

# **LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA**

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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: James Bortzfield

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**Interviewee: James “Jim” Bortzfield**

Interviewer: Barry Loveland

Date: October 13, 2014

Place: LGBT Center in Harrisburg, PA

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**Abstract:**

James “Jim” Bortzfield was born in Lancaster, PA in 1934. He received his undergraduate degree from Elizabethtown College as a business major. Upon graduation, Jim moved to Harrisburg to work as a buyer for Pomeroy’s, but after several years he switched careers and purchased a beer distribution facility in Hershey, PA. After this successful business endeavor, Jim was searching for a new opportunity and decided to purchase The Neptune Bar, a local gay bar in Harrisburg. In this interview, Jim talks about his upbringing, especially talking about his knowledge of being gay at a very young age, but still being able to find companionship among his peers. Jim states that for him it wasn’t too difficult for him to be out. Jim also discusses his two earlier careers paths and why he made those career shifts. On discussing his last major business endeavor, owning The Neptune Bar, Jim recounts anecdotes of being the bar owner and his overall experience. Since selling the bar in 1984/85, Jim discusses his retirement life and having moved to Ft. Lauderdale, FL.

**Lonna Momsheimer:** Speak up.

**Barry Loveland:** Alright, go ahead.

**James Bortzfield:** Is it okay? And the sound is alright?

**LM:** It’s going to be alright. Okay.

**BL:** Alright?

**LM:** Yup.

**BL:** I’m Barry Loveland. I’m an oral history interviewer with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. And I’m here with Lonna Malmshemer who is our videographer. Today is October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014. And we’re here to interview James Bortzfield at the LGBT Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Jim, do I have your permission to interview today and videotape the interview?

**JB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** Yes.

**BL:** And then, we have a consent form that I'll ask you to sign at the end of the interview, as I mentioned to you before. At which time you can place any restrictions on any part of the interview if you want. Also, let me assure you if you wanna stop and take a break during the interview, we can do that. Also, any time you wanna decline or answer any question that's fine as well. So, just let me know.

Alright. If you could state and spell your full name first of all and then we'll ask about your growing up.

**JB:** My full name is James J-A-M-E-S, Nevin, N-E-V-I-N, Bortzfield, B-O-R-T-Z-F-I-E-L-D.

**BL:** Right. Okay. Could you tell us when and where you were born and raised.

**JB:** I was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in Manheim Township. I went to Manheim Township High School and graduated in 1952.

**BL:** What year were you born?

**JB:** 1934.

**BL:** Ok, good. Tell me a little bit about growing up. What was your family life like? Did you have siblings?

**JB:** I have a brother—I had a brother. He died when he was 62 in 1991. I had a wonderful family. It was my mother and my father and all my relatives were very close. They are all gone now.

**BL:** What did your parents do for a living?

**JB:** My father was in the confectionary business. He ran Keppels Incorporated in Lancaster. He was president of the Pennsylvania Candy Manufacturers Association for many, many years.

**BL:** And your mother?

**JB:** My mother was at that time a home-wife. She just stayed home and took care of the house.

**BL:** Okay, good. And what was school like for you? Did you know you were gay then?

**JB:** Absolutely. I knew when I was 11.

**BL:** Really—

**JB:** And met a lot of boys in school at that time—

**BL:** Who knew you were gay?

**JB:** Oh, yes and a lot of the straight boys too. They went out with me.

**BL:** Really?

**JB:** It was fun. I had no problems at all.

**BL:** Hmm... Well tell me more about what that was like. What your school life was like. Were you involved in any activities or---

**JB:** I was on the basketball team and I was also—one year, I was manager of the basketball team which was a nothing job. But it was just to be around my friends on the team. We used to have wonderful times together.

**BL:** Well tell me more about that. (laughs)

**JB:** It was just the normal high school life and the only difference was that—we'd go to dances and we'd have dates, go to the movies, go to dances and all. But when that was all over after you took the girl home you met up with whoever you had a date with later on and proceeded that way.

**BL:** [chuckles] Well that's interesting. So how did you sort of figure out that other guys in school were maybe interested or whatever? Did they have certain signals or--? [chuckles]

**JB:** They picked me out.

**BL:** Did they?

**JB:** Yes, they did.

**BL:** Hmm.

**JB:** I was one of the few boys that had a car. There were three of us out of 150 people in the senior class. But I was one that had a car and they always said, "Would you take me home?" after a game or something like that. Would you take me home and I said sure I'll take you home. Do you want to stop and have a coffee first or something and you know, it was very easy. It was almost too easy.

**BL:** [laughs] Well that's pretty interesting. Did you have sense of any sort of gay life outside of school?

**JB:** Not until I was 15 or 16. I was 16, I wandered into downtown Lancaster and somebody said 'you should go into the Village Tavern'. I asked what it was and was told it was the gay bar. I said, "Oooh—we have a club." I went in there—and the Village Tavern in Lancaster at that time was part of a nightclub and it was also the Greyhound bus station. Being that Lancaster is close to the naval base down in Maryland, they used to have a choice of—the sailors used to have a

choice of, you know, in the weekend to leave and go to Lancaster or Philadelphia and a lot of them came up. From... It was—they came from Bainbridge and those boys liked to party too.

**BL:** And so—where was the Village Tavern in Lancaster? Do you know?

**JB:** It was right behind the Brunswick Hotel.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** The old Brunswick Hotel. The same location but the old Brunswick Hotel.

**BL:** Okay—interesting. Well—was that the first kind of place that you came out to?

**JB:** Yes, yes.

**BL:** Started coming out to. Were there other places you eventually started going to?

**JB:** Yes. When I was in high school I had a very good bass voice. I was in the choir and I did solo work. My parents sent me to Philadelphia to Lester Englander for voice lessons. And he was a mad queen but we never did anything together and he never came out to me and I never came out to him, but it was very, very obvious.

And after I had heard rumors of some of the clubs—one of them was called the Pirate Ship—in Philadelphia, the bar went from one street to another. The first half you walked through the straight section and then you opened the door and then you got into the gay section.

**BL:** Wow.

**JB:** That was the first gay bar that I was in—then I went to some other ones but then got thrown out of two of them because I was at that time only 16

**BL:** [chuckles]

**JB:** But I looked older.

**BL:** Well that's interesting.

**JB:** So I knew there was life outside of Lancaster.

**BL:** Yeah.

**JB:** Even at that age.

**BL:** That's—that's pretty amazing. Well—did you go to college or anything after high school?

**JB:** I went to Franklin and Marshall for two years and I was in a geology course there and I didn't do well in mathematics and I didn't want to pursue it and I wanted to switch to business. And Elizabethtown College had a professor there—his name was Grey and he was excellent so I transferred to Elizabethtown and went there for two years and that's where I graduated from.

**BL:** And your major?

**JB:** I had a business major.

**BL:** Business major.

**JB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Mhm. Right. So were you aware in college of any sort of LGBT life?

**JB:** I was not very active in college. I was very careful because for two years, I lived in a dormitory there and I didn't want to arouse too much suspicion. When you are that close to people—when you have to sleep in the same building with them, it is a little different. But then I started commuting between Lancaster and Elizabethtown. Every day I had to drive up there for school and then I'd pick up one—I knew a couple of other guys in college that were gay and we'd all get in the car and drive up to Harrisburg to The Clock Bar.

**BL:** Okay—what year was that, do you think?

**JB:** Pardon?

**BL:** About what year was that?

**JB:** That would have been 1956.

**BL:** Wow—wow.

**JB:** Because I moved to Harrisburg—when I graduated from college I was hired by Pomeroy's. They send a human resource man to hire people and they hired me and I was in their executive training program. For six months, I was trained to be a buyer. I was going to New York every other week to buy and that started in 1957.

**BL:** So what was Harrisburg like in the 1950's for gay people?

**JB:** What was—what?

**BL:** What was Harrisburg like in the 1950's for gay people?

**JB:** Well there were plenty of them around—[chuckles]

**BL:** [laughs]

**JB:** I mean The Clock Bar was always busy on weekends. You could not dance but there were tables in the back and it was a great place to meet people.

**BL:** Mm.

**BL:** If you didn't like that you could go to Johnny Kobler's. If you didn't like that, you could go to Warner at the old Warner Hotel Bar. There were other bars where you could meet people and it's not like you were actually in the bars and drinking and all but that's where you went to meet people. Either there or the State Diner which was across the street from the Clock Bar and then there was always State Street.

**BL:** Mhm.

**JB:** Then the bars closed at midnight that was before they could be open until 1'o clock and 2'o clock. So a lot of people had after the hours parties at their houses and there might be 10 or 15 people that would go. That was where you really met people. And had a really good time, it was a lot of fun.

**BL:** Could you maybe describe some of the bars that you attended a little bit because we are trying to sort of get some better sense of what the bars were like—for instance, The Clock Bar. Could you maybe tell us a little bit about what it was like?

**JB:** It was—it's very hard to describe. It was just another bar.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** I mean, along the walls were clocks—it was called the clock bar because it had clocks on the wall set to different time zones around the world like Moscow, London and you know, that's why it was called the clock bar.

**BL:** Oh, okay.

**JB:** The Dare's owned it.

**BL:** Uh huh.

**JB:** The Dare [ph] family owned it and it was straight owned and straight bartenders but they were very friendly and very welcoming. You know...and it was no problem at all.

**BL:** Mhm. And do you when that sort of became a gay bar.

**JB:** No, I do not.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** I don't think anyone knows really. It was in the thirties I think is when it originally started.

**BL:** It start-- It opened in 1938. I was able to trace it back through the various business directories but I wasn't sure if it was immediately gay or if it eventually became gay.

**JB:** I never saw a straight person in there.

**BL:** Yeah. [chuckles]

**JB:** Never. Now, The Warner Hotel, that was different. That was part—that was...some of the guests that would stay at the hotel would wander into the bar. The bar tenders were gay

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** So, you know, Johnny Kobler's was another straight bar and the gays stayed in the back along the side. We were welcomed there too. I mean there was never a problem there.

**BL:** And where was Johnny Kobler's?

**JB:** Kobler's was back in the alley right across from where the jail was. The jail and Kobler's—that building, that's now occupied by the parking garage.

**BL:** Okay, alright.

**JB:** If you go back in that alley—what is that alley? Blueberry?--the alley next to city hall.

**BL:** Okay. Yeah...

**JB:** I forget the name of that alley,

**BL:** Yeah.

**JB:** But if you go up to the next intersection it was on the corner there. It was underneath the parking garage.

**BL:** All right—okay, interesting. And The Warner Hotel, do you have any other sense of what that was like inside. Do you remember anything about it?

**JB:** It was—fairly rundown. They used to have a plaque out front that said that Mark Twain stayed there or something like that. It was probably built around the turn of the century. It was a wooden frame hotel on the outside. I don't know when it was torn down. It was—

**BL:** Okay. And then-- How about coming out to your family?

**JB:** Never. I never came out—it was never an issue. They never brought it up. I never brought it up. I didn't think I had to. I knew that they knew. My one sister-in-law made a smart comment



saying, “I think Jim is queer.” And my mother said ‘it’s really none of your business’. As long as I was successful in business and could support myself, you know, they had no problem with it and never did. I was very lucky that way.

**BL:** Mhm. Once you started at Pomeroy’s, how long did you stay there?

**JB:** I was there seven years and I worked with a man there—the manager of the men’s department was Earl Brandt, who left there and bought Brandt distributors and then when he left I said, “Earl, I got to get out of here. I hate retailing. I said, if you know of a small beer distributorship for sale somewhere, let me know.” Two months later he called me and said that Ernia Corsee (?) and Hershey wants to sell Triple and asked if I wanted to buy it. I said yes. He says to go down to see Melvin Keckler. He was the real estate agent down there. They told what they wanted it for which was reasonable and I ended up being a beer distributor in Hershey—for, until 1972.

**BL:** Okay. During this time did you end up needing a partner or anybody special in your life that you developed a relationship with?

**JB:** Oh, yes. In 1969, I met my first serious lover. He had a movie theater. This person I was asking you about, Howard Roland was—I was with him at the movies and about this man who sitting down from us. It was Kelly. I asked if I could be introduced so one night at a party I was introduced to him and we were lovers for many, many years and we’re still friends. He is 71 and he lives in Tucson and we call each other at least every other week.

**BL:** Wow—that’s great.

**JB:** But that’s...He is the only one true person in my life.

**BL:** Mm. How long were you together with him?

**JB:** So from 1969 ‘till 1981 or 1982.

**BL:** Wow. That was a long time.

**JB:** Yes, but then I started wandering. [chuckles] I must have of gotten bored.

**BL:** Mhm, okay. Well, in 1972 was that when you decided to get into the gay bar business?

**JB:** Yes, because after working every day from 9am to 9pm you know, and then not having anything to do for a while... I asked Kelly, I said, you know, ‘I’m sittin’ on this money and I gotta do somethin’. This is terrible, just sittin’ around.

So I called Earl Brandt again and I said, ‘Earl, I want to buy a bar’. And he says, ‘I have just the bar for you! Bob Maley wants to sell.’

I said, ‘Oh, the Neptune?’

He said, “Yeah!”

I said, “It’s awfully small”

He says, “But the price is cheap. The place to start—you gotta start somewhere”

I said, ‘Okay, let’s go’. And we opened it in December

**BL:** So was it already called The Neptune?

**JB:** It was already called the Neptune.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** It was name after Bob Maley’s speedboat. He used to have a speedboat out in Williamsburg [ph] I never changed the name. I didn’t see the need of changing it.

**BL:** So The Neptune used to be a straight bar.

**JB:** Yeah, very. Capitol workers and...

**BL:** Okay. So was it—how was the transition to suddenly change it into a gay bar. Was it difficult to get clientele?

**JB:** Well, Kelly was my bartender.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** And the other bartender you would know but I don’t know if I can mention his name. I can mention it off...

**BL:** Sure.

**JB:** When we’re, y’know. But... the first day we were open was on a Saturday and there weren’t that many straight people around anyway and the word spread right away that it was a gay bar. That Monday, after the State left out—the crowd used to...they came in. Mary and her friends and a couple of the guys and a couple attorneys and all and they sat at the bar and looked at me and they said “When are your people comin’ in?”. I said, “probably as soon as you people leave”. They laughed and they kept on coming in for a couple of years.

**BL:** Wow.

**JB:** At happy hour from four to six. They’d stop in.

**BL:** [chuckles] So what did--Obviously, you enjoyed doing this for a living.

**JB:** I did then but I would never do it again...but I did then. 'Cause I lived there.

**BL:** Yeah.

**JB:** I often learn from the Greeks...they're always successful in their restaurant business. It's because they live there. They don't let other people run it and you have to watch what's going on and you have to watch the money. I sat behind the cash register every day.

**BL:** Mhm

**JB:** I opened up every day at four o'clock and I'd usually go home and take a nap around nine or ten and then close at two in the morning. We'd get out of there around 2:30am and then go across the river over to the diner or over to Bob's Big Boy for breakfast and then get home at 4:30am and then next day turn around and do it all over again.

**BL:** Wow. Yeah.

**JB:** You know. And I was never tired or anything—you can do that in your forties and fifties. [chuckles]

**BL:** [laughs] What were some of the more memorable moments for you in the bar?

**JB:** The people. That was the best part of it. Meeting all of the people. There are so many wonderful, wonderful people and of course there's a lot of them that don't even go out to the bars. But I met so many nice people. And the parties that we had.

**BL:** You had like a number of special events throughout the year?

**JB:** We had—we never had a Christmas party at that bar. All the other bars were open on Christmas but I was always against that. We'd open for happy hour from 4-6pm. We'd have an open bar and we might get 20-25 people and they were all invited up to my house at 6pm and we would put out a spread. Kelly would cook—he was such a wonderful cook. We did that every Christmas. I was never open Christmas night or Christmas Eve. I said let the other bars make the money. That was my night off.

But we had themed parties, of course. Military parties as you have seen in the pictures. Halloween parties and New Years—we were the only bar that didn't have an open door policy. You had to buy a ticket to get in, ahead of time. We only sold a hundred tickets and that's it. It was open bar so you didn't have to bring any money and it was only 10 bucks.

**BL:** Wow.

**JB:** I think the last one we had, we raised it to 12. Which was, a lot because you got free champagne, you got food and you got breakfast.

**BL:** Wow. [chuckles] So were there other good memories of certain characters that you recall from the bar? I mean, you don't have to mention there specific names but you could maybe talk a little bit about different people that you saw all the time—your regulars and so forth.

**JB:** There were regulars that came in and they were—entertaining. One, Frank, with the tambourine and every time some Spanish music would come on the juke box he always played the tambourine and everybody remembers Tambourine Frank.

**BL:** [laughs]

**JB:** We had to have maracas behind the bar for him too. He was the oldest person in the bar. He was 64. He used to work at the Patriot News and he was just a wonderful guy. There were some other local pharmacists and so on that used to come in every night after work and they were just nice people.

**BL:** I remember Wesley.

**JB:** Oh Wesley, Benjamin Troutman. He was one of my best friends. He lived right across the street from me when I was at 608, when I lived at 608 N Second. He lived down the corner with his mother and Dennis. Every dog he had was called Dennis. They were all black.

**BL:** They were small dogs.

**JB:** Everybody knew Dennis—the firemen were in the firehouse, he was friends with all the firemen there. He used to tell stories of going back in the firehouse. [chuckles]

**BL:** [laughs]

**JB:** But I don't know if those were true if he was just exaggerating.

**BL:** Yeah. But he would—I understand he would take a taxi.

**JB:** He would take a taxi up there. Up to the... The taxi drivers all knew him and he usually got a free ride

**BL:** Mhm.

**JB:** But he'd tip them. He took a taxi home too. He always wore a suit—a blue suit with a tie. Always dressed, always made up. He came to a party one night. Not at—John Koch's house. John Koch had a party, I don't know if it was a New Year's Party or what, but Wesley showed up. He was invited and they didn't he would come but he showed up and he looked exactly like Marlena Detrick.

**BL:** [laughs]

**JB:** And if you ever saw him, you would—you could see how... 'cause he looked like, even without makeup he looked like Marlina Detrick. He originally did shows in New Orleans. He reminisced-- used to reminisce about those shows. He was a good hearted person.

**BL:** Mhm. Any other characters you can think of that were—

**JB:** Not really any that stand out.

**BL:** I mentioned Calvin before—that danced a lot in the bar. You recall—

**JB:** He was the real exception. He was the only one that—he was really a stand out. Mostly everyone else was normal. People off the street. That's what made him exceptional. [laughs]

**BL:** And I remember that the bar always seemed to be very crowded because it was a very narrow bar. So you had to go through everything—and you had a separate room that had the dance floor correct?

**JB:** That came later on. We expanded next door and then expanded into the restaurant. I bought the Capitol Grill.

**BL:** And you renamed that The Paper Moon?

**JB:** That was Paper Moon—but when I had it, it was the Key Largo.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** It started as Key Largo and then when Frank bought the bar, it changed—Steven changed the name to Paper Moon. He named it after a restaurant he used to go to in Georgetown in Washington.

**BL:** So why did you decide to sell the bar?

**JB:** I had enough of it.

**BL:** Yeah.

**JB:** It was just— you get to the point where...there has to be a better life than this. The smoke was getting to bother me—I tried to stop smoking. I was a chain smoker. I mean a horrible chain smoker—two cartons a week. It was way too much and I finally stopped in the great smoke out of 1983, I think it was. I had a cold anyway and I finally stopped cold turkey. I said I can't stay in this bar being a non-smoker.

**BL:** So what year did you end up selling it?

**JB:** Yup.

**BL:** Which year?

**JB:** What?

**BL:** What year?

**JB:** You know, I really am not sure. I think it was 1984.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** It was either 1984 or 1985, but I am not sure and my paperwork is tucked away way down south. So I'm really not sure.

**BL:** Okay. What did you do after that?

**JB:** I didn't do anything for four years and then I decided to move to Florida. I took a couple trips down there and said, "Wow! This is just...for me, I should have done this ten years ago." I have been there ever since. I moved there in 1988.

**BL:** Did you work down there?

**JB:** Yes, I did. I go there and—I got tired of going to the beach every day after about three months and I thought I better look for a part time job. So I went to an agency and they got me a job at a bank and I hated it. A week later I asked if they had anything better and they said that Blockbuster was hiring at their corporate office. The corporate office was down there. So I went to work for them in facilities management which included payroll and mailing out—getting mail in. It was actually just a glorified mail room. I was the supervisor there and we were responsible for mailing out the payrolls for 35,000 people and doing all the accounts payable checks and printing all that. It was quite extensive. They moved to Dallas in 1998 and they wanted me to go with them but I didn't want to leave Fort Lauderdale. So I took my severance and bought a condominium and I am still there.

**BL:** When you moved down to Florida did you get involved at all in the gay life in the Fort Lauderdale area?

**JB:** I was. I was in a gay chorus. I didn't go to the gay church—the Sunshine Cathedral, but I was in the gay bars a lot and the club life.

**BL:** Uh huh. So what was it like there?

**JB:** I had a lot of gay friends but a lot of them are gone. I don't go out much anymore. I just pretty much stay home and visit friends of mine and that's about it.

**BL:** So what was the gay life like in Fort Lauderdale when you got there?

**JB:** When I got there—it was pretty extraordinary. We had our own beach and plenty of places to go and it was very easy to meet people and of course, I have always lived in Wilton Manors and that's the center of gay life in the east coast, at least we think so. I mean there's—the town I live in has 11,000 people and it's like sixty percent gay. It's very upscale—not where I live in my little condominium but the houses and all they are quite expensive. The people there are really, really nice. It's a nice place to live, nice place to retire.

**BL:** Mhm. So now you are fully retired?

**JB:** Oh yeah.

**BL:** Yeah, yeah.

**JB:** I retired when I was 64.

**BL:** Okay. And do you have, like, interests or things that you do now?

**JB:** Well I still have my piano—my grand piano, my Yamaha which I bought here in Harrisburg in 1969 and it's traveled with me everywhere.

**BL:** Wow.

**JB:** I have that. I love photography but mainly music. I'm opera buff and the greatest thing that ever happened was the Metropolitan Opera HD (high definition) broadcast. We have three theaters within ten miles of where I live. And there's three friends of mine that are also opera buffs. If some opera singer is playing in Amsterdam, which was happening last year, they flew to Amsterdam. Just fly around the world to follow the opera or we go together to see them. It's good. It's good.

**BL:** So do you travel much as well?

**JB:** No, I don't. I am not a good traveler. I have only been here a week and I am homesick already. I am leaving a day early. I'm leaving Wednesday to go back instead of Thursday. I just miss it so much. I miss the heat.

**BL:** Okay. [chuckles] Can you think of anything else? (Directed to LM)

**LM:** Yes.

**BL:** Please do.

**LM:** When you owned the bar, The Neptune...

**JB:** I can't hear.

**LM:** When you owned the Neptune...

**BL:** When you owned the Neptune—

**JB:** Yes.

**LM:** Did people organized other kinds of activities there?

**BL:** Did people organize any other kinds of activities there?

**JB:** I don't understand the question.

**LM:** Well, political activities or volleyball or whatever?

**BL:** Were there any like...

**JB:** No. Now I understand, no. Other people from outside organized the volleyball and they'd come in and—"would you buy a volleyball" so we'd you know, donate to them. But we never originated any of that in the bar. Which today you would do that. It was a real oversight then. We should have done it. Like, the bars in Fort Lauderdale—each bar has its own baseball team. Each bar has its own volleyball team. They have golf teams, they have bowling teams. I mean it's just incredible—

**BL:** Yeah. Right.

**JB:** and it's something we never thought of doing.

**LM:** What's the worst thing you had to handle?

**BL:** What's the worst thing you had to handle in terms of being a bar owner?

**JB:** The worst thing—

**BL:** Any incidents or any kind of problems you dealt with?

**JB:** Just keeping order. We never had—I never really had a serious incident. You have people that have too much to drink and do crazy things you know. But I never really had—I think in the time I had the bar I only had to throw two people out. Or bar two people. Most people behaved themselves pretty well.

**BL:** In terms of the relationship with the police and so forth, you didn't have any issues with them?

**JB:** In all the time I had the bar the police were only called one time and they stopped at the door and met me and they said "if we come in there, we're going to have to make an arrest. We don't come in unless we make an arrest". I said "we'll take care of the problem ourselves". And I never saw 'em again. I was never harassed. It was too easy.



**BL:** Mhm. That's good.

**JB:** I had a neighbor that had a problem with noise—Mr. Webber. He was the building right next to the bar. The Webber's Beauty Shop. His wife was lovely and his son was a really nice guy too but Mr. Webber came over one day he said, "you know, the noise here at night is very loud" and I said, "well, there's not much I can do about it". You know. Well, he moved. He did. In about three months, he was gone. Sold the building. He's the only person I ever had any words about, but even that wasn't a serious problem.

**BL:** Right. Okay. Let me think. You were never in the military right?

**JB:** No. I missed it. I went with my friends and my eyes were so bad they thought I was blind. They had an eye surgeon come in and check my eyes and they said I was almost blind in my left eye. I was rejected. I was 4F.

**BL:** Okay.

**JB:** I was very disappointed at the time 'cause all my buddies went.

**BL:** Did you have like any organizational affiliations or anything you got involved with, like civic stuff?

**JB:** No.

**BL:** Okay, alright—how about—any religious life? Did you go to church at all?

**JB:** When I was young. Up until the time that I moved to Harrisburg. Even when I was going into college and when I was living there I used to drive to Lancaster just to go to choir practice on Thursday nights. My parents were both very religious but they never pressured me, at least after I moved to Harrisburg. I just didn't go. It just---it was First Reformed Church—First Reformed in Lancaster County of the United Church of Christ and they were very accepting out of all the churches. They're the most accepting. I just haven't gone.

**BL:** You mentioned that music was a big part of your life. Did you get involved in any kind of musical groups or were you—how did you participate in music?

**JB:** It has always been personal for me—to sit down and calm myself and entertain myself or some of my friends. But I have never played in a group and I have never played for the public.

**BL:** Okay. How did you—when did you learn how to play the piano?

**JB:** I started playing when I was five.

**BL:** Oh.

**JB:** The organist at our church started teaching me and I took lessons for five years from her and a lot of it is self-taught too because I still learn. There's -- I hear things on the radio and I say "I don't have that music". I have so much music you would not believe and I don't know what's going to happen when I go. The music will just go in a dumpster I guess. There is access to music online now that you don't have to worry about buying it. (\_\_\_?) music site, I download. If I see something that I want and if it's public domain, and all, you can download it and print it out. And you're playing it within a couple minutes. You know. I've learned a lot of new things that way.

**BL:** Do you have a favorite type of music? Is it classical?

**JB:** Classical. Absolutely. That's is the only thing I have. I have two—I have Oklahoma! and I have Carousel. I have the score but other than that everything is classical. That's boring, isn't it? [chuckles]

**BL:** [laughs]

**JB:** I can play other things but it just doesn't do anything for me.

**LM:** Who is your favorite composer?

**JB:** Richard Strauss. Richard Strauss. Der Rosenkavalier is my favorite opera. Next to that is—oh I don't know, there are so many—all of them. They are good. Any of the Vaudanarian Operas. He's my...he's my third. Mozart's second.

**BL:** Did you have many opportunities to go to see the live performances?

**JB:** When I was in Harrisburg—I was on a buying trip one time and I had tickets for Carmen at the old Met, the old original Met. I also saw Der Rosenkavalier there as well and that was just—when I think about that night I want to cry. It was just amazing. That was at the old Met. When I saw Carmen there, they said that the only ticket they had was restricted view. I said, "what's that?" and he said "it's just a partial view". So I said, "well, I'll take it". 'Cause it was the last ticket they had. It was in the upper balcony and you're sitting there's a pillar right in front of your seat.

**BL:** [laughs]

**LM:** [laughs]

**BL:** You had to go around the pillar while in your seat. My head was turning all night. As long as you could hear it, it was good.

**LM:** Who was singin'?

**JB:** Who was the singer? Rise Stevens. She was still doing it then in the 50's. Oh, Ariadne auf Naxos, that's the other—one of my favorites. By Richard Strauss.

**BL:** Were there any important events or turning points in your life, would you say?

**JB:** No. Everything to me just kind of flowed. It went from one thing to another. Nothing was ever—no.

**BL:** Okay. Is there anything else you can think of that you wanted to add?

**JB:** Absolutely not.

**LM:** What do you think about the changes that have occurred in the LGBT community and the acceptance with gay marriage and some of the other things that have sort of happened along the way.

**JB:** Well I wish I were born now. The kids today have it so great. It's only getting better.

**BL:** Okay—that's great. Thank you so much Jim. We appreciate your time.

**JB:** Well, I hope I haven't bored you to death.

**BL:** NO, not at all. It's pretty fascinating actually to hear some of the stories about the bar life especially here in Harrisburg in the area here. You know, I think one of the things to me—I don't know if you appreciate the importance of it but the early bar owners were really so much the heroes of the community. They were the one that stuck their neck out and got into business doing that, when it wasn't an easy thing to do. And there was nothing in the community for people to come together around. So it really was an important service.

**JB:** It was the only place where you could come together. Other than the sleazy places. You know. Before bathrooms or...

**BL:** Before any organization or before any of that stuff happened, bars were really the focus of the community. It was an important service.

**JB:** And the bars weren't sleazy. Nobody got out of line. It was strictly a place to meet people and drink and have a good time.

**BL:** Thank you very much.

**JB:** You're very welcome. I hope I...

**LM:** You wanna get permission?

**BL:** Yes. We have the consent form for you.

**JB:** Oh. Do you want me to fill this out now?

**BL:** Yeah, yeah. And you can...if you wanna come over.

**JB:** I'm sorry I have trouble hearing you, it's so embarrassing.

**LM:** Oh no, that's alright. I'm sorry I'm not speaking hard enough. Part of the reason for that is I'm an underhearer and I can hear you perfectly well.

**JB:** Oh really?

**LM:** Oh yeah.

**BL:** If you wanna use the table here, it might be more stable. [chuckles] That one's a little shaky. It's more for just looks.