none for people who are creative writers. But then, when I came back, my dad had just built this big building two doors over, 4800 building, and he had just built that and was scrambling to show the banks that he had rented all this space and he got like, \$10,000 worth of restaurant equipment and he said "Tam, if you are not doing anything how about running a restaurant for me?" And I am like, "okay." So, we did that and we ran it right into the ground in four months [CL: Laughs] and you know, I am giving you like my life story. I do not know [CL: Oh, no. It is fine]. Yeah and so then, you know, after running that into the ground and having like a small nervous breakdown over it, I went into social work because

besides writing, social work you know what I loved to do. I ended up working in a group home up in Bloomsburg [Pennsylvania], got promoted to Supervisor, had some young boys with frontal lobe damage and one of the symptoms of this was that they could not control their appetite. They never felt full, so these two young boys, grossly obese, locked kitchen, everything, small ranch home you know. So, it was just these two boys and a small staff of like six or whatever and I am the supervisor and trying to manage everything. And then, we get this other young boy frontal lobe damage, but he did not have that as his disorder but he just was a little out of control. And he was— and so, one time he cornered me and the nurse and we had a bad experience. He punched me out, and you know, and so in protest I said, “you got to give him more meds or something or send him back to the...” and that was the time [Former President Ronald] Reagan was de-institutionalizing, trying to get— trying to push everyone to group homes or... A lot of people were like— psychiatric hospitals were closing and whatnot and so they said “no.” They said, “Tam, if you had done a better job, this would not have happened” and I quit. And unfortunately, they did not make really any changes. The next supervisor he put in the hospital and that is when they decided to send him back. So, that whole experience just kind of left me with a bad taste. I did not really know what to do. I mean, I love helping people you know if I cannot do my writing and I could not— the reason I did not ask my dad to help me out to get an M.F.A. [Master of Fine Arts] because that is really what I wanted to do; he put me through school and I did not want to keep, you know... I do not— I like to take care, you know, of myself, but— so I did not know what to do I came back from that experience and my dad goes “Tam, you know, you know people I help in dentistry” and so in a weak moment he got me while I was down and did not know what else to do and it was like— so, it was like he was holding this carrot out and I went for it and so he kind helped me get into dental schools. And I went to Penn [State University] down in Philly. I love Philadelphia, did not love dental schools [CL: Laughs]. But, I got through the program because you know, you just got to focus on the goal you know. I am goal-oriented, so I got through it.

CL: Do you like your job now, though?

TD: I love my patients.

CL: That is good.

TD: I could do fillings in my sleep. I can do crown preps in my sleep. I love solving problems and I love my patients. And I try to do as good job as I can. I mean, I have written a couple of screen plays throughout the years I went out to L.A. [Los Angeles, California] a couple times to try to pitch them, got nowhere. Wrote a screenplay last year, entered it into a couple things, did not get anywhere. So, I love writing. I love film. I would love to get into film someday. But, for right now, it is okay. And you know, we are— the economy is what it is. I am very much needed here. It is not like I can just go off and you know, do some writing. I got a family to support and you know, big practice to run and so that is what I do.

CL: Cool. Okay. So, we are— I know you said that your father was Arab and your mother was Finnish. Did you— were you guys religious at all?

TD: Well, my dad’s family were Christian Arabs, Arab Christians or whatever. And my mom was Lutheran, but they all joined the Presbyterian— Market Square Presbyterian. I do not know

if you know that Church, big red brick building downtown. So, I kind of grew up in that church and my mom was very much born-again. I remember Billy Graham incessantly on the TV [Television] growing up, not a big fan of his at all [CL: Laughs]. And you know, it was not easy growing up gay, you know, in Harrisburg because at that time, there were no Ellens [DeGeneres] or Rosies [O'Donnell] or you know Elton Johns or you know— we had Liberace I think and he was not even out. How somebody liked him could not be out [laughs] he somehow was still not out [CL: Laughs]. But then, we had Billy Graham. And I did not know I was gay when I was young. I just knew there were voices in my head, you know. And I almost tried to commit suicide when I was like around 12 or whatever, but you know, I do not know. I prayed a lot then and so...

CL: So, when did you come out then?

TD: So, I figured out that I was gay when I was at Wichita State and I had dated a couple guys and it was really weird and creepy [laughs]. It is really weird when you do not— when something does not feel right to have like guys open doors for you. You know, there is a certain quality that is just not there and you talk about going out for dinner and it is like “well, I think that we should go here” and it is like, do we not talk about that? But this was back in '85 or such and it is very patriarchal you know what I mean. I mean, when you are thinking you are straight, you are behind the eight ball right from the beginning. There is no equality dynamic in it at all and I just did not like that and it did not feel right so anyhow. It was just when video started coming out in grocery stores and so, I am at the grocery store and this little tiny grocery store right where I lived in Wichita and pick up this video, looks interesting, called *Desert Hearts* and I take it home and I that movie changed my life [Laughs]. I think that is why I love film so much. Do you guys know *Desert Hearts*?

CM: No.

TD: It is like the most beautiful lesbian love story ever and it was so well done. Donna Dietch is the director and she had a little cameo in it and, uh, just excellent script, excellent acting, excellent storyline and the love scene was, you know... I think I returned it like two months later [CL: Laughs] but it was just an exceptionally well done film. And when I think still now, it is kind of like the standard that when they were filming *The L Word*, they told the cast, this is what I read, to watch *Desert Hearts* because that is the quality of acting and passion and stuff that you want to recreate in this series, *The L Word*. So, I mean, Donna Dietch has always been talking about doing a sequel, so I just am waiting for it. But anyhow, I think that is not what you asked me. I...

CL: So you saw that though?

CM: And it spoke to you?

TD: I realized that I was attracted to— I realized that I am not a freak. I am not going to burn in Hell. This is just kind of who I am. And I think prior to that, the only images I had of gay women were like, big burly you know, phys ed. [physical education] teachers. And when I was saw how beautiful those women were, it was like it kind of lit a lightbulb in my— like I do not have to turn into this to be gay. You know, it is okay to beautiful it is okay to— there is all different

variations. And back in that time period, there were not a lot of imagery so that was a huge—and how that film of all films, a little tiny independent film, is in the grocery store, it is not even like a big budget. This film is in this when videos first came. To this day, I just think it was like an act of god that it just happened to be there and I happened to watch it. Because that film I credit to me coming out. I mean it was a great... So, anyhow I came out. I knew my parents would not get it and I thought, I did not want them to try to commit me, so I thought I am going to wait until ever have my first girlfriend and you know, we are steady or whatever until I come out. And so that is exactly what I did. When I graduate from Wichita State and came back, I went back to play Racquetball and the woman who ran the club, we used to half Alpha Racquetball Club they used to be of course [unintelligible], and so we started going out. She was my first girlfriend and we were going out for a while and I decided to come out to my parents and so that was around '88 or something like that.

CL: So how did that go?

TD: You know, I think compared to a lot of people's, I think better than many people. My mom just— my takeaway, what she said was “what did I do wrong? I do not know... what I did wrong?” And because you know, people think that is a standard thing and my dad was like “well, Tam are you sure you really want to go down this road?” So, clearly neither one really had a sense of what it really— and they did not know any gay people and my parents knew no gay people and I really knew— I had no gay friends. I had— knew no one really, except my girlfriend and just starting through her to get to know some people in the gay community. But, it was pretty— there was D Gem down on Front Street. Do you guys know about that? [CM: Mmhmm] which is now the Wharf or whatever, but that was the only place. And I remember going in there when I was young and thinking right when I started going out with Sue and it is like “wow this is like Mecca.” I mean, like anyone you know, lesbian. It was not gay. There were no men that I remember, a lot of phys ed. teachers and others, you know. But it was so fun and good.

CL: And how did you meet your first girlfriend there?

TD: I met her playing Racquetball.

CL: Oh that is right. You said that. I apologize.

TD: So that is how we met.

CL: Oh. So, we went over your occupational history and how you have taken over this. Do you plan on staying here with this or are you hoping to pass it on?

TD: I think, you know, I am going to be here probably for the next five or six years I think. I have a lot of ideas. I would like to start maybe different businesses, maybe dental-related, maybe not. But I cannot see myself, my dad practiced for like 50 years, there is no way in hell I am going to be able to make it like that. I am not— the fact that I have held the same job for 22 years is really a miracle for me because I get bored, I want to try different things. I am like, you know— and I work with a lot of A [Type A] personalities and I am married to this building. I am married to my operatories and my schedules. And you know, I have never— it is so; I feel like I am a fish out of the water. Do you know what I mean? After a year of practicing dentistry here, I

did not like working with my dad. My cousin was here. I did not like working with him. Everyone was just too rigid. I could not stand it. And my girlfriend, at the time, was a midwife out in New Mexico she— we had gone to Penn together and she was out there and I like “I have had it. I quit.” You know, they gave me a goodbye party. You know, I am quitting dentistry. I have had it with you people. I am going out with Lisa. We are going to hang out. We are going to have a beautiful life in New Mexico because I love New Mexico. That was my favorite part of my bike trip. So, I get out here; I am a school bus driver, you know, I meet a writing group right, talking about screenwriting. I am like in a little bit of heaven, you know. I am not making any money [CL: Laughs]. Lisa is completely supporting me and they call me after a couple of months and say “Tammy, please come back.” My dad had another practice up in Williamstown [Pennsylvania]. He goes “Please, come back. The doctor reneged on the contract we have no one up there you have to come back” and I am like [sighs] and I did. So, I came back and Lisa and I broke up and I ended up seeing someone else here and it worked out, you know.

CL: So, it sounds like you are very close then with your family then?

TD: Yeah we are very close.

CL: That is good.

TD: We are all close. My ex and I are like practically best friends. She lives down the road from me. We go on vacation together. She is single. I am still single now, you know, after we split up in 2009. And you know, the kid loves that they can bounce back and forth on the road between us and it is good. I have a good life. I live on the river. It is so beautiful in Dauphin [Pennsylvania]. I feel blessed, you know. I am so lucky and for me to— whenever I grumble about you know being a dentist or whatnot, who am I kidding? I mean, I have a good life you know. I feel shame that I feel this way but it is, it is what it is.

CL: Yeah. Okay. So were you ever married?

TD: No.

CL: No. Were you and Jem ever officially...well, I guess you said you broke up in 2009?

TD: Yeah. We broke up before it became legal and we had talked about just like doing the ceremony, but we had never gotten to that point. We split up before we had done that.

CL: And are your children adopted or...?

TD: So, the neighbors— when I moved in with Jen and her family house, and she is still there now with her dad, the next door neighbors, Jack and Bill, a gay couple. So, Jen had lived in that house since she was a young girl. She became friends with Jack and Bill, who were just like 10 maybe 15 years older than her; and they had made an agreement that if Jen ever settled down and found someone she was serious about that Jack would love to donate the sperm or whatever, so he did. And so when Jen and I got together, we had this like official thing. You know he— we had this dinner out on the river, we put a table out there, we had candles and this beautiful dinner. And that night, Jack and Bill whatever and they came over with a syringe and this laminated— decorated basket. And Jen is like the most fertile woman on the planet, no kidding

[CL: Laughs]. I think that was it. That was my in, swimming around in that thing. And yeah, she was born like nine months later, and so that was Maijan's dad. Unfortunately, he died of AIDS [Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome] when she was ten months. We did not know he was positive [CL: Mm] when he gave the sperm and so when we— and to this day, I am amazed that ... When he was a pilot for American Airlines.... So when he started having weird symptoms, I do not mean to be stereotypical, but I mean his having these vague symptoms of you know fatigue and all these different things going on, no one thought to test him for HIV [Human Immunodeficiency Virus]. And I do not, to this day, you know, this was like, you know thirteen years ago, why did they not— why did they not test him right away? So, he languished for like you know, eight/nine months before even figuring it out and you know his counts were going down and all that stuff. And finally, when they did figure it out, it was too late. He was— so, he died when she was ten months old and that was sad and then for Ocean, Michael— Jack's ex was Michael... and the gay community as you probably know, I mean the ex's just hang on we are just this huge extended— for many of us— this huge extended family. I mean, it is interesting I have so many straight friends that you know, do not ever talk to their exes. You know, they do not care, but here I do not know if it is just because we— many of us are a close-knit family we... So, Michael was an ex of Jack and he said "Look, you know. I would be happy to help raise because Billy was not that interested in providing sperm," so Michael provided sperm for Ocean and Ocean came and after like the first or second try, and you know he is— ironically Ocean looks like me and I have no DNA. He is left-handed. He looks like me. He is very creative, he is an artist. No one understands that. Michael is not left-handed. Jen is not left-handed. No one understands anyhow. So that was that and then after Jen and I split in 2009, Jen is a little intuitive and psychic, she calls me up and says "Tammy, I had a dream. I need to have another child." And we are exes, right? And I do not have the right to say anything but I am thinking, no. I do say "Please, Jen. We have a boy and a girl. It is perfectly fine let us just have a different dream tomorrow. I mean, let us just forget it [CL: Laughs] and she is like, "Tam, no, I feel it. She is a little girl she needs to come through, you know I just feel it, you know. I just feel like she keeps coming in my dreams like..." Like, I do not have a right to tell you what to do with your body, but I know as who I am, that whoever this child comes out of her, I am going to be her mother too. And it was not like you know I would say no, it is just the woman I was going out with was giving me major grief about that because it was hard enough, you know, to get them to wrap their heads around like they are going to have to be like another mom to some of my kids. But another child? And my current girlfriend at the time was like "I know you, Tam. No. No you can be her aunt or something." It became this very— so Bella became this— before she was even born, before she was even you know whatever, it was... But right now, Bella is a light. She is a light. And I believe Jen and I believe that she came through to her in her dreams and I believe that this little girl is so happy to be on the planet. And it is a blessing and you know my ex, the girl I was going out with, she loves her too. So, it is ironic that she loves her when she gave me hell about it before she was even born. But that— and the father of Bella was a guy that Jen played racquetball with because Jen is now very into racquetball— was, and his name is Tommy. So, she has three different daddies for her children. I just call her like the lesbian whore [Laughs] [CL: Laughs]. You know, like you are like a lesbian whore. You just get sperm from all these different guys, but whatever. Tommy is a sweetheart and he is a good dad to Bella so...

CL: That is good.

TD: It is kind of like an odd— not a typical type of story, but it works for us. We all get along. Well, Michael is not crazy about Jen and I, but that is okay. We do not— it is not a big deal.

CL: [Laughs] and how— your kids are? How do they react to having different fathers?

TD: It is all good. I mean, they all regard each other as siblings and I think for the most part, they all feel kind of blessed. They have two moms and you know, the big ones have dad and Michael, and Bella regards Michael also as her dad. So, she is like, “I have two moms and two dads” you know. So, you know, it is good.

CL: That is good [TD: It is good]. Nice, one big happy family.

TD: It is. It is good. I mean, sometimes, there is tension here and there; but, who does not have tension? And I feel for the most part, you know, we are lucky. We are lucky.

CL: Okay. So, were you ever in the military?

TD: [Shakes head]

CL: No, I did not think so. You said that we went over your history. So, are you affiliated with any of the LGBT organizations in the area?

TD: Do you know, I had— when we first had the kids, we marched with PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbian And Gays], went in to talk with them. Whitney Singer, who is a good friend of ours, she got us involved with all that but since the mayor, Linda, who was here before and she kind of nixed the marches. That is when it kind ended. So— but we were doing some PFLAG stuff so I am not— there is the gay and lesbian business network thing that I am marginally involved with and whatnot and not overly involved, you know. But, we have a nice growing population of gays and lesbians who are becoming patients here; and I would love to be known as, you know, the practice that is the most welcoming of the LGBTQ and all the other acronyms of you know.... [Laughs] [CL: Laughs]. I mean, I would love that. We have— I think we have two transgendered people and you know, it is interesting. And I love you know having people who are different. And I love— the scared patients are my favorite ones and the people who seem the most troubled are my favorite patients and feel like they do not have a home. You know, I would like to somehow let that be known, but you know we do it little by little, word of mouth.

CL: You said you were marginally involved in the Gay and Lesbian Business Alliance?

TD: Well, I belong to it. I mean, I am a member of that. I have gone to a mixer, you know, and I support it in that way, but I have not been to too many events and primarily because I am exhausted when I get home from work; and on weekends, all weekend long I have my kids. I do not have them during the week. I just get them, you know, on the weekends, which is actually good. But, when I was at Penn when I was going to you know Penn Dental, I was on the Gay and Lesbian Speakers Bureau and we went around and spoke to different groups on campus and spoke with attorneys and went to Philadelphia High School and did that. And I love that and I

miss that and I wish I could do more of that, but I have not really had any opportunities to do that here.

CL: What year was that?

TD: I went to dental school '91 to '95. Yep.

CL: Okay. I had a question, but I forgot it. Okay, let us see. So, are you— do you still practice religion or do you still go to church or?

TD: Well, I— Jen and I are very spiritual. We are kind of like New Agers, you know. So that is kind of where we are so there is no church that really embraces those ideas that... We read a lot. We realize spiritual things and we talk about stuff with the kids, but Maijan is convinced she is an atheist and she is perfectly fine with that. And she right now is in California visiting my sister who is an atheist and I am like, ah, this is great. You know, like I do not care. I said to Maijan, "I do not care if you want to be an atheist, but I want you to be open, you know what I mean. That does not mean that you are allowed to like, not ever engage. Anybody talks about something spiritual you can just la la la, no you cannot do that. You have to be able to have conversations. I mean, you know, you cannot close yourself off"; and so, you know, we go back and forth because I just took them to church two Sundays ago and she was like "Mom, why do we have to go?" And I am like, "because we do, because our friends are getting baptized, her little boy is getting baptized and we are coming to support and it is important." But, I brought coloring books so they could all color [Laughs]. All three of them were in there, half coloring, not listening. Just, I do not care. I feel like you know I am not— I do not identify as Christian; but, I feel like growing up in that church gave me a basis of understanding so many stories. And I think Jesus is great and I feel like I am a huge fan of Jesus, you know. I do not accept the idea that he is the only, you know, enlightened being that ever came through. I think there were many, but he is probably maybe one of the most or the most. And he had so many great stories that we can learn from of how to live your life. But, so basically to your answer, I am a New Ager who just accepts. You know, I love Buddhism. I love American Indian spirituality. I love parts of Christianity and Cabalism. Jen is studying Cabalism right now, so you know we are kind of all over the ballpark a little bit.

CL: If you do not mind me asking, how do did you and Jen meet?

TD: Golfing. That was the first and last time that we golfed together, period. I have not golfed since then. And so, it was a lesbian golf league that they have in Harrisburg and a friend of mine asked me to come out and play and we were looking for a fourth. I had another friend of mine he said "I will get my friend Jen to come" and we bumped into her at the Pink Lizard when the Pink Lizard was around and she was going out with somebody at the time and so— but she agreed to go golfing. And on the day we went golfing, it was three weeks that her mom had just died of cancer so she was going through a lot because she was so tight with her mom and— but, you know, her dad talked her into just coming out and getting out and doing something. And I do not know, we just hit it off and it was really good. So, we— she said that the thing that made her fall for me was I wore baseball caps a lot and I am not a good golfer [CL: Laughs], so my first ball went right into the woods and I go in, I am looking for this ball and I come out with a feather in my cap and she thought that was cute. And so, as a consequence feathers, have been our thing,

mainly my thing, and so we both have matching feather armband tattoos. Now she looks like the tattoo lady. She is pretty much all covered and I tease her about like, she is going to be a circus act if you know, she keeps it up. But, I only have one. And it is unusual because most people who get tattoos, they just keep going “do you not know what it is going to look like when you get old? Do you not know what— how you lose the color and everything?” Well, they do not care, so it is all good [Laughs] [CL: Laughs].

CL: You said that you had some siblings. How did they react when you came out?

TD: My sister, who is very bright, said to me when I came out to her, because she is one of the first people I came out to in '86 '87, she goes “Tammy, I have known you were gay since you were like 8.” And I said to her— I remember saying, “Do you think you could have saved me from you know hours of therapy? Do you know therapists I have seen because I thought I was like effed up? I mean, really, you could have helped me out.” And she was like, “eh, I know you would figure it out on your own or whatever” [CL: Laughs]. So, it is interesting how the people around you can see you better than you can see yourself. And another interesting thing was like, my doctor I went to see growing up was my uncle and it was my dad’s cousin, first cousin. And I came across, he died ironically playing racquetball when I was in high school, and I found my medical records he had for me. And so, I am looking through these medical records he had them since I was born, and when I was around the age of 12 when I almost committed suicide, they have there— he had on there that I was clinically depressed. He had this on the thing and yet no one ever talked about it and no one addressed that. And I just like to this day, I do not really understand—I am not really sure. I think there was so much fear, you know, like we just need to buy her more ice cream. We just need to make her happy. And I think that there was no name for it— no one was coming out at that time and my parents would have been ill-equipped to deal with that. And so they just did not. They just ignored it and just tried to make me talk about other things or distract me with other things.

CL: You said that you went to therapy? What made you...?

TD: In college, I went to, you know, sort of talking to— because I knew things were not right in my head and I could not figure it out. I did not really understand myself and it is weird. I mean, anyone who knew anything about gays and lesbians could have pegged me right from the get-go; but when you are trying to figure out on your own, you do not really have a name for it for you know. What I mean, there really were not any role models it was just kind of just it is like trying to figure out where the furniture is in a room that the light’s not on. How do you orient yourself? I mean, it is hard to figure it out.

CL: And when did you go to therapy?

TD: When I was in my 20s going to college.

CL: And you said you came out you graduated from Wichita State?

TD: I figured myself out in Wichita State and then, I came out after I had my first girlfriend like a year or so after graduating, so it was about '88— 1988 or 9 [1989].

CL: Did you have anyone else tell you that they knew beforehand like your sister did? [Tammy shakes her head] No? I always find that there is always people who know...

TD: I mean, there probably were, but nobody came forward with that. I mean, I was a tomboy. I remember when I was like five, I was wearing my cowboy outfit— my favorite cowboy outfit. My parents were having a get together with all my aunts and uncles and cousins and so my grandmother's sister, who is just about as old as god, I am standing in the corner; I do not know why I am standing in a corner with my guns and my holster and whatever [CL: Laughs] and she comes over and see says— she is bending down—“hi Tammy!” She goes, “what are you going to do when you grow up?” And I remember this clearly. She said to me “what are you going to do when you grow up?” And I go, “I am going to find a girl and we are going to get married” [Laughs] and I said that when I was five and she laughed. She did not know what to say. She goes she says, “No you are not”—something to that effect: “no.” What was she going to do? I mean, she never had heard or seen anything like that. So, I mean, I think I was giving clues right from the beginning, but no one was picking up on it [CL: Laughs] and no one was helping me out so....

CL: Okay. Do you— so the other— so we talked about LGBTQ organizations. Are there any other history, professional, or civic organizations that you belong to?

TD: No. There is not.

CL: So your job takes up a lot of your time?

TD: It does, you know, because I have to run this and I am— I do not know. I just get kind of beat you know and I am trying to get myself in shape, so I get up at like 4:30 every morning then get to the gym around 5:30. So, it is a long day. So I do not have a lot of energy for a lot, you know?

CL: What do you do with your kids on the weekend?

TD: We do a whole bunch of things. I mean, I live right on the river in Dauphin. Have you guys ever been on the river in Dauphin? [CM: Mmhmm] [CL: Yeah] It is so beautiful [CM: It is beautiful]. I feel like it is so beautiful egrets coming in there [CL: Mmhmm], just so beautiful. So, in the summer, we float down the river, the kids are now kayaking except for Bella, and you can go to the different islands and you can walk across and my son likes to fish and they just play. And you know, my son plays soccer, so he has soccer games and my daughter used to do everything. My daughter's done so much. She has done all these sports. She has got so much natural ability, but no competitive nature at all. So, as soon as she joins anything that they start competing in the game, she is like “oh I do not want do this anymore.” I am like, are you kidding me? Because I am ultra-competitive, you know [CL: Laughs]. [Gestures] I have this ping pong table as my new obsession because my knees are shot I cannot play racquetball anymore; so, now I am like I am asking my patients, “do you by any chance play ping pong? Because we could play after” [CL: Laughs] [CM: Laughs]. So, I have patients coming in here and playing with me and it is just so fun. I am having a ping pong potluck, you know, in a couple weeks at my house and so but now— Ocean likes sports, so he can socialize. Maijan likes it kind of the same way, but being competitive is not their thing. Bella, on the other hand, has got enough

competitive—like we play Uno that is her speed right now, she is out to kill [CL: Laughs]. And I do not know how it happens, but every time— nine times out of ten, she beats us even when we are trying. She lays all her cards out in front so we know what she has. Even though we know what she has, she still wins. How that happens, I have no idea. She is a smart kid [CL: Laughs].

CL: Got to get her to the casino when she turns of age.

TD: She is a smart kid. She likes to win. We are going to have some success with sports. I am sure of it.

CL: So, you said you played racquetball for thirty years. What made you start doing that?

TD: I think that is what saved me about being gay. I mean, if it was not for racquetball, I would probably not even maybe be here. I mean, racquetball kind of saved my ass and it was a way of escaping, you know, it was a way of just— and I just fell in love with that sport and it taught me so much. I learned social skills. I mean, there were no kids; you know, I was playing at the Bentley Club, which is just down the road here. And now it is not the Bentley Club it is the... whatever the teaching you how to be a hygienist they have a massage artist and all these different things. But, I was like the only kid and I was like playing with all these adults who you know, learned how to socialize with adults and being very competitive with them. And I just— I started playing tournaments and being successful and you know, ended up having a Coach Winterton who ended up becoming the national team coach. And yeah, he helped me out a lot, taught me a lot of things and that is why I kind of followed him up to New York and I went to school up there. But yeah, I mean it is just... it's an outstanding sport, it is hell on your body. It is a frickin' awesome sport. It is tough. It is hard, you know, it is you know— you can beat— I love beating cocky guys [CL and CM: Laughs]. They are my favorite people. I love coming to a club that no one knows you and you see this guy sitting and you said “hey. Want to play a game?” “Eh, okay.” And then you just warm up, but you do not warm up well. You just try to like do it a little bit, but then you get in there and the door closes and you think “Oh, I am going to kill you” [Laughs] [CL: Laughs]. It is awesome. I love it. Really competitive, but it is good.

CL: And you said you do not play anymore?

TD: I cannot [CL: Yeah]. I tore my ACLs [Anterior Cruciate Ligament] playing that sport and my Achilles playing that you know. It is just too hard on my body and I cannot— when I tore my ACL, my left knee playing, I was playing at a like a regional tournament down in Maryland and it took five years to get back on the court [CL: Hmm]. You know, they botched the first surgery; they did another surgery and with PT [Physical Therapy]; and then, within three weeks of playing, I tore the ACL on the other knee [CL: No] [CM: Oh, wow]. You know what, this is a sign from God this is not— I am not— I am done I have done good things in that sport I— you know, played a lot, it was you know, had some success. It is good. I got to find something else. Biking, you know, I also love biking from my bike trip, but I do not— never competed biking-wise. But now that I found ping pong, I think I want to be in the senior Olympics. I am training right now for senior Olympics.

CL: [Laughs] you got some more years to train [TD: Yeah] [Laughter]. Okay. Let us see here. So, we went over pretty much everything on my list. Was there anything specific that you wanted to tell us?

TD: No. I mean, I think we have just about hit everything that [Laughs]— I think you know more about me than most people do [CL: Laughs].

CM: Let me ask a question. Have you ever experienced any discrimination or anything?

TD: Do you know I may have, but I would not know—do you know what I mean? I mean, I am out to all my patients and I do not hide behind anything and people ask me a question and sometimes I know I shock them you know with my response. But because I look the way I do, I am not, you know— I am a soft butch you know what I mean. I am a little more butch than I am— not femme-y at all. I came out first as a little bit femme-y, but I kind of evolved into where I am now and I think most people figure it out, although I get some... I just had a picture of my three kids you know in my operatories and he goes “are you married? Where is your husband?” And I am like “Oh dear god” and he is from India and he is very— he is older and I was getting ready to do a crown. I was like, “I am not going to come out to this guy during this delicate procedure” [CL: Laugh]. I do not need—so, I did not come out to him then. But, no. I mean, I have not really had that and I am the type of person where, you know, Jen, my ex, she would be like sitting in a restaurant and she would say “do you hear what they are saying over there? What they are talking about?” And I was like “who cares?” You know, I would not notice it because I mind my own business, you know what I mean? You know, like I do not care. People give me strange looks, I do not—it does not bother me. I do not really care. I just want to live my life, you know.

CL: Have you found that you know, because you have kind of been all over, have you found that Harrisburg is more accepting than other places or?

TD: I think Harrisburg now is more accepting. I mean, I think the fact that, you know, I think that still the lesbian and gay community has a lot more to do. I mean, we have come so far. I never would have guessed we would have had the right to marry. I never would have guessed that would have come even in my lifetime or it being so young. That was amazing. And the whole transgender thing that came on its heels. I thought, “holy cow.” I mean and I think, I still think that it is going to take a while for people to wrap their head around. You know, here is a lot of backlash on the transgender— on the transgender bill, the bathroom bill and all that. Is it because they do not understand that? I mean, they barely understand many people in the gay and lesbian thing; how the hell are they going to understand transgendered people? And now, they have this intersex and all these other categories of you know orientations and stuff and that I have to look up and I am trying to figure out. Okay, so like, she is inter— I have to know what that means because you know, I have to know. People are going to ask me [CL: Laughs]. I have to know what that means so it is confusing. But anyhow, no I have not had discrimination; but I think we have got a long way to go, but I think we are getting there. But, Trump [sighs]. Hopefully he will get impeached before too many things get reversed, you know. So we can only hope [CL: Mhmm]. But you know, I pray every day. And actually, I am thankful. I am grateful that Donald Trump is president and I am grateful because conversations have been started and

movements have begun that would not have happened under Hillary. And if it forces people to finally come out or take a stand about something because you know there is a lot of complacency with— when things were just okay and it is not really 100%, it is complacency and it happens in all seg— black community, gay and lesbian community, women’s community, we get complacent and we do not stand up. And I mean, there should have been women marching through the streets when the Equal Rights Amendment did not pass. They should have been marching for the whole time. The fact that it is still not passed is an abomination it is an abom— it should be an embarrassment. But— and remember it is like “it is fine. It is good enough, you know.” It is not good enough. And you know, we have to keep fighting for things and letting people know it is not okay; but that is the thing, I mean you look around and everything is okay and people got their car and they are talking about getting this house or— it is not like Uganda where they are hanging gays and lesbians from trees, you know. I mean, it is— we do not live there and maybe if we did or if we had a little more of a taste of that, it would get people of their couches to do more. But look around, you can go to Target and you can hang out here, you can go have a couple of drinks here. I mean, what is there to complain about for the most part, even gays and lesbians and whatever, they—they are fine [CL: Hmm]. You know, for the most part, I think. The transgender people are struggling a lot more. I see that. And they need a better community and they need more gays and lesbians to stand up for them and straights you know. But, you know, it is just going to take step by step.

CL: Mmhmm. I agree with you with the Trump being president. I think Russell Simons said it that— not the fitness guru but the music mogul [Laughs], he said “you know, if anything good has come out of this it’s that people have started to have that discourse [TD: Yeah] and that conversation [TD: Yeah]” because it was not really going on [TD: Yeah], so...

TD: Yeah. I think if Hillary [Clinton] was elected— I mean, I was a Bernie Sanders fan, right from the beginning. And Bernie Sanders to me is still the bomb, you know, he was awesome. You know, and people were like “well you are a feminist and you are not voting for Hillary?” And I am like [Groans], I am not a big fan of hers, you know, I am not a big fan of hers. And there is too many dark corners in her past and I just do not like it. But Bernie, I like him. And he is out in the open and he is fighting for equality and anyone’s who is committed to social justice issues like he is, I am for them. You know, social justice is not about, you know, make America first and do this and money in your pocket and you know all this other stuff, it is social justice. And I feel like spiritually, whatever we do here, it is got to be all about social justice. It has to be, you know. We have to make a difference in our lives.

CL: Yeah, absolutely. Okay, I have thought of another question while you were talking and forgot about it because I got excited when you started talking about Bernie.

TD: [Laughs] I know I still have my Bernie sticker on my—in my house you know. My kids all know about Bernie. You know, they get it. And I am going to keep talking about that and I keep raising the issue it is important for kids to talk about these things [CL: Mmhmm]. And so, they know and they realize a little bit about social justice and I one of the reasons I took them down to Market Square also is because they are very strong in social justice. They have got homeless people that they are camping all around the perimeter of that church because they were kicked out from underneath the bridge or whatever and... [Cellphone goes off] That was my dad. And

so, I mean I do not know how to get people to care more about social justice issues, but it is important. Just pick one [CL: Laughs] [CL: Yeah], just pick one.

CL: Do something, yeah. I know what I was going to ask you. Did you ever go to Pride in New York or...?

TD: I did. I did go to Pride once in New York it was so exciting. And you know how Dykes on Bikes leads the parade? Have you guys ever gone to Pride in New York?

CL: I have never been to the one in New York.

KM: Do me a favor. Turn your phone off. There is a signal that is coming out.

TD: Oh. I am sorry.

KM: I should have mentioned that when we first got started.

TD: Okay.

KM: Mine is probably on, too.

TD: Okay. It is off.

KM: But I can hear it.

TD: Oh, I am sorry.

KM: Just now though.

TD: So, when we went there, there was Dykes on Bikes and I do not have a motorcycle. I had a little moped once and I felt big [CL: Laughs]. But anyhow, we were marching behind the Dykes on Bikes or whatever and there were thousands— thousands of lesbians. I felt like I was home. It was the most incredible experience you know. Anyway, you— we are going to march down 7th Avenue, one of the big avenues, and the police were trying to direct us down the smaller street and we were like “No” And they were like “Stay down. Everybody sit down. Sit down.” So, everyone sat down. Thousands of women sat down in the middle of like you know this place where we were just going to go on to 7th Avenue and the police were on the horses and they could not get us up. They could not do anything, we were not doing anything. We were not throwing bottles or anything. We were just sitting down, we just sat there and finally they said: “okay, fine. You can go down 7th Avenue” and it was like— it was fantastic. Yes and so, I have been to a couple marches here on— in Harrisburg. They had a couple marches months ago, you know [CM: Mhmm], so— and I took the kids down because I am— it is important for them to get it, social justice. So, I went there and I went to the big March on Washington. It was huge. And my parents came. It was so meaningful to me. That was back in '93 or something like that and that was really cool. So yeah, I have been to some big marches.

CL: What year was it that you— with the sit-down?

TD: That must have been one of the years I was up at Penn, I guess. Maybe it was '92 or you know '93 or something like that?

CL: What made you decide to go?

TD: Who was going to pass up an opportunity to go to New York Pride? I mean, do not know [CL: Laughs]. Someone said let us go to New York Pride and I said “okay, let us go.”

CL: [Laughs] But you never went back?

TD: Well, you know here is the thing. There is an evolution to being out, you know. And so when you first come out, someone put the lights on the candy store. You cannot get enough. You want all the pins, you want all the decals, you want to put your car... You wanted all that stuff and you cannot get enough of it. So, you go to all the marches and I went to all the Philadelphia marches and all that. And there is a time when you get settled in to being, it is not that you are not still fighting for your rights, but it is— you get it, you are cool with it. It is not like novel anymore so it is— I did not you know— I did that. I was there. I experienced that. It was awesome. I went to the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. I do not know if you ever heard of that. Frickin’ awesome. That just ended. All women, at least half of them lesbian, had all these big— we had all these groups. We had yodeling twins from Australia. It was, I mean, just a bunch and the only men who were allowed on this like 12 acre and thousands of women coming in listening, camping out all day, eating food, the only men allowed in were the men who were changing the port-o-janes. It was port-o-janes not port-o-john [CL: Laughs]. They were the only men. They could only haul out the shit. That is— they were the only men on there. It was awesome. It was just a great experience. And so I have been in a couple of things like that which is just inspiring. So, yeah.

CL: Do you have any desire to do anything like that anymore or...?

TD: Yeah. I mean, I do but it is changed now that I have children. So now, like I want to do like a children— like a family Olivia cruise, you know. Take them on a cruise with other gay and lesbian families and things like that. So, things like that. I mean, individually, I do not have that need any more as an individual to do things like that, but to expose my kids to you know meeting other gay and lesbian families. They go to a private school right now, Londonderry, and there are a couple other gay and lesbian families. It is very open, very inclusive. It is like the United Nations down there. I mean, it is just, you know, everyone is welcome and that is great. And then next year, my daughter is going to go to CD [Central Dauphin], which I think is in some ways, it is so huge, but it is going to be a real step back. I do not think it is going to have the United Nations feel. It is not going to have, you know, the creativity, predominantly white you know, predominantly straight. It is going to be a lot different and...

CL: Did she want to go there or...?

TD: She had— we had gone back and forth. We had talked about home schooling. We had talked about Cyber School. We talked about you know, Bishop McDevitt. I was not a big fan of Bishop McDevitt, but I kind of was rooting for CD, because I want her to not be so isolated and I want her to be— she has got so many natural gifts, you know. I am bragging, but she does [CL: Laughs]. I want her to try travel, try things that she will never get in a private school, in Cyber School. So, it is fine. She will be fine.

CL: 13? Is that junior high?

TD: No, she will be 14. She will be in 9th grade next year.

CL: 9th grade. Only four more years.

TD: I know.

CL: [Laughs] soon she will be driving.

TD: You know, last Friday I took her to Philly [Philadelphia] to fly solo alone to see my sister, non-stop. So, it is like it is intense you know. You need a special pass to get in and you have to see her off and blah blah blah. And I thought, I am going to be such a big girl and I can handle this and it is not going to be a problem. As soon as she leaves, I go in the bathroom and just bawl. And I was just bawling like because all I remember is just her sleeping right here when she was a little baby and just that was a big step her going on that plane and she is like texting me she is having a wonderful time with my sister. And my sister teaches there and is very impressed and I have the feeling that she is going to want to go to college there because U.C. [University of California] Santa Barbara campus is beautiful and she saw her out going to Catalina [California] last weekend and woo what is not to love, you know? So....

CL: All the way across the country from you.

TD: Yep.

CL: Have to get used to that.

TD: I know. It is okay. Someday we will move. Someday this will be something. Maybe we will let the staff have this and we will go live somewhere else or something. We will see.

CL: Any other questions, Cathy?

KM: I do not have anything.

CL: Anything else you wanted to tell us?

TD: No. I think it is— the only thing I want to say is I think it is important for gays and lesbians to be out. I think it is crucial to be out. And there are so many— we are talking about complacency, so many gays and lesbians I know who just live this kind of quiet life. I mean, you know, just for the sake of children trying to figure out, that is why I am out you know [chokes up].

KM: Alright, I can hit the stop button.

TD: [Nods]

CL: Okay.