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Title: LGBT Oral History: Peggy Allan

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Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Interviewee: Peggy Allan

Interviewer: Nicole Price

Date of Interview: March 20, 2015

Location of Interview: Peggy Allan's home in Lancaster, PA

Transcriber: Nicole Price

Camera: Liam Fuller

Proofreader: Katie McCauley, June 17, 2015

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Abstract:

Peggy Allan grew up in Oregon, where she attended Northwest Christian College for a year before marrying and having two sons with her first husband, Gary, a pastor. After 10 years of marriage, while the two were living together in Northern California, Gary came out as a gay man, and the two divorced. Peggy then married her second and current husband, Don, whom she has been with for 40 years and with whom she has another son. In this interview, Peggy discusses the initial struggles she and her sons faced in their relationship with Gary after his coming out, and then the later friendship that she and Don developed with Gary and his partner, Hal, and the family unit that they all came to form, including Peggy's children. She describes how her lifelong friendship with Gary and Hal brought her to understand and become a great supporter of the LGBT community in Northern California, especially in trying to help foster open and affirming faith communities there, and how she and Don have continued to support the LGBT movement since their retirement and move to Lancaster in 2007.

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1]

NP: Okay, so we're in the home of Miss Peggy Allan in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It is March 20th, 2015, and if at any moment you feel that you want to stop the interview, feel free to say so, and we'll stop the interview.

PA: Okay.

NP: I am Nikki Price and I am doing the interview. Okay, so let's just get started with a little bit of your family origin and a little bit about where you're from.

PA: Okay, like, from my youngest years?

NP: Mhm.

PA: Okay, well, I was born in Spokane, Washington, and mo—and grew up mostly in Oregon, and when I was—when I went to college, I went to Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. And I met my husband—actually, I met him at my sister's wedding – he was one of the groomsmen, and I was the maid of honor, and when I went to school then, he was there and had graduated, but was still there, and we started dating. And we got married after a year of college. I only had one year. We got married when I was 19. Had our first child when I was 20. [laughs]

NP: Whoa.

PA: And then—he was a pastor, and we lived in Bellingham, Washington for three years, and then we moved to Oklahoma to Phillips University, where he went to seminary and finished his degree. And then from there, we moved to California. We were married for 10 years, and then our marriage fell apart because he came out as a gay man. And then I—I had been friends with my husband now, and we married about a year later and lived in California until 2007, and then we—we’re both retired and moved to Pennsylvania. That’s my life in a nutshell. [both laugh]

NP: So can you talk a little bit more about your story with your first husband?

PA: Okay, when we were in Oklahoma, things kind of started to fall apart. We had a second son there, and after we’d been married about five years, there was very little intimacy in our marriage, just in—physical intimacy, but just, you know, conversational intimacy. He really kind of withdrew. Used college as a—used his classes as a—as an excuse to be away from home a lot. And I—we had some experiences where he talked about being attracted to men and—but he didn’t wanna end the marriage, and so we moved to California, and he was pastoring a church, and things got worse and worse and worse. And finally we were meeting in a small group of young couples. It was in the ‘70s—those self-help groups. [laughs] And one night, I just had had it—the tension was really thick between us, the kids knew—felt like they were tip-toeing around on eggshells because things were—they were like five and—five and eight, or maybe a little older than that, a year older than that. And—and so I just confronted him in front of the group and said, “I know something’s going on with you. And we’re not leaving tonight until you tell me what’s going on.” And he got really quiet and then he said, “For two years I’ve been seeing someone else, do you know what that means?” Well, I immediately knew that it was a man. The group did not. And actually, we’re meeting at our home. And after the group left, we talked for a long time, and he said, “Well, you know, I don’t want a divorce.” He said, “We can stay married, and I can have my relationships, and I can allow you to have yours,” ‘cause he was always accusing me of having an affair with someone if I talked to a man, you know? And so I think he was trying to cover up for what was going on with him. And I said, “I can’t do that, that’s not—I can’t live that way.” He was a pastor. He said, “You can’t do that, you know, we’ll—we’ll get caught, and then you’ll get fired, and it’s—it’s just not worth it.” So we ended up separating and divorcing. And it—it took a long time, but we made a specific effort—he and his partner and my husband and I made a real effort not to use the kids to get to each other. We didn’t badmouth each other to the kids. We were very civil to each other, and then—and he—but he refused to tell the kids. They were like—David, our oldest son, was 10 when we separated. And he just couldn’t tell them. And I told him—he made me promise that I would not tell them. And I—I wouldn’t have, ‘cause I didn’t feel like it was fair for me to out him to anybody. But I did tell him that I would not tell them, but I would not lie to them if they asked me. And we continued to be friends, but when David was 13, he came home from a weekend at his dad’s and he was very quiet and very withdrawn, which was not his personality. And I sat him down and confronted him about what was going on—I knew what it was. Because Gary and his partner shared a bedroom, you know—I mean, the kids—they slept in the same room when the kids were there, they just never talked about it, and so he just said he thought his dad was gay. And I told him that he was. And he really, he didn’t want his dad to be his dad anymore, he wanted Don to adopt him, he didn’t want his last name to be Hall anymore, he wanted it to be Allan, and, you know, Don was not about to take his dad’s place. Took him about six months—

he didn't go back to his dad's for about six months, and I would force him to come out and say hello to his dad when he came to pick up his little brother, but he wouldn't go, and one weekend—or one week, he got a phone call and I heard him talking on the phone and he said, "Well, no I can't come." And when he got off the phone, I said, "Who was that?" and he said, "That was Hal," and that was my husband Gary's, partner. And he said, "He told me that I need to come this weekend 'cause we need to talk and I'm—I'm not going." And I said, "Yes you are. You need to talk." So he went and Hal really straightened him out. I think what he said that—that changed his mind totally about his dad and who he was and, you know, and that he wasn't really any different than he'd ever been was he said, "You have to remember that your dad is still the same man he's always been. And he's always—he's always been the same father. He's still your father. The only thing that's different is that you know something about him now that you didn't know before." And that was like an "aha!" moment for him. And that really changed his life. I mean, he really turned his attitude around and—and that's when we really began to get close. And I was close to his part—to Gary's partner—they were separated. They were partners for 22 years and all, but for about six years, they were on again, off again, and it was in the '80s, and Hal contracted AIDS while they were separated. And so he died of AIDS in 1994, which was a traumatic experience for all of us, because we'd all become really close. We did all our holidays together, we always spent Christmas together, we did birthdays together—Gary's and my husband now, their birthdays were two days apart, and Hal's was the day after my husband's, so we did a big birthday celebration every year, and we did Thanksgiving together. We always, you know, were very, very close. And I think it was good for the kids, plus we have a son—my husband and I have a son, and he just always knew that Gary was gay, so our whole family became advocates for the LGBT movement. And have been—my parents were the same way. Gary and my mom were very, very close. So that's kind of it. He died a couple—about two and a half years ago, and that was really hard on the family. That's—died suddenly.

NP: This is Gary.

PA: That was Gary, my—my first husband, yeah.

NP: So can you talk a little more about the experience of adjusting to Gary coming out?

PA: Oh, that was a tough one.

NP: Mhm

PA: I wasn't angry, so much as hurt. And—and we talked a lot about it—he really did talk to me a lot about it. He wasn't very good at communicating in many ways. But it took us a long time—it was probably maybe five or six years before we really began to be able to be friends. And I—I mean, I struggled, I was—I was hurt, and of course, because he couldn't come out to the people in the congregation of the church, people believed that Don and I'd had an affair, and that's what broke up our marriage. And I refused to fight that, because I didn't think it was fair to Gary. It was his occupation—it was his job, his career. And so we moved to another church, and people, you know, criticized us for that—he felt very guilty, because he didn't—because he let people believe that. I never—I never blamed him for that. And that was one thing. We—we

made—all four of us made a conscious effort to—to remain as much family as we could, and it was hard for a long time. But when we did get past that, and he was actually out, I was able to talk to it—to a lot of other people about it. I—I’ve spoke at FLAG—PFLAG [Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] groups and—and talked with women who were survivors [laughs] of a gay marriage. And that helped me accept what was going on. Plus, my husband Don is a very nurturing person, and he really helped me get through that. He’s very non-judgmental, as were his parents, and his dad was a retired pastor, so he knew what it was like to be in a parish and not be able to talk to the people of the church about what was going on. And like I said, it was a struggle, but it’s interesting now when I think back about it. I’ve been trying to write the story, and it’s hard for me, because I’m trying to get back in touch with those feelings that I had through those years when we were—when I was really struggling with what had happened. And of course his parents didn’t—Gary’s parents didn’t like me—I mean, his mother didn’t like me from the very beginning. I wasn’t good enough for her son, and so, when we divorced, then she was really mean to me, and she badmouthed me to my kids when they were with her. And like I said, it was a struggle—but it’s—it’s so minor to me now, compared to what we had over the last 30 years as a family that I—I don’t even—it’s hard for me to get in touch with those feelings again.

NP: So you mentioned that it was difficult for Gary to discuss this with his congregation.

PA: Yeah.

NP: Could talk a little more about that?

PA: Yeah. Actually, we had quite an experience later. He did talk with them about it. He ended up leaving the ministry and went to work for California State University in the library. But after—I think it’s—it was probably about 18 years later, our church, which was Disciples of Christ in Northern California, at the regional—the region had decided they wanted to become open and affirming. I mean, there was a resolution that came to the annual meeting. And they asked us to tell—there were some people in the region who knew about Gary, and they asked us to tell our story. So Gary and—and my—our middle—his—his second son, my middle son, Tim, and I stood up in front of the annual meeting and told our story and how the—the journey that—it really was a journey—the journey that we had made to that point, which was—he was very, very nervous, much more nervous than I was. He hadn’t been to an annual meeting for 18 years, and he was standing in front of people that he went to college with and people he pastored in churches, and it was really hard for him to stand up and say—the first words out of his mouth were, “I’m a gay man.” But the response, especially to him, was overwhelming. I mean, people just came up and poured out their stories about gay people in their families, and they were able to talk about it—hadn’t been able to talk about it in the church for so long. At that point in time—there are lots of churches, now, that are very accepting, but that was not the case.

NP: And this was in the ‘80s?

PA: This was—actually, it was the early ‘90s.

NP: Okay.

PA: When we did that, that was in—I think it was 1993 that we told our stories, and they decided to table the resolution. There were some people who were kind of fighting it, so they decided to table it for a year, and they asked us to travel around to churches in the region and tell our story. And so we did, and we got some very interesting questions when we were doing that. But—and one of them was, [laughs] “Would you still be married if Gary hadn’t been gay?” And my immediate response was, “No, probably not, because our communication styles were too different.” We really were not happy with each other, living with each other. We’re very good friends, but marriage partners, we were not good at. So probably, we wouldn’t have stayed married anyway. That wasn’t—that was probably the straw that rode the camel’s back—I mean, obviously I didn’t fit the bill for him, and he didn’t for me either, because we didn’t have any intimacy in our marriage. And that—that—so we—we did that for a year, traveled around to churches in the region. Interestingly, the church that I was a member of was the one church that was really nasty to us when we were there, and I felt really sorry for my son, because he was the one that they pounced on instead of—instead of questioning Gary and I, they—this one woman just went after Tim. And that made me angry. [laughs] That unfortunately was—I mean, fortunately, that was the only church that—that did that, which is kind of ironic, that it was the church that I was a member of, but the next year when we voted on that, at the annual meeting, it was an overwhelming vote to vote for the region to be open and affirming. And it still is the only region in our denomination in the United States that is an open and affirming region. Now, not all the churches are open and affirming, but—but the region is. And they now have a lesbian regional minister, so. They’ve gone—grown—grown a lot [laughs] over the years. And that was—that was really—that’s probably the highlight of our coming out as a family—was being able to tell our story, and I—and that’s the thing that that really taught me, is that that’s what is changing the world, is personal stories. People—[cut off]

[END OF TAPE 1, refer to audio recording]

[AUDIO RECORDING]

PA: —Realize when they hear those stories that they know someone is—who is gay.

[Discussion about recording problems omitted.]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 2]

LF: Okay, recording now.

NP: Okay, so we’ll pick back up where we left off. You were talking a little bit about being part of a support group for women who were survivors?

PA: Yeah, it wasn’t actually a support group. It’s just that I had—there were people who knew families that were breaking up, and they would ask me—I had several women who called me and wanted to know how I survived—how I got to where I was, and I, you know, my—my only advice could be that you just have to be open-minded about it, you know. I—I never believed that it was a choice. Gary did tell me at one point that one reason that he—and he always loved

me, I mean, we always continued—we continued to love each other. That didn't change. But he said that he felt like—because he was so afraid of being gay, he felt like if we got married, then that would make it all better, and that would make it go away, which—obviously, it wasn't gonna do that—wasn't gonna do that. But—but I think that he was grasping at straws at that point. But I never felt used, because I don't think that was his intent at all. I think he really loved me, and he wanted kids, and we had two great sons, and he and my—our youngest son are—were very close. He used to call—[laughs] he used to introduce him as his stepson, which was kind of interesting. [laughs] But—but they were very close, and he's—he was “Grandpa” to my youngest son's kids, too. So it's been a great family experience.

NP: Could you talk a little more about your educational and occupational experiences?

PA: Well. [laughs] You mean you wanna know about my education?

NP: Mhm, and a little about Gary's, if you do know.

PA: Okay, well, he went to the same Christian college that I went to.

NP: Okay.

PA: He had graduated by the time I had got there, but we had met at my sister's wedding, and we started dating when I got to school—he was working in town there. And then he—his graduate degree was from Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma. Took him four years to get his Masters of Divinity degree. And then he was in the pastorate—actually, only for about five years after we left there, because he left the ministry after about—about a year and a half after he—we separated. I went to college for one year at NCC [Northwest Christian College], and then we got married, and I didn't go back to school until I was a stay-at-home mom—did a little work in department stores and that kind of thing, but basically a stay-at-home mom—until about—well, it was the fall of 1974, and I went back to community college, because I decided I wanted to pursue a degree. And it was in—at Thanksgiving of that year that we separated, so I only went that semester, and then I had to drop out, because I had to go to work full-time. And then I went back to school again in 1980 at Sacramento City College and got—I mean, no, I'm sorry, it was Yuba College in Woodland, California. And I ended up with a degree in Accounting, which is really not what I wanted to do, I don't think. I'm—I was always pretty good at it, but I'm a people person, and you don't really deal with people a lot [laughs] when you're working with numbers. But I—I moved from that to California State University—actually, I went to City College in Sacramento there for—after we moved there, for a while, and then I started to Sac State [California State University: Sacramento], and I got my degree in Communication Studies when I was 50 years old. And I actually graduated with my middle son [laughs] in the same ceremony.

NP: Wow.

PA: He was an Environmental Studies major, but we were a part of the same—same college, so we graduated together. That was really fun. And then my youngest son graduated from high school that year. So it was a big—big party year. And I loved Communication Studies. I started

back in Sociology, and then I went to Philosophy, and then I went to Social Work, and I finally found my niche in Communication Studies. And I actually worked in the department there while I was going to school. And then when I finished, I got a promotion [laughs] and stayed there for 14 years.

NP: Okay, would you say that you've had much involvement in the LGBT community, sort of doing events, or any kind of awareness events?

PA: Oh yeah, I've been very involved. The Disciples of Christ church has an organization called GLAD, and it stands for Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples. And we were very active in Northern California. They're actually the ones that got us to tell our story there. And I—since we moved here—when we moved here, we moved to Lancaster because of a church—it was called Disciples United Community Church. It was a Disciples/UCC [United Church of Christ] partnership church and was founded as an open and affirming congregation. And we've done—we did the Pride festival every year. Unfortunately we had to close our doors—it was a tiny, little church, and we couldn't afford to stay open anymore, so we're not there now, but I've marched in gay pride parades and I've—I always advocate for LGBT people. I have a nephew who's gay and is married to his partner. We have a niece who is transgender—transgender. And so it's been—it's been a big part of our lives. Both of us, both Don and I, have been very active in supporting the LGBT movement.

NP: Can you speak more to the Pride festivals?

PA: Oh, I love the Pride festival. [laughs]

NP: More about your involvement in the Pride festivals, and where they are?

PA: Well, our church always had a booth, and so we were—we were always there.

NP: Mhm.

PA: And it was exciting to see other UCC churches in Lancaster become open and affirming over the years that DUCC—we called it “DUCC,” D-U-C-C—that it existed. And we felt like, when we closed our doors, that that was—we fulfilled a purpose in the city. But I just—so we always had a booth at the Pride festival. We still go. I just love doing it. One year we marched in the Harrisburg Pride Parade, and it was really interesting to see the protestors. They always kind of intrigue me, that they can stand and yell such hateful things at people. And then I've got—I don't know, I don't know about involvement other than just being openly supportive. I sing in the Lancaster Community Chorus, and probably a third of our chorus is—are gay people. So it's a very active—it's very active in the community and gay—gay events. We usually go to the Pride—the pre-Pride worship service the night before. The churches are very active in the Pride festival. Now, the first year that our church was there, there was only Metropolitan Community Church from Mountville and our church, and the last year that we did it, there were 12 churches represented from Lancaster city.

NP: Wow.

PA: And the surrounding area at the Pride festival, so. And the last time we did it, there weren't even any protestors, which is kind of interesting.

NP: What do you think sparked that shift in having so many more churches a part of the movement (_____???)?

PA: I just think the fact that we were so out there in our church that the other churches began to really question, and I do think that your generation are gonna be the generation that changes the world in that respect, because our experience with—with young people, even high school-age—well, elementary-age—they just don't care. It's not a big issue with them. And they think everybody ought to be equal. And—and that's—I am so thrilled with the number of states that now allow marriage equality. I wish that my—that Gary could've lived to see that and could have married his partner. We have some friends down the street that—a gay couple—that my daughter-in-law in New Hampshire performed their wedding right after New Hampshire legalized same-gender marriage. And they now are recognizing Pennsylvania, which is really nice, to see that happening.

NP: Can you talk a little bit about the pushback that you might have seen toward the late '80s, early '90s?

PA: What do you mean by pushback?

NP: Sort of the—I guess the churches or the organizations or even just people in your personal life that might've been against the movement or against homosexuality.

PA: Yeah, that was tough because we were so open about it. I—I had a friend who suggested to me that maybe it was not a good idea for my sons to go spend the weekend with their father, because wasn't I worried that he or his friends would molest them, which made me very, very angry. I have always tried to emphasize to people that, you know, gay and lesbian people are not out to recruit people. And they don't molest children, for the most part. The percentage of gay people who are child molesters is much less than heterosexuals who are child molesters. And that was—it was really hard for me, to hear people—I mean, it—it—I had to get over being angry about it and just try to educate people. But it was interesting how it began to change when people really began to be enlightened about it. So many people thought it was a choice to—to be gay. Well, why would anyone choose to be discriminated against? But I think that—what—what our purpose was, was to educate people that—that it's not true, it's been proven that it's not a choice. People are born that way. You know, I was born heterosexual. Gary was born homosexual. It's just—I don't understand the threats. But the last campaign in Pennsylvania, when they had the ballot, or the—the referendum on the ballot about gay marriage, and they had—were advertising. They had several ads on TV where people were talking about how their marriages were—would be threatened if we allowed gay people to marry each other. And I keep wanting to say, "If your marriage is threatened by two gay people getting married, then there's something wrong with your marriage." And if anybody ever felt threatened by having their marriage—if anybody's marriage was ever threatened, mine was! My husband was gay! But I never felt threatened in my marriage to Don because Gary would like to have married his

partner. I would have been happy for that. In the—in the late ‘80s, there was a lot of talk about promiscuity, and that was the big criticism of gay people—was that they were promiscuous. They weren’t allowed to have normal relationships, so that was their only way to have relationships in some—you know, in some cases. We had a friend who had been—had many partners, and it was because he couldn’t have one partner and be out with that. People wouldn’t accept it. So he had to hide it and have clandestine affairs. And that—that was the thing that I think that—that really needed to change. That was the thing that upset me the most, was the talk about how promiscuous gay people were, because the gay people I was involved with then had friends—as friends were not promiscuous. They were committed, in committed relationships, but weren’t allowed to be out. We have a friend who was a school teacher here in Pennsylvania, and he stopped teaching because he was—he knew that if people at all fin—found he was gay, they would find a way to fire him. Which—that’s just so wrong. [chuckles] But yeah, the ‘80s were a tough time, because there was a lot of—AIDS was rampant. Especially in Northern California, there was a lot—Northern California got a lot of criticism about that.

NP: Why is that?

PA: Well, because there’s a huge gay community in San Francisco. I’m surprised at the size of the gay community here in Lancaster, but there is a big gay community here. But, you know, AIDS was running mad in the ‘80s, and people were losing people that they loved. It was really hard when Hal died of AIDS. It’s horrible to watch someone die that way. It just eats up their body. And it was a sad day, and—and the fact that they were so criticized for it—and they were sick people, they were—and yet they were blamed for having the disease, so it was a tough time.

NP: You mentioned that the gay community in Lancaster has been really big. Could you talk more about how big it was in the ‘80s and how it’s grown?

PA: You know, I don’t know in Lancaster, because we—we’ve only lived here for seven and a half years.

NP: Right, right.

PA: But—and in Northern California, it was mostly—it was more—it was San Francisco, and it’s still really well-known—there are a lot of gay people in San Francisco. But we lived in the Sacramento area, and there was a big gay community there, and it grew a lot while we were there. I lived there for 37 years, so it—there—it—it was more out. In the—in the ‘80s, it was—it wasn’t. There were a lot of gay bars that everybody knew were gay, but nobody talked about it, and I think that was maybe the—part of the disturbance—the disturbing thing was that people knew, but they didn’t wanna talk about it. There wasn’t a lot of—I haven’t been in a place—any place where there was a lot of gay bashing, where people were really—were hurt or beat up, but there—there was a lot of that in the ‘80s in a lot of different places.

NP: Why don’t you think people wanted to talk about the gay bars that they were seeing?

PA: I think it was uncomfortable. They—they felt like—they felt like it was still wrong, but I think—you know, I go back to when my—when my first husband came out to his parents, which

was long after we divorced, and his father just said, oh, he'd known it all along, but he didn't wanna talk about it. Well, Gary needed to talk about it. And I think people were afraid to talk about it. I think they didn't wanna face that that was happening. You know, they didn't—they didn't know anything about it, and they didn't wanna know about it. Well, gay people don't wanna talk about their intimacies, they just want people to accept them because they—they love someone of the same gender.

NP: You were talking a little earlier about thinking that being gay was something that you were born with versus choosing, so what brought you to a place where you felt that being gay was something that you were born with?

PA: Well, it was mostly Gary. I mean, he talked about that. In later years, he talked about the fact that he remembered when he was in junior high, and his friends were becoming interested in girls, he was interested in his friends. And it scared him, you know—he didn't want to feel that way, because the—there was always an underlying attitude that that was wrong. It was bad. It was sinful. And the churches have not helped with that. You know, the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches have been so judgmental. I just—I've talked to so many gay people who just have always known. I mean, my nephew [laughs] didn't come out until he was probably—when he was in his 30s. I'd known since he was a little, tiny boy that he was gay. But he never could acknowledge it. And of course, when he came out to his parents—Gary changed my whole family's life, so when he came out to my sister and her husband, there was no—no chance that they weren't going to accept him for who he was. And we all knew it his whole life. He just couldn't bring himself to tell everybody. But nobody ousted him to anybody else. I think that's what's important, to not out someone if they are not ready to be out. But yeah, I think it was just talking to gay people who just have always known, from the time they were little, that they were different. They weren't interested in the opposite gender. They were interested in their own gender. And that—Gary is the one that really brought that to my attention, but I know there's been a lot of research done on it, too. We checked some of that out, and they're saying—doctors say that there's—there's—it's not a choice.

NP: Okay, we're gonna shift gears just a little bit.

PA: Okay.

NP: So can you talk a little bit more about how your children were coming to terms with Gary's coming out?

PA: Well, as I said, my oldest son had a really hard time. But when he accepted it, it was like it—it was—his life changed. And he realized that he had friends who were gay. My middle son [laughs]—his brother told him—David told him, and he just went, "Oh!" He said it was like all of a sudden he realized he never had figured out why we were divorced. Because he was only six—he was five when we separated. And he just could never—he didn't ever understand why; in fact, he felt guilty, as lot of children of divorce do. And all of a sudden, it made sense to him. He was—he was about 12 when his brother told him. And our youngest son—it was never a question. It was just always known from the time—'cause he's—he's 12 years younger than my oldest son and nine years younger than my second son. So he was, you know—we were really

already good friends with Gary when James was born. And, yeah, he just has always been—he was an advocate—actually, the way it affected him—when he was in high school, there was a girl in his band that was a lesbian, and there were kids giving her a really hard time about it, and he stood up for her, which was a big thing to do, and he got some—he was badmouthed for it, but he has always been an advocate, because Gary was part of his life, and he loved him, and he didn't see anything different about him. You know, I—I think it was a struggle for the kids. I think, with David, a lot of what hurt him so badly was that his dad—he felt like his dad had deceived him. Which is some of what I felt, you know, because for two years he had been having an affair before we separated, and all the time accusing me of—every time I talked to a man, of having an affair. So there was hurt there because of that. I think it was the deception that was hard. Especially for David. It was really hard for him to accept that his dad had kept that from him.

NP: Was there ever a point that you or David recognized that it wasn't deception?

PA: Yeah.

NP: Or...okay.

PA: Yeah, I think it was—it was more fear. [laughs] He didn't—Gary didn't know how to deal with it. It took him a really long time to be able to talk openly about it. His partner was a really wonderful man who was able to do that. And I think he helped Gary come to terms with that. It was a long time before he felt good about himself as a gay man. I don't know how many years but probably five or six years, he was really hiding within himself because he just couldn't come to terms with it. But then he began to realize that people supported him when he did come out. Other than his family, which was an unfortunate experience, and I think it happens more than we would like to admit, that families don't accept their gay children. But yeah, I think we both came to terms with that when we were able to really talk it through with Gary. Both of us felt like he really—he wasn't trying to deceive us. He just didn't know how to handle it. Didn't wanna hurt anybody. But in the process hurt us both really badly. I mean, the last five years of our marriage was really hard for me, because he was just not there. He was not there for the kids, and he was not there for me. He was very absent in our lives a lot of the time. He found excuses to be gone.

NP: So what patterns have you noticed in families that show them as being unaccepting?

PA: Oh. [chuckles] Well, I could tell you about Gary's mother, who decided that she would spend the rest of her life sending him material on he could get well.

NP: Okay.

PA: But I think—I know people whose parents have said, “You're no longer my child. You aren't welcome in my home.” And as a mother, I can not understand that at all. I can't say that I would've wanted one of my children to be gay, because of the discrimination, but I would never have—I can't imagine—that's—it's—for one thing, it's not wrong. [chuckles] I think, you know, if my child was a murderer, I would struggle with that. If my child was gay, I would not.

Because it's who they are. It's—it's not a crime or a sin in my eyes, it's just who you are. But I've seen lots of angry people who can't accept either a child or children who couldn't accept a gay parent. And I think there's some fear in that. With a child, particularly. I think there's fear that they might turn out gay, and they don't wanna be. I think that's part of what David's struggle was. In fact he asked me—he said to me one time, "Am I gonna be that way?" And I said, "Only if that's who you are, you know. It won't change my feelings about you." But he struggled with whether or not he was gonna be gay. Which he's definitely not, but. [laughs] But I—I just think there's a lot of anger. And I see anger in families that—I think—I think, for the most part, families now are more accepting. But we have a friend here in Lancaster who is a lesbian woman and she's—her parents have never been accepting of her. They tolerate her and her partner, but they're not accepting. And that—it's just sad.

NP: So you've lived in Lancaster for quite a few years now?

PA: Seven and a half.

NP: Seven and a half.

PA: Mhm.

NP: Are there any political or civil rights movements that you've seen within the area that you can speak on?

PA: Oh, well, I—you know, I've worked—I've talked to the people with the human rights, but—and I—but I don't really—I haven't been really involved in political or, you know, human rights organizations here in town.

NP: What would you say were some of the more important turning points in your life, or even Gary's life, that you'd noticed, that you remember?

PA: Oh my, well, I think for both of us, for our whole families, when we got involved in the GLAD group that the Disciples had in Northern California. It was a place where everybody was safe. And it wasn't—it wasn't an organization of mostly heterosexuals or mostly gay people, it was a group that came together to support each other, so that was a real turning point. But I think the—probably the—the turning point for when Gary and I became—really became close and when his partner and I became such good friends—Gary had been separated from his partner, and had another partner who was a sick man, and he—and he stabbed Gary and almost killed him. And I spent a lot of time at the hospital with the kids and during his recovery and Hal, his partner, and that's when we became really good friends, because he thanked me for being there for Gary. And I had friends that did not understand that, did not understand why I was—and thought Don should be jealous of that. Well, Gary wasn't interested in me, and I wasn't interested in him as a—as a marriage partner. But I think that was when we really—I don't know, we really clicked. We really connected again. And that was an important—that was an important time, because I'm sorry that it took something like that for us to really be close again. We had been close, and we'd done holidays and stuff together, but there was a connection there that hadn't been there for a very long time. So I think that was really a turning point for us.

NP: Now, you mentioned the GLAD group at your church in Northern California? Can you talk a little bit about how that started?

PA: It was a group of people from the church. Not—it wasn't just our local church—it was the regional church, and they—I think there was a national organization and they decided to form a chapter in Northern California. And they just decided to start meeting, and they advertised it among people—it was actually done by word-of-mouth more than—because, you know, the region was not supporting that, particularly, at this point. At that point. But they—it was more word-of-mouth. And so we just started meeting as a group about once a month and talking about issues and about our lives and how we were affected by—by the church and how they wanted to be part of the church. Particularly, I mean, you know, I could walk into the church and be accepted, but there were a lot of people in the church who felt like they couldn't take Communion, they couldn't have positions of leadership in the church, and that group formed, I think, to advocate for that. And that changed drastically over the years, especially in Northern California. But—and then, actually, they started ordaining gay people long before anybody else in the country did, as pastors, so.

NP: What did you find to be the most beneficial aspects of the GLAD group?

PA: Of that group?

NP: Mhm.

PA: Well, for one thing, they were the reason that we told our story, and they were the reason that the region became open and affirming. But just—just the support, just knowing that there were people there that you could talk to about it. I think it was—I think any—any time there's a group that's a support group like that, it's really important, and—and it was really a good place to be. It was a safe place, where we could all talk about what we needed to talk about, and where the gay community, particularly, could just be out and relaxed. It was something that we all looked forward to—was being together.

NP: Would you happen to have any material on the LGBT community that you'd like to share? Or, like, pictures of Gary or anything related?

PA: Well, I was trying to think of—I have that picture [points off-screen], which is us and all our sons, and that was at his memorial service. [laughs]

NP: Oh, okay!

PA: In San Francisco, which was really beautiful, by the way. His partner, the year before he died, his partner's name—they have a—in Golden Gate Park, they have a friendship circle, which is—they have—in the cement, they have carved the names of a lot of people, gay people who had died. And the year before, he had—a bunch of people had gotten together and paid to have Hal's name carved in the cement. And that's where we had his memorial service, was at the friendship circle. I don't know—I'm trying to think if I—I had—someplace I have a family

picture that we had taken, which people always laughed at, and it was of our kids and their wives and Gary and Don and me. [laughs] And then we had a picture—it was, like, a photo session that—I don't know, I won it or something at Montgomery Ward's, a photo place, and—and they took it. The guy—the photographer didn't know how to handle us, because Gary kept saying, “Oh, you need to hear our story. You should hear our story. You won't believe it.” [laughs] And we had a picture taken of Don and Gary and me together. [laughs] Which is—and I've got that somewhere, but I don't know where it is. But we've laughed about that so often—we spend a lot of time laughing about how people thought we were very, very strange. And, in fact, my youngest—my middle son said to me, one time, “Mom, you have to admit that this is—we are not a normal family.”

NP: Why did people think you were so strange?

PA: Well, I think just because Gary was so much a part of our lives, you know, that we just did everything together. One Thanksgiving, Gary and Don traveled from California to Oregon for Thanksgiving. I had a class on Wednesday night, so I flew up on Thursday, but they drove up together. People looked at me like, “Your what? Your husband and your ex-husband drove to Oregon together?” “Well, yeah! They're friends!” You know? And my parents—I think it was my parents' 50th anniversary, one of the women walked up to me, and she said, “Well, is your husband here?” and I said, “Yes they both are.” [both laugh] She thought she had—and said, “What do you mean?” and I said, “Well, see those two guys sitting over there on the—one on the couch and one on a chair, and they're talking to each other?” And she said, “Yeah,” and I said, “Well, the one on the couch is my first husband, and the one on my—on the chair is my husband now.” She said, “And they speak to each other?” “Well, yeah!” I mean they—I think people just found it—I think it's more common now, but I think they just found it just so unlikely that I would remain friends with my ex-husband who was gay. We spent a lot of time laughing about it. But I don't know why they thought we were so strange. Even Gary's—Gary's gay friends thought we were really strange for a long time, and then they all just became part of the family, so, you know, I mean, I don't know why they thought we were so weird. It just seemed logical to me to do that for our kids. I think there are a lot of divorces that really damage kids, and we were bound and determined that was not going to happen. And so I don't think it would've mattered whether he was gay or not—we would've remained friends, and they might've thought were just as weird then, you know, if he hadn't been gay. But I think particularly because he was gay, they thought I should hate him or something, and there was no reason to. I got what I wanted. I got a wonderful second husband, so—we've been married 40 years. So I can't—how can I complain about the fact that he was gay?

NP: Could you speak a little bit to Don's experience coming into the family?

PA: Oh, he's a very accepting, non-judgmental person, so it was just a really easy transition. And he and Gary liked—I mean, we'd all been friends before Gary came out. So, you know, they really liked—they liked each other, they were friends, too. So it was—it was just an easy—I mean, it wasn't—there was—there were never any really bumps in that part. [laughs] The kids always—they always liked Don. I think it was hard for them at first when Don and I started dating, 'cause we started dating right after Gary and I separated, which I—that was another thing that people didn't understand that, but, you know, a divorce is not like a death. I guess in some

ways it is, but it wasn't like I'd lost my husband. It was that we were no longer married, so I didn't—I didn't really need a grieving period. [laughs] But he transitioned really easily into the family, and my parents accepted him, pretty much—my mom had a hard time, but she was having a hard time with my divorce, so—and not just because—I mean, it was before she knew he was gay—Gary was gay—but she just had a hard time with the fact that one of her daughters got a divorce, and so I think that was part of her problem. But—and of course, they met Don right away, so that was—it was like, she felt like I just transitioned too fast, I think. But over the years, she came to grips with that, and his family was very accepting of me, and we told them about Gary, and they were—they were always like grandparents to my two older kids. So I—yeah, I think he's—he's a really good man. Very nurturing—very nurturing to me, but he was always also very kind to Gary about it, and very supportive of Gary, which was really helpful to me. And—and he also really helped David get through the—through the traumatic experience of finding out his dad was gay. I think, had Gary been able to sit down and talk with him, it might have been an easier transition for David, but I think Don was really helpful. Like I said, he and Gary were very good friends.

NP: Just changing gears a little bit again, what are some of the changes that you've seen and some of the challenges that still remain within the LGBT community?

PA: Well, I think—I think there will be struggles for a long time, because I think there are still a lot of people out there who just—they—they don't understand it, and they don't want to. [sighs] I don't—it's interesting in a county out here—I mean, we live in the county; we don't live in Lancaster city. There's a—there's a very different attitude than there is in the city about the LGBT movement. But overall, for a state as conservative as Pennsylvania is, I think there's a lot of acceptance here. And I don't run into a lot of dof—'course I don't run in circles that are people who are hateful, so I don't see a lot of struggle. I'm sure that gay people could probably tell you a lot more about their struggle, because I'm not, you know, as involved with gay people as I was when we lived in California because of all of Gary's friends and—but we have friends, several friends who are—are gay or lesbian, and I—I think that—I don't know what their struggle is, I mean, I—I don't know that I have—I don't really know how to answer that question. I do see struggles. I still see discrimination. I think the whole marriage equality issue has a long ways to go, but I'm—I'm pleased to see more and more and more states legalizing it, which seems really sad to me that it has to be legalized—it should have been all along. I think it's—I think most of the struggle is just helping people understand that, you know, they aren't out to try to make anybody else gay if they're not gay. They just wanna live peacefully and have their re—their own relationships. We have several people in our—we go to Grace UCC here in town, now, and we have several gay and lesbian couples that have adopted children. So adoption is happening more, and I think that's—I think that's—has been a struggle for people who wanted to be parents and were not allowed to adopt, and that may be one of the biggest struggles they face. But it's becoming legal in more and more places. So I think—I think it's a good time in our lives. I think the world is changing. And it's not just this country, I mean—other countries are coming around and acknowledging gay marriage and just the freedom to be gay. Be who you are.

NP: You mentioned that there's a difference in attitude between the county and city, in Lancaster.

PA: Yeah. Yeah.

NP: Could you speak a little more to that?

PA: Well, I just think the county—the people in the county are more conservative politically and sometimes theologically and socially. Although all of our neighbors know what our family situation is. I have an equality sticker on the back of both of our cars, and nobody's—nobody questions that. We do know that there are—in this neighborhood, there are gay and lesbian people, and they are more and more out. So I think—I think it's—it's spreading this way, but the—in the city, I just don't think people question it that much. Like I said, in the Chorus, we have lots and lots of people who are gay or lesbian.

NP: Is your church in the city?

PA: Is our church in the city?

NP: Mhm.

PA: Actually, no, it's on New Holland Pike. It's on the way up to New Holland. It's outside the city, in the midst, but a lot of people from the city go there. But I think...I just think sometimes in a city, it's easier to just—I think cities tend to be more open-minded and liberal about things like that. You know, I know that there's—there's still some racism and that kind of thing, too, but I think it's—I think we're working on it. When we first moved here, we were a little nervous about having an Obama sticker on our car [laughs]—you know, that kind of stuff. But—but our neighbors have never—there's never been any—in this particular neighborhood, we've never had anybody, you know, say anything to us about who we are or what we believe or the fact that we are supportive of the LGBT movement. And a lot of people, we just don't talk, and we don't know our—some of our neighbors that well, so we never talked about that with them, but particularly our neighbors on this side are just really open-minded about it, so. I do think there's a difference in the county. Yeah, I mean, if you look at the votes during political elections between Lancaster County, the whole county, and then look at Lancaster city—

[END OF TAPE 2, refer to audio recording]

[AUDIO RECORDING]

PA: There's pretty big difference in voting.

[Discussion about recording problems omitted.]

NP: Yeah, I was going to ask if there was anything that we missed that you wanted to share, or anything really important that you wanna share?

PA: I don't know, I can't think of anything. I can't remember what we've talked about and what we haven't. [laughs]

NP: We've touched a lot on your community in Northern California, your church, definitely your personal background—anything that might be relevant.

PA: Yeah, yeah. I can't think of anything else. I think I've pretty much said it all. I mean, I just think—with me right now, marriage equality is a big thing. It's really fun to see our family members and friends being able to get married, because that's what they really want. And so that's probably where I concentrate my efforts most at this point—is. I just get really excited when I see that another state has [laughs]—has decided to acknowledge it. I remember my oldest son saying, “Kentucky will be the last state,” and Kentucky went before Pennsylvania did. [laughs] So of course, you know, there are people who fight it, but I—I just don't think—I think it's—it's gonna happen. And I think—I think what's—one thing that's really important is what I was talking about, about the younger generation. I think that's what's really gonna change things, because for the most part, people your age and younger are accepting and aren't fighting anything. They just don't care. I mean, I don't think it's that they're apathetic about it; I think that it just doesn't matter to them. We don't need to—we don't need to even mention that someone's gay, just like we don't need to mention the color of someone's skin. You know, I mean, I—when we get to the point where we're all just people, then, I think, we will have arrived. Whether we'll ever get there, I don't know. But I—I think that's what's changing, is that, you know, the younger generation is just saying, “Why are you so worried about this?” [beeping noise] It's beeping at you. [laughs]

LF: It's not recording anymore.

[camera beeps again]

PA: It's telling you something.

LF: Do you wanna maybe talk about the experience of your trans niece?

PA: Oh, that has been an interesting experience. She was our niece, and then she became our nephew. She did not go through the surgery, but she took the hormones, and she transitioned to male, and—and then—she's—she also has bipolarism. So she's had some mental health issues—actually, she was here last night and, I mean, all yesterday, and they left this morning, she and her dad. But she has transitioned back to female. And she said—well, we—she talks very openly about it with us. We have a really good relationship with her. And right now she's living in New Jersey, and she is dealing with her mental health stuff right now, but she has decided—she's—they've changed her medication, so she's really on a more even keel with the bipolarism. But she—I asked her, I said, you know, “What prompted you to—to move back towards feminism instead of masculinism?” and she said, “I'm actually doing it more for professional reasons,” because she hasn't gone through the surgery, and she feels like—she wants to go back to teaching. But I—I don't know. It's been an interesting experience watching her go through it, 'cause she'll—she'll feel—well, *he*—she was Greg for 11 years, so I have trouble thinking of her as Linda again. I thought of her—*him* as Greg, so it's been kind of confusing to the family. He would go off his meds because he felt like he was fine, and then he would have an episode where it's—he was manic, and he would end up in the hospital. And a couple years ago, he went into the hospital for about two months, and when he came out, he

was—he had changed his name again. His name was Linda Marie, and he went to—when he became—when he did—took the hormones to—to be male, he became Greg—Gregory Lindon Smith, and then he came out as—of the hospital as Marie, because he didn't want to Linda or Greg. But he was really messed up at that point. Now, we were pretty impressed when they were here, that as Linda, he—she seems very—she seems to have things under control with her illness and is—she's working toward—she's on disability, but she's working toward trying to find a job again. She lives in a group home, she's in a—she went into the hospital in New Jersey, and she now is in a group home in a ghetto area in Irvington, New Jersey, so it's kind of—that's kind of a hard place to be, and it's really expensive rent, so she's looking for another place. But yeah, it—that's been a very, very interesting experience. We have a friend in New Hampshire who is transgender also, and he went through the surgery and is now female. Has transitioned well and is staying married. I mean, they're still married, and she's not a lesbian, but—but they were best of friends before they got married, and they have two kids, and they decided to stay together. I really admire her for that, I couldn't have done it. I don't think that's something I could have done. But yeah, I think the transgender experience is a little harder for people to grasp, and I—and Linda's—is obviously affected by her being bipolar. That's really hard. Yeah. So it's just—it's been—I don't know how—how to explain it other than it's just been really interesting to watch the process happen. But like I said, she seems in a really good place right now, and we had a great visit with them, so. I was a little nervous about it, because I hadn't seen her since she transitioned—was trans—started the transition back. But she looks good, and she's healthy—healthier than she's been for a long time, so maybe this is a good thing. And other than those two people, I don't really know anybody else who is transgender. I mean, I may. [laughs] What can I say? But it's not—I don't have knowledge of it, anyway. So yeah, I think that's a harder thing for people to grasp and cope with. I mean, people who are not gay or transgender. I think that's—I think that's something they struggle with more. As far as being bisexual, I think we're all on a continuum somewhere, you know. I doubt that there's anybody—I think there are probably more people between the two extremes than there are—than are the extreme on either end of the spectrum. But yeah, I—it's been an interesting experience to watch Linda—Greg—Marie—Linda—or Marie Greg Linda transition over the last—about 12 years. And she was—and she was diagnosed bipolar before she decided to—that she was transgender, yeah. And, you know, we—we all in the family—all realized when it's happened that we could see why. I mean, we could—we could see how she could feel like she was more male than female, just because of her personality. But—I mean, it wasn't a big shock to us. So I don't know where she's going, I don't—what will happen now. But I—and I don't—like I said, Danny, our friend in New Hampshire, obviously was very serious about it. I mean, it wasn't—he doesn't have any kind of mental health issues, so it wasn't—it wasn't like that affected the decision. It was a long time in coming. But—but Danny is a really nice person. [laughs] And a really attractive woman. So that's my feelings about it. [laughs] I mean, I don't have any particular feelings. I just think it's puzzling to people.

LF: Okay.

NP: Did that shut off?

LF: The camera?

NP: Yeah.

LF: Yeah.

[microphone rustling noises]

NP: Okay, well, we're gonna end that here.

PA: Okay.

NP: Just wanna thank you for your time—

PA: Hope there's stuff you can use. [laughs]

NP: Oh, there is plenty that we can use.