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Interviewee: Joe Burns
Interviewer: Unknown, "I" stands for "Interviewer"
Videographer: Lonna Malmsheimer
Date of Interview: October 15, 2014
Location of Interview: Unknown
Transcriber: Sara Tyberg

Abstract:

Joe Burns is an LGBT activist who actively participated in LGBT organizations, marches, and protests especially throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. In this interview, Joe discusses his involvement in several of those LGBT and women's rights organizations, including Berks County, Allentown NOW, the Gay Line, and Le-Hi-Ho, of which he was a founding member. He also recalls his involvement in attempting to have a gay rights ordinance passed through the Human Rights Commission and Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus for the Lehigh Valley area, which unfortunately failed. Additionally, in this interview Joe considers the importance of talking and listening to women in order to promote inclusive activism. In terms of his personal life, Joe briefly talks about his relationships with two of his lovers, both which sadly ended in divorce. In the future, Joe hopes to learn about what happened to the Le-Hi-Ho library and his fellow activists from Berks County.

[Burns_1]

I: What happened in your life after you went to Chicago [Illinois]?

[Burns_2]

I: Okay, Joe! Why don't you tell us a little bit about the Berks County [Pennsylvania].

JB: Okay. Berks County was in Reading, Pennsylvania, and that group was started [video is focusing, and becomes clear] originally by Jimmy Smith, Jerry Yoder, and Lou Augustine. Now Lou was the woman—Mabel Lou Augustine—was the woman who kind of came up to Le-Hi-Ho more or less at various times and lived in Reading [Pennsylvania], and it was her residence. So, they met in December I believe, and then they had their first actual meeting in 1975 October—I'm sorry, January 2nd, 1975 of the Reading group. Immediately after that, they came up to Le-Hi-Ho which would have met the third Saturday of the month—as they had done for years and wanted to just get some guidance and to let them know that they were in—that they were starting a group, now they needed to know what to do, and needed some friends, etcetera. So, in response to that, I went to their meetings and started to go to their meetings and participated then for several years, actually. And I thought it was a remarkable group for a number of reasons. For one thing, it was very—it was at least half and half [waves hands like balancing a scale] and probably at times, there were more women than there were men, and that was pretty rare, in those days. Very rare, as a matter of fact and and... I remember Jo Jones and Jan Sweat were lovers. They—as soon as those two—is that they were the—their activism had started in being the first women to go into... the mines... for Bethlehem Steel. Now what those mines were, I don't know. I think they closed not very long after that, and I never found out if they were iron mines or coal mines—coke mines—coal mines, I'm not sure. But that was their—that was their background. They came to us. They had just successfully won their their battle, and they were very active.

They were not at that time... feminists. They became so certainly with the radicalization by Janet Cooper. Coop came around and really did a number on a lot of people, I think men and women in terms of changing minds and attitudes, and really, being very forthright about supporting women's rights. My particular friend was Cindy Showalter (sp?), and Cindy and I decided that we hadn't ever really sat down and talked with—with the opposite sex. I never sat down and talked with lesbians, and Cindy and I became very good friends as a result. We spent a lot of time talking with each other, yes, a lot of time talking to each other—which I enjoyed and learned a great deal about...

I: What was that like? Talking to lesbians?

JB: It was... they were different—they were sexist for one thing, that—that I find very interesting. They really in a way that we had not—we had given up in the sense—the men were less hooked up on male-female roles, and women could tell you [snaps] instantly, and this always amazed me, that they could look at somebody coming in the door and every one of them agreed that they were butch or femme. And that was the difference to them, and that they knew, and that—that—that—that was something that identified the women by. They handled (____???) how they identified women by, and I think men had given that up by then. I don't remember that there were those kinds of distinctions about who is—who is more femme or who is who — is more butch or that we didn't role play in that way, and I don't think that they did either, necessarily, but they sort of identified, and I was so tickled by that. But the other thing that really amazed me and tickled me was that they were so quick in the identification. They could tell just just by looking at someone, and I couldn't see whatever they were looking at. I didn't know, but they were certainly very, very, very clear on what what they saw and...

I: How big did this group become?

JB: It never became very large. I don't suppose that more than about four —fourteen to fifteen people at any one point, but we would have very active meetings, and they enjoyed each other—often came together, often came together. So, we would spend—Ricky and I would go down to Reading [Pennsylvania] two or three—sometimes two or three times a week to be at meetings. They were very a social group, and they really liked each other a great deal, both men and women, and so I talked about Jerry and Jimmy Smith—with another person—by— guy by the name of... who... I'll have to think of it in a minute... there there were certainly some men and more women and the women were very active in terms of contributing a great deal to the caucus committees. It is—the leadership they did—they served of on committees a lot, and so that they supported that whole aspect of things wonderfully. They were very active and gave to the conferences a lot— although they were not, they were not [interviewer talks over him]

I: For the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus?

JB: Yeah. They were not—they were not out sending leaders in their own right. Interestingly enough, the organization founded itself as a council. It wouldn't elect a president, and I think that there were two reasons for that. I always I always felt one was because my presence, and I would be the only experienced leader there—would be the only person to really hit it, you know, five or six years by that time—five or six years of experience of being in Le-Hi-Ho, and... and ...so, I

really kind of knew what they were talking—and they... I refused to—to —to be an officer. I wanted them to do it, and instead of doing that, I think that there was a certain amount of territorial jealousy between them that they wanted everything to be level. So, we operated as a council of six or seven people who were... who were the—the leadership, and we met and literally ruled by consensus in a sense, but we were extraordinarily active. We had, we had every kind of sting going. We had—we called interest groups, and the interest groups were if you were interested in something, you got some people to do it with you, and we called an interest group, and generally, that was people from the group. They would do these three or four things, and we were continuously having meetings of various sorts. We did hay rides, we did letter-writing committees, we did—we did potlucks, we did dinners, we did... just everything that you can imagine. An art group to us, and it was the art support group—Jerry was a very big artist—very good artist—Jerry Yoder was a very good artist, and he may have done that professionally, I'm not sure. Jimmy Smith was vice president as I recall. Jimmy was an interesting character himself. He was just kind of a... of a... I'd call him flighty it's not—flighty in a different sense that he really would just flited one thing to another, he never—and... and so, he wasn't flighty in the sense that that we ordinarily—that ordinarily we use it, but—but a bit of a—a bit of a bumbling bee, is what I always thought of him as. Just as he was like a person in his own way, but not very effective with anything. [chuckles] He's got—he—I think he—he—he became the first president—and then they didn't have any anymore. They just — they went to council, living in that whole — whole position, and I think we've got a treasurer, but I don't remember. Kevin Smith was the boy I was trying to remember, and the reason I wanted to remember Kevin is because he was the one who went out in the newspaper first—it was little — a little publication—Bucks County, I don't remember what it was— but it was the weekly publication for the county, and he went to them and came out big time, and said, you know, "I'm — I'm here, I'm gay, and we're gonna fight for gay rights," well that's the first time that was we were going to fight for gay rights in Reading [Pennsylvania]. It was the first time I'd heard about or anybody else heard about it. [laughs]

I: What was the reaction among gay folk?

JB: Oh, what it ha—that did not work well at all. The reaction was that the district attorney wrote a letter and said, "I will not meet with gays—I will not meet with gays." Where upon Barry going with a letter to the district attorney that said, "Yes, you will!" We were official as a county, and you can't — you can't turn it down, and he said, "Yes, I can," and did, but that was — that was pretty much the end of that discussion, too. We never did — we never did form anything—we never — never went forward any more than that, partly because they've been so negative, and I don't remember what happened. I mean, that—that got to be public, that part of it, again, got into the paper on both sides, and we argued for a while, but then we carried that forward there. On the other hand, we had such a great time. We just had so much fun being together and enjoying each other. It really was a joy to be in that organization I thought, and the other thing, again, it was so neutral, being so balanced between the male and female participation. I remember playing a baseball game one time—the last softball game I ever played, because I was playing with all these women, and I'm thinking, "Oh, Lord," I was —I was so hurt the next day. I couldn't for three days, I was so stiff, I couldn't move. [laughs] And I said never again, and never again with women, either. They [video is focusing, but becomes blurry] just whipped the hell out of me. Oh, it was terrible. And I really felt bad, because I, at

that time, geez, I was in pretty good shape, I thought—oh no! Not like they were, not like they were, and I don't think we played more than three innings, but it was amazing.

I: So it sounds like everybody enjoyed each other's company?

JB: Very, very much. Very much. It was just a real joy to be with—the girls, Jan and Jo moved off to Chicago [Illinois] in a couple years, and they left me their dog. When they used to chat with me [laughing], the dog would be so—not a very popular—not — not popular in [_____???) as I recall. The pictures were my constant companion. Wonderful, wonderful, and for me, and... but I can understand that people didn't like her, like they didn't like my lover either—not a real popular person. And probably for the same reasons, I don't know.

I: Did the group get involved in any other kind of activism after the DA [District Attorney] incident?

JB: I don't think so, no. We—we were scattered—we were scattered —Jerry Yoder [video becomes clear again] would have an idea a minute, and so Jerry was real hard to keep up with, and one of his ideas as I recall in that year, because he was this kind of artist, he drew a stamp design that he put the Liberty Bell on. Now this is 1976, right? This is—this is—we're celebrating the 200th years of 1776, and Jerry wants to put a Liberty Bell on a stamp. I mean, it's just a freaky idea. Now, we got it, but when the first stamp came out, the army (_____???) stamps came out ... now, 40 years later, so what — what does we have back in those days? I don't know, but he tried. And we supported it, and we had these better writing campaigns to get into—took around, tried to get new people to read it, and all the organizations in Pennsylvania to be a part of it, and to write to support a stamp, because that's how you get stamps made. [sounds of carbonated drinks opening in the background] It's write to the advisory committee. Well, it was no —no — no chance of it at all, [video is focusing, becomes blurry] but that's the sort of thing that Jerry would do. He would just had these —flipped off these ideas, and we just got exhausted trying to keep up with him, and we tried to implement ideas, and do all these various things. It was [video is focusing, becomes clear] crazy, crazy, crazy. It was real fun, and... and I don't remember what happened to them all. I—I—I—I've—I'm trying to remember what was the end of that organization, what was the end of my participation in it—I don't know, I just faded out and I don't remember what quite happened, whether—it couldn't have lasted until '83, I don't think. It started in '75, and my — and my thought is it might have lasted until '78, maybe the—maybe around the first time, the first conference, I'm sure that they participated in that... in the first pride conference. I don't remember after that, and — and I can't say what happened to those people. I don't know, and again, I—one of those things that I've been trying to find out—I would love to know what happened to Augustine. I'd love to know what happened to Cindy Showalter. I'd love to know what happened to Luke Kevin Smith. Kevin... did I say Kevin Smith? Yes. And... I don't know, [camera adjusts] I don't know. I don't know.

I: Well, we'll try to find out where they went.

JB: Yeah, it would be nice, because there were 3 there were three bars in Reading [Pennsylvania]—two—I think one or two of them are still exist, and so last year, I believe they were still there... at that time, I was young enough to go to bars and— and — and we did that

sort of thing, not—it wasn't a big bar, we hardly made that our center of our lives at all, we were—hopefully, we were centered in each other. You know, on occasion, we went to bars, and the bars were relatively supportive (as ???) I recall. They did some fundraising for us, and maybe for the caucus. I'm not sure, back in those days.

I: Were your...?

JB: Rosemary's bar did that—in Allentown [Pennsylvania], I remember with the caucus.

I: Your socializing outside of the bars, is that fairly typical for most of the people in your circle?

JB: Well, that's what—that's what—that's what always the importance I always felt of the—in the organizations—in the case you provide that social outlet that wasn't the bar, that wasn't some place where you were putting your sex on the line, and putting that face of yourself on the line, and that ego involvement—really, that — that was the what I felt was the — one of the major contributions of—of — of what gay organizations were doing and the kinds of things that they were generating. We were — were about generating community—was probably — was probably our real big function, and when I think about the fact that — that these groups did not accomplish anything. There was no legacy following GCS [Gay Coordinating Society]. What was important about it was that it formed that sort of community and was— and was really a... pump of making people out and getting people out and feeling proud about themselves and being active and you know — you know when we got in the paper or we met and did public things, and went to the bars and took along our little, you know, ours things for the—brochures for the conferences and so on or for lobby day or whatever we were doing, it really... provided impetus for activism and for that sort of thing to— that — that sort of that awareness I think in the community to be—and to make that a part of the community, supporting—supporting the larger community was a part of what — what — what was supposed to be if you were a gay person, and I really think that that worked, and that — that was the legacy that — that all these groups ultimately left is our community building was what really has resulted in today's life, and I was conscious of the fact that that's what we needed to do. That was my thought is that we needed, you know, the community building. It didn't matter who came, it mattered that the people who came got what they wanted from it, what they needed from it, and what it — it worked every time, and you can see the group—that the history of the groups... the... [spins hand in a circle, thinking] curve that groups go through in which they become what they start become their major—the major impetus that they become versus when people are getting really and taking it from the (____ ???) what they need to take, which is the kind of support and— and — and talking about my life and your life and talking to each other and—and making community, the whole thing about community, but being able to make that breakthrough to never been there before... we were not about that and I think I was stunned to find to remember that we didn't—we were so inward, we depended on ourselves in the first place, so that when we did things our as activities were never dependent out on—we didn't go to the experts [video zooms in] outside of ourselves, you know, we didn't [video zooms out] have the document, the lawyers—we—we—were our own activists and we did what we had to do. For instance, if there was a problem in—in—in Bloomsburg [Pennsylvania], we went up and addressed the problem. When—when... Danny in Williamsport [Pennsylvania] had trouble and was having trouble in his home, being attacked on a regular basis, we went up and tried to respond to that. When Sam

Edmiston in Bloomsburg [Pennsylvania] was attacked in the dormitories, we went and tried to respond to that. So—when somebody committed suicide in the schools, we would try to address that issue. But we did it ourselves. We didn't—we didn't go outside and I—I think that what I found when I went to Chicago [Illinois] for instance, was that—that we didn't — we didn't — we didn't do outreach. We didn't—we didn't reach out to the alliances and to — to people outside of ourselves. We didn't think about them as being—we needed to get together with—internally, so that the gay people drew together and that was our function, I think. And but again, we—we missed a ball game in not reaching out that—that I didn't even realize until later on that was possible.

I: One of the—

JB: They were the allies. There were—there were people, especially who—I remember, for instance, that there was a... president of the John's Hill churches in Allentown [Pennsylvania] was a gay person who came out to me, and—this happened a lot, and this happens a lot when you—and I'm sure it's happened to you, that people come out to you privately and—and—and—who are in positions of authority, positions being able to help you and will say, "I'm gay, and I want you to know that, and I want you to know that I'm doing—I'm working behind the scenes." And literally, and they—they were enormously important, enormously important, always have been. So, there they were our allies, but they were also secret, closeted gays very often. And that was important, John Folby, I think, would be in that position when he was doing the AIDS business... was extremely closeted, so I say that—I shouldn't say that here. Don't bring out people that you don't know about, but John is—John and—John is out now and has been out for I'm sure for long that it doesn't make a difference.

I: Well, one of the—talking about community building. One of the things that you were involved in was the switchboard in the Allentown area.

JB: Oh, that was — that was — that was much later, and I—I will get into that, because that was really an outshoot of—remember... okay. Early in—and I don't know the year—Barry Weaver and I went to—

I: Barry Weaver from Lancaster [Pennsylvania]?

JB: Barry Weaver from Lancaster [Pennsylvania] and I went to the switchboard at Reading [Pennsylvania], and I think that we had an idea that we could go there and get some ideas as how to start a gay switchboard. He did, so I went—in Lancaster [Pennsylvania]. After that visit, I didn't. I went there for two years and trained with them. It was a ten-week training period to learn to be a switchboard operator to work, to work with suicide line in Reading [Pennsylvania]. Ricky and I did that for two years. And then—and then we formed a group in Allentown [Pennsylvania], because suicide is a very serious matter, and that's what you learn when you did the training is that you don't fool around with this stuff, you know, you do some training, and you don't just throw yourself into it. Either you don't just do it on amateur basis, you do it with some—with at least some awareness of how serious it is and the issues that come up, and they were serious issues when it would come up when you weren't around the switchboard. I think... Roger done it in—in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania], and I don't remember what year he was—he

was—he was involved. I think—I think it was after us as I recall. I — I—I remember going to the switchboard and sitting in and going to the switchboard room and sitting there for a while.

I: Yeah, there was a switchboard in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania].

JB: In Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]. But I think that may have been afterwards.

I: What did you learn from being a part of that switchboard experience?

JB: Oh, everything. You know, you really... you learn how to talk to people, listen was the main thing. To really listen and — and — and to pick up and to talk to people, and I think I learned a lot about just talking to people. I was a very shy individual, very introverted—shy individual, and you certainly couldn't be on switchboard—I mean, that was the whole thing, but also, you couldn't do (art?) face-to-face... with people, but you had to deal any — whoever came along, and wherever they were, you had to deal with them. Only had a couple of serious cases, but some of them were serious, really serious. I may talk about one later... okay. But the switchboard—

I: Well, how long did the switchboard—?

JB: Well, the switchboard pulled out a whole different period. That was... moved to Allentown [Pennsylvania] in '77, okay, this will be two years later. And Allentown [Pennsylvania] was—I was a member of Le-Hi-Ho, which was located in Allen—in Bethlehem [Pennsylvania]. At that time, Dixie White and Carol Block came to me, and they were NOW [National Organization for Women] members. Dixie was later on became the president of Pennsylvania NOW within a year or two. I think '78, as I recall is when she began her term of service—[puts up two fingers] her two-year term of service. But she said the Allentown [Pennsylvania]—so Human Relations Commission is not considering adding some new coverage, and we want to put in for gay rights, and for handicaps—whatever it was, it was an umbrella of several things, and I—because I thought it was important that we have—that we didn't just gay rights, that we were looking — too often the gay movement has done this to itself. It's fights for gay rights in a narrow frame, and it really doesn't think about—doesn't really think about broader issues, doesn't get itself involved in broader issues, for instance I think that the fact that—that — that—when I talk about the lack of women, the fact that the men got in charge of it are gonna say that they dealt with male issues, literally. Never talked about the fact that whether a—child support or—or females and—a big deal back in that day when women were not able to keep their children, losing right and left, because of the lesbian issue, and that—men were silent on that. They —They never saw the need to defend in that issue or support women in that way, [moving hands emphatically] vocally, say it out loud, put it in the newspapers, 'cause now that that consistently—this was the importance of NOW that they always, always, always, every conference they went to, every meeting that you went to or anything that was really public, they always mentioned gay rights. They always put that support right out there, right out in front, and that was tremendously helpful and very impressive, very impressive, and that was at all levels, all levels, and then I was in... So, what happened with that is that we went then to city council, we went to—we talked to a few people—a councilman that we knew was in favor of gay rights, of adding these to the... commission, because the city council would have to approve that, okay? We went — We went to the Humans Relations Commission itself, talked with them, and they were in favor—all except

for one person, as I recall, who really was very vociferously against, and we had some (____???) discussions on (____???) justice with them and went to their meetings, went to city council, talked to city council. I'll never forget that, because... I spoke at city council for the first time, and—and I think somehow I got on the radio, and I don't — whether if they did an interview or if they were a recording that session earlier, but the next morning, I'm just scared to sit for them to think I'm the most hated person in Allentown [Pennsylvania], the most hated person around, because I really now have come out publically, very publically in terms of newspaper and radio and so what.

I: This was after the city council meeting?

JB: This was after the city council meeting.

I: The public meeting?

JB: And there was nothing, you know, now I had been out for a number of years, and there had been publically out in that way, and you know, which I'm really addressing, and — getting my face out and my name and my voice—literally, I'm supposed to work with the mayor and the voice on the radio. Oh my God, you know, I really... fortunately, most of the people who were there were not—were — were — were Puerto Rican and really speak awful English. [chuckles] And might not have recognized me. But, I really—it was a funny day, because I was—felt I — I may not live to get out [laughing]—I didn't know what was gonna happen. So, we talked to city council.

I: But no one else confronted you after that?

JB: Talked to city council, and—and they... there was some issues. We went back four or five months — I don't remember how long this went on. But ultimately, the — the —the position of some of the members of city council was that we will not allow you to speak anymore. Okay? So this is when we—we really became serious and—and we—as soon as we went to city council, then we formed our own organization. It was an opposing group. There was a person by the name of Frank—[video cuts]

[Burns_3]

JB: Or he put it in the library, I don't remember which. At any rate, what I did was write a letter back and— and — and refuting whatever — whatever he had written and put that in the library. That's totally lost—I have no idea what happened to either of those papers anymore, but that was where the argument also went through—the intellectual argument was written down on the paper—Le-Hi-Ho can support us. We got the caucus to come out, all kinds of people, and anybody that we could get to come and support us and speak for us was welcome to come to city council and do that, and we got—Le-Hi-Ho relatively frequently. We would just represent—put on a different hat (____???) what — what I wasn't that night or what we needed that night. It might the caucus, it might be the —the — the local organization, whatever. At any rate, so we—we—we had this ad-hoc organization which was—which was created for and meant to support the effort for getting the city council—

I: To approve the ordinance?

JB: To approve the ordinance. And I—

I: This was against discrimination?

JB: Yes, this was against discrimination. That was the point at which we had a rally at one point, remember? Now, we had a number of rallies that we—because the city council kept doing these crazy things like we couldn't talk and... or, you know, you can't meet. We—we—one meeting—the first one—the first rally we had, we set that so the door and we came out of the closet. [laughs] We opened the door, and then we all ran around the screens (?), coming out of the closet. We had a bunch of meetings. The rally that you came to as a matter of fact, and the speaker of—as the person—chairperson of the Rural Caucus, and I think by that time, [camera focuses, video becomes blurry] I think Dixie was president of NOW as I recall. She was (___???) president, and she also spoke. And we had that in a park. That was the first time—that was the first time—okay, that was the first time we had a demonstration in Allentown [Pennsylvania], and we had a rally that day as I recall. We had a parade—we had a parade. Was that—yes, that day, we had a parade, and the next day of course, you guys went to—we went to—went to North and had that thing in Williamsport [Pennsylvania], which is a whole other story...

I: [mumbles]

JB: That's Dan story and I'll let him tell it.

I: Yeah, Dan.

JB: That — that was —that happened that same weekend. You appeared Saturday with me, and Sunday, you went up there. That — that was the day that they let the speakers—somebody was up in the hill protesting, and I said, "Okay, come down here and speak," and everybody was mad at me. You guys all squalled but I think their free speech is free speech. I wanted them to say that they can have their say and it means absolutely nothing, okay? You know, give them their two minutes in the light, and then go away, hopefully, is what I was hoping what was gonna happen, but I also believe enough in free speech that, you know, it's important to give people their — their — their say. Nobody wanted to do it, because they're on our time. They're — they're taking—they're taking up our—they're crowding our space, and this is a difference in philosophy. But that it's the—it's dumb (?).

I: Now let me just ask a question, you invited the "anti-"s to speak?

JB: [nodding]

I: Okay.

JB: It was a minister up there.

I: But they declined?

JB: Yeah, they had little signs up at the top of the hill and we're down in the amphitheater, and so we had them down to speak for a second, and he was—he was totally unaffected and that's what I wanted him to know. Is that you just—like I'm preaching to the choir, he's also preaching to the choir, except it's not his choir. And he's not going to make any headway. Interestingly, we had a group from Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]—it was a peace group. (____???) of Peace at the University of Pennsylvania—young man—young, quicker man and informed the commune, and — and —and they came up with just wonderful flags that this was so superb. This was a socialist technique. This is what socialists do to you—remember the socialist science, that the—when we marched, socialists would come and this great big banner that would go up and right across the whole street. [motioning with his hands up and over his head] So they would march in the middle of again—again, in the middle of all the people that they could get, and it looked like they were huge. There were two people who were socialists carrying the sign. [chuckles] But it was wonderful, and that's what this group did. They had these marvelously large flags [camera focuses, video becomes blurry]—a red one—I'm sorry, an orange one and a yellow one, and that's all it was. There wasn't anything on. There was these big, colorful flags. And I remember marching in those things and feeling so proud [laughing] and so happy. And so why, what — what remarkable technique this is to make work, and they did.

I: Well, what happened to the ordinance at that time?

JB: Nothing. We—it—they—the city solicitor did a judgment that said that we can't pass them, because the state—that the—gay rights are not legal in the state, and there was this still. It was like they still won't legal — still illegal in the state, so we cannot have—and no, it was Human Relations Commission had not best, we cannot exceed the authority of the Human Relations Commission, and as I recall, it was illegal. Okay? And so we could stand to drop it at that point. We did go on meeting for a while, and again, we were just having so much fun—just having so much fun as an organization. This was—this was a lot of women—some black people were involved, which is one of the few times that really there were some black people who came to the meetings, and I was very pleased with that. We tried—Dixie was such a good friend and such a wonderful leader and theorist and she taught me so much about, you know, about support, you know, getting out of an organization, making coalitions, and how you do it, and you know, you need to be out—normally outreach needs to go out and you need to support. You need to go to their meetings. You need to go to a black church if they're having a Martin Luther King Day, you go sit in the pew and be a part of their situation, which is a practice that ya know— that we can follow after that, but I really didn't know before how to do these things and she was such a gift in that, in terms of the coalition, and now she's such a gift in that. I wish—when I—I was so happy to belong to NOW, because it was my model. I was sure that this was going to be the model for the future of the gay movement, except that now our organizations have broad canvases and broad issues and numbers and numbers of issues that they're involved in women's health from daycare to wages to non-politics—Dixie said, “You know, we don't want to take your positions, that's that really—we don't want to do that. We're political, but we're political support. [Interviewer coughs] We're political people. Okay? And—and—and if we do that, we bite into the establishment, and we can't fight it if we do.” Another thing that she said that was— was a wonderful thing, I'll never forget that I thought was such a great lesson was , “Don't put in

today's world what you don't want in tomorrow's world." You know, so don't put sexism in today's world. Don't be sexist in any way. Don't put it in today's world what you don't want in tomorrow's world. Just eliminate it. It's no longer what we do, and it was a great piece of advice—great piece of advice. We tried to think about that since then about don't pay attention, don't be a part of that game. Play your own game. The one that's in tune with your integrity and in tune with your tomorrow—create your tomorrow today by looking at a life and I just think that was—that was such an incredibly smart (____???) organization. So that you don't—what we did with the organization is I think we tried to be careful about not—not—not keeping it for tomorrow, not—not—not shaping it. Instead, we had to live with what we didn't want to live with.

I: Did...?

JB: Then, okay, they were part of that. They were very supportive. A lot of people were. Le-Hi-Ho was where the LEPOCO [Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern] came. Lots of people, all activists, came and supported us, and the Human Relations Commission supported us, but it simply didn't work out. With that said at that point, now what also happened is that there was a—some leftists who were involved in... something happened... that they were involved in there, and I've forgotten. They called it the "Muhlenberg Fire," or something like that, but they were socialists that... it were a part of our organization, and we got in. They were the ones that wanted us to fight especially on the free speech issue. Of course, it's very important, and it was true that that free speech, when you were told by city council that you cannot speak, we won't hear you, that's a free speech issue, so we—after, that was the fight that continued after the... the fight for after we came off the gay rights thing. We're weren't gonna do it. That didn't happen as a matter of fact until 2000-something, and I don't know who did this. I met the women in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] at the Pride Conference—or the Pride Day. And we were just talking one time, and then I met—these were the women who in fact had lived their fight in 2000 together.

I: For the ordinance in Allentown [Pennsylvania]?

JB: Yeah, the ordinance.

I: Right.

JB: In Allentown [Pennsylvania], which did finally work out, and that was what? 1977, 78 'til then, and (____???) I didn't know about my organization—I didn't need to say anything that was long past history. I was very pleased to know and to meet these women that had actually brought to fruition at a later time. Really thrilled, 'cause I didn't—I didn't—I didn't—we probably—I didn't know what to do at that point about fighting it, quite frankly. We just—we just simply dropped it, and I left it—I left the seat before very much longer than that. [coughs] But Le-Hi — that was important ad hoc organization. This was the organization that gave worth to the...

I: Did you speak at that public meeting on... with—before council?

JB: Oh, yeah.

I: On the ordinance.

JB: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we spoke—we spoke a number of times. We spoke every meeting to the ordinance.

I: Right.

JB: In favor of the ordinance, as long as they would let us. At the meeting in which we — we — which they had silences, that next meeting, we went in and when it came time for public discussion—they announced for public discussion, we all put tape over our mouths to indicate that we had been silenced, and... what happened with that? There was a person from the office of—CID [Criminal Investigation Division] office, and you know, we talked about gay rights, and then city council said, “Okay, we gave up. We take back our words. We change what we’ve said before—we (_____???) before. Now you can talk about it.” That was the end of it. That’s all we really wanted. Now, we had wanted the issue of free speech, but we did it to the opposition, which was funny, but that was a victory. (_____???) all the same. It was important to do that, very important to go in and represent the free speech issue, absolutely. I just thought it was remarkable that they—they had—they were the ones that wrote the rule and got away with it. Made the change. [Interviewer begins to ask a question] Okay, I—there wasn’t, okay that was the group that—that formed Gay Line—Gay Line, it was called in Allentown [Pennsylvania]. And it was literally my part. We got a local group that did the training for us. It was the...

I: Gay Line? What was that?

JB: Gay Line. No, there was a group of—that did drug therapy, and... I had been involved with them, and I had gone there as a non-druggie, okay? But they ran therapy groups, and I was very impressed with them. Really, really liked them a whole lot, and got so much out of that—that time in my life was so important for me to go and clean up the whole, you know, renew the whole psychological thing, and I really emerged as a different person as a result of them in ’78—’78 to ’80. I think I went two full years to them. Right next door to me, as a matter of fact. It was called Confront, but they were—they did the training that went for Switchboard about how to handle these serious matters that came up and gave us a place to meet. And, ultimately then the Switchboard worked through my —my apartment. I had a new apartment—I had just divorced, so I got an apartment that had a back door that the people could come in through and not bother—not bother to come through the house. It was the fire escape, and they’d come up the fire escape, and went to the room with the switchboard, and that lasted for two years. I moved to Bethlehem [Pennsylvania]—moved the telephone line right along, but then it folded, okay? After I—after I left Bethlehem [Pennsylvania] and went back to Allentown [Pennsylvania], that—that thing folded.

I: The switchboard didn’t continue after that?

JB: I’m sorry?

I: The switchboard did not continue after that?

JB: Yeah, that was '78, that was '78 I think '79 — '79 — '79 to '80, and then I was living in Allentown [Pennsylvania] separate by myself, breaking us out of the picture. Ricky was down the street. My lover who's down the street.

I: Is there anything you want to tell us about between... say, 1980 and '83, when you went to Chicago [Illinois]?

[JB lets a deep breath out]

I: What was your life like then? I mean, you were still involved with the Rural Gay Caucus, the Pride conferences...

JB: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was at fault, but I was also out—remember, Ricky was my — was my ride. And Ricky—my lover was a person who was different with me than he was with everybody else, and he took me all of me, because I wanted to—all of me to the caucus and remember we were meeting all over the damn state, because we didn't have a home. We didn't have a central place. We had a church on Sundays once a month at the French Meeting House. After that, then we would meet wherever we could meet and wherever people—like, if they were—if the person in charge of the committee, they could name their own home town, that's where we'd go for a meeting. If a committee meeting or whatever... and Ricky did that for me, he just drove everywhere. He loved to drive. That was a big thing, so I didn't have a car after that, and therefore, I really was very handicapped in terms of being able to get around and to do some of the things I had wanted to do. I still made it. One way or another, I got to most—almost all of the meetings of the other caucus, but I didn't get to other meetings. I couldn't be as participant. I mean, we had the first conference, the second conference, then after that, I wasn't able to be at the third conference, couldn't do it. And then the fourth conference is the one that we planned [video adjusts, becoming clear] and I let down, and you had to finish up. But that was caucus material, [video adjusts, becomes blurry] and then—but I—so I—that was one of the periods in which I was inactive. The same thing happened to Le-Hi-Ho. You get a lover, and we really back off, and—and we got a divorce sometimes is what I call. And, so I—Ricky and I separated, and life changed for me to a certain degree, but a lot of the therapy changed me, too. In terms of becoming, I felt much more of a person—a whole person in terms of doing this wonderful therapy business. If they did, it was very important. I don't think the Gay Line—Gay Line... did its—did its thing, which is informational was its purpose, and I don't recall if there were any really serious things that came in on Gay Line. We didn't have to get any suicide calls. It just didn't happen to us, fortunately, so those were really frightening if they ever happen to you. [coughs] But it went through those couple years, and it—it got right through my house. Good people, but we only ever did that first 10—that first 10 group people—group of 10 people as I recall, and we just never needed any more—never got any more. They—two years later, two I think, they originated or 80- something. They re-originated the Gay Line, re-instituting the Gay — Gay Line. I think that it operated through a LBGTC—LGBT Center that they had in Allentown [Pennsylvania] at that time. They had it for a few years. They had it up until '82, maybe '85 when that—when the Center closed. I didn't want to know how it opened I was out of town, and so I went back one time and found out that was there and went to see them and saw

that Le-Hi-Ho had now had its offices—its offices there or—and the library there which was off in the corner. Le-Hi-Ho was meeting there from its meeting, and Le-Hi-Ho was running the whole the newsletter for the organization—for the larger organization now called the Le-Hi Lehigh Valley Times, I think, something like that. Instead of Le-Hi whatever we had said it was, and they went to me for, I think, and that whole organization closed down when—and I never have know what happened to Le-Hi-Ho. I went to Allentown [Pennsylvania] Library to find out, and what I could find out. Their last thing—public statement, I believe, was '83, about the time that that Center closed. '83? No. I'm sorry. '87, '87. And... I don't know after that. I do know—I think Le-Hi-Ho was—had a 20th anniversary. I know that. A 20th anniversary party, 'cause I talked to Ron C. That was the last time I talked to Ron, but sometime after that, said, “Ron, do you believe that?” — When Ron told me he goes, “We had an organization that lasted 20 years.” Amazing thing. And—and I don't know after that. That was evidence that they were around for a year or two, that somebody kept the newspaper—box—I don't know the termination date, they never found out. I don't know. And I never found out what happened to Le-Hi-Ho library, which is one thing that I really wanted to know was... I'm sure, because the people they were so proud of it, and so serious about it and really, you know, kept contributing to it and making it this—this larger collection and adding to it, in terms of magazines and magazine articles and—and anything that they—clippings—whatever they could add to it, but it became a serious and greedy thing. It would be a wonderful resource if we could find it, but I'm sure it did not go to — (Kinetic???) was formed before Le-Hi-Ho folded. That's all I know, so I don't think that they got the library, and I never found out, but I would love to know what happened to it. It was intact when I had it, before I left I had it in 1980, the library was in my house. We honestly didn't have anywhere else to store it, and this is a problem when you don't have homes—when you don't have buildings. Then you have storage problems like we did with the library—we had 400 books. Where do they go? And all I had were the books—I didn't have the other files. We didn't have the magazines and the stuff that had built up that I don't know about. I didn't know where that stuff was, and I assume that Ron C. kept it, because he had a house, and his lover had been active in terms of being an archivist for Le-Hi-Ho organization. Just don't know what happened to it and can't find out and haven't been able to find it out.

I: What led—what led to your decision to go to Chicago [Illinois]?

JB: Lover. Met Doug in 1980, and... we—we—he was traveling from Chicago [Illinois]. Doug was a airline reservations, and one of the things about working for airlines, if you don't know this, it used to be that you could fly all over—and privileges to go—you could go—literally, almost go look at—go on the airline—you had to get a ticket. And you had to just have stand-by, but as a matter of fact, you could go all over the world on virtually any airline. And they had inter-line agreements with—and I took a couple of those trips with him. Ultimately, it was Pan Am [Pan American World Airways] he worked for first, and Pan Am was the world's biggest airline at that time, and that big—and was the real originator of airlines in terms of routing and—and so on, and really hadn't reached all over the world. But every time they wanted to go anywhere that they wanted to have a diplomatic mission, then they said ok, and then the president said, “We're gonna run an airline there, give us permission and guarantee our wages” is what they did. It guarantees us a profit. [coughs] So, Pan Am had this incredible reach, and we went—we could go anywhere, and we did go—we did go to some places, but that's because he had that, he could come out to Allentown [Pennsylvania] for free. And, so he came for about, oh,

I don't know, six months or so? And I said, "Okay, I really—this is really nice, but we aren't going to be lovers?" and that was a—that was a year later. I met him first in October. A year later on New Year's Eve, I proposed to him. And said, "Okay, I give up." [laughing] "I really do want to marry you," and that's how I got to Chicago [Illinois]. And that's when we—that's when he had decided if we wanted to be—if we wanted to be lovers. It was good, and it was good. It was a good life with Doug. It was a good life for 18 years, and then it. Then he divorced me, okay? And... but that was—that was kind of good, because it was really Doug coming into his own, you know? Doug had always been... didn't stand up for himself, I think. And I said, you know, the one thing I wanted was for him to stand up for himself. He did, and I lost him. [laughing] Ain't that funny? I feel like—I just think that's just kind of an irony, but he really did, and we divided right down to the teaspoons when we separated. That's a hard, hard decision, and it was a long time... enacting that between the (_____???) in '88 and '90—I'm sorry, in 1998 and then in 2000, we actually separated. That's why I came here two years later. We had to sell—you know, get the house ready to sell and so on, and all that kinda—two years—two years in enacting that—about a year and a half.

I: What did you do in Chicago [Illinois]?

JB: Okay, now, I didn't mean to get that far ahead, because really—I want to say what I was say in a minute.

I: Okay.

JB: And this student—really, there are a couple organizations—while we're doing an oral theme, just to reconnect. There was an SVGU [Susquehanna Valley Gays United] that Sam Deetz did, and I think you did it [pointing to interviewer] and you did it [pointing to LM] or you did an—an interview with Sam finally. Is that correct?

I: I didn't, but...

JB: You did a Sam Deetz interview.

LM: Yes.

I: Okay, you did that.

JB: Okay, and did—and Sam—Sam had an—he told you about the SVGU at that time? And the council?

I: Susquehanna Valley—

JB: Susquehanna Valley Gays—

I: United.

JB: In—in Northumberland [Pennsylvania] which, if you know Northumberland [Pennsylvania], is this little tiny place next to Sunbury [Pennsylvania].

I: Right.

JB: They have a 4,000 population. We were so tickled, because we had the smallest—the smallest town with a gay organization in it.

I: Yeah, I remember driving up there all the time.

JB: Yeah. And... that—so Sam did that, and the off shoot of that was—was Danny and...

I: Williamsport.

JB: Williamsport. Got inspired by—by belonging to that organization, and, then Danny went through social (____???) organizations up there. Just again, to through these names out and so that they become a part of—

I: Dan Manable?

[video cuts]

[Burns_4]

JB: Okay, I've been saving this—I'm saving talking about democracy, because I want to have that conversation with you. You know, I want to do a—a—a mutual interview in which you and I are together, talking about the caucus. And I think that's a good kinda—a good thing for us to do. We've done it before, but I think we need to do it one last time.

I: 'Kay.

JB: More officially, so that we really are sure of what—what we need to cover.

I: If you want to do it that way, that's great.

JB: Yeah, I think that's—that's the way to do it. What other organizations did I belong to? Allentown NOW. It was Dixie's idea that there was a very large chapter—a very, very large active chapter in Lehigh Valley [Pennsylvania] called Lehigh Valley NOW organization. And it was—it was an umbrella organization in terms of the fact that it covered Easton [Pennsylvania]. There were — there were no other organizations that covered the Lehigh Valley [Pennsylvania], so we really drew from all these—these broad base of people. Very good organization. NOW at that time, we talking about the 1980s and remember that that was the year our (____???) They—they—when—when...

I: 70s and 80s?

JB: You are right. And we did an awful lot with things...

I: You could (____???)

JB: We did an awful lot of things with the ERA [Equal Right Amendment]. Create the support for the ERA. That's one of the things about the—that GCS did letter writing campaigns, for instance. And Le-Hi-Ho did them—but GCS, they coordinated the signing and writing and... my lover did the banner for them. I—that the one that's — the one that's the iconic picture of the project is Ricky standing there with his banner that he had made. He also made the banner in front of us—my lover made the banner in front of us. He was very adept with his hands. Very intelligent hands in a way that —mine was thumbs (____???) his hands were, and so in terms of real talent. I mean, he could do anything with his hands—knitted, crocheted, did macramé like crazy... you know, just automatically. I really depended on Ricky for some things, you know, he wasn't—he wasn't the brightest bulb in the world, but he saw things—'cause he saw the surface. I'm not the surface person. I was trying to get down in—not—I dismissed the surface, and Ricky could tell you that people were left-handed or right-handed or if they limped or whatever. I didn't see those things. He always did, and I felt I depended on him for it. It was a smart—a smartness about him. So, I talked about him being—at one point I talked about Ricky being different. That he wouldn't—he would take me (____???), but he was never complaint, but other—people didn't like him. Something about Ricky, I don't know what... that—that—that I do know what, but people didn't—people didn't care for him, and... and he wasn't—he couldn't—he didn't speak—he spoke rarely at meetings... didn't have a whole lot to say, and did other things and it was for the things between the meetings... but he was an enormous support, and I'm very grateful for that. Know him today. I shouldn't throw this out here, but I will. He's living with a woman—he's been living with a woman for 30 years. Blows me away. [chuckles] Now, he's not having sex with her, but he's rolling with a woman, and has done that, again, for 30 years, 'cause—and since we all—within a year or two after we separated—right after Doug—after Doug and I—after I moved to Chicago [Illinois], he got together with this woman he's still with and living in Allentown [Pennsylvania]. [video focuses, becoming clear] Stubborn... diabetic... heavy... he weighs about 300-and-something pounds... it's a sad story, and also very difficult for me to know, because for the same reason that—that he was uncommunicative [stumbles on word] then is still uncommunicative then—now—and difficult to speak to. He doesn't understand me—he doesn't—he little—I could talk to him all day long and find out that he didn't understand a word. He'd just sit there and say [nods head up and down, mouth open]. You know, really? He didn't know what I was talking about, and you know, it's weird—weird—Doug was always so different, because Doug—I always wanted to hear, and I didn't care what he said, and it's just what the conversation was. I loved him very much, but... it was difficult, because he was a difficult personality, I think. And I still care, but at the same time, he's just as stubborn as he ever was. Hard to know, hard to know. [leans forward, face off camera] Organizations, again. [camera adjusts to see his face] Allentown NOW was about 14 of us, as I recall? Very active people [leans back again, camera readjusts]

I: What did you say? I'm sorry.

JB: Allentown NOW

I: Yes.

JB: The National Organization of Women and this was a group that Dixie fostered.

I: Right.

JB: When she was president of—the state president. She said, as many people—and this was true. This I knew beforehand, but I think that it may have been one of her bits of wisdom is that... as many organizations as you get, you get that many more activists, okay? So she was in favor of creating as many organizations as you possibly could, so she created Allentown NOW—as opposed to Lehigh Valley NOW, and there were 14 of us, and we were a really active group. We were the most mixed group. We had—we were family, there were—her cousin came, you know, the cousins mother came—we were Black, we were Hispanic, we were Chinese, we were male, female, gay, straight, everything, you know. We were so proud of them, because we really felt that we were the most mixed organization that you could get, and only 14 of us, and we were active. We would go to all kinds of marches in Washington [D.C.]—the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], we went out to the great march in Chicago [Illinois] after—when they did the first rally—the big rally in Chicago [Illinois], and we're going out there and arriving in Chicago [Illinois] early morning. Didn't spend a dime in Illinois, because we weren't about to support their economy.

I: 'Cause they hadn't passed the ERA?

JB: Yeah, because they had voted against—they had taken—I think they had taken it back.

I: Yeah, they rescinded their vote.

JB: And I went to Washington [D.C.]—the marches in Washington [D.C.]. They had great big marches—the vast marches of 100,000, 200,000 people—I don't know. It was incredible, and the March on Washington of '78. That was the gay March on Washington in 1978. We would go up—we went to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] first. Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] did the—organizing the meeting for the march. They're—the march they're gonna have one that they—they have this—I think the meeting was either in '78 or '79, and then they didn't—they actually did not march until next year. It was the first March on Washington, and it was a huge...

I: I marched, but I wasn't involved with the planning.

JB: We met at a friend's meeting—met at the friend's meeting house. Do you remember these things? Do you remember these details?

I: A little bit.

JB: Okay. We met at the friend's meeting house and was a great clash between women who really, you know, very—very sane and include us—you know, these are our issues and pay attention to us. I remember how strong they were with that and — and very forthright in terms of really bringing up women's issues and making the guys pay attention to it in a way that I just—that I hadn't really seen before. This was—not a confronted meeting, but it was—in a

certain sense, it really was also—it was confronted, and it was confronted between people in Texas who wanted—who were much more human rights people as opposed to—Texas was human rights, so they had that kind of broad agenda, Pennsylvania went through the council—did the LGBT business. At—which is subtly different, okay? Your emphasis is subtly different on that’s your focus, okay? Human rights can be a very much broader issue and be a milder kind of—milder presentation to the public than LGBT, which is a little more in your face, and a little more inclusive in terms of really being very vociferous about—about transvestites and transsexuals and really representing them as people and making them a part of our existence that you just didn’t find it in—necessarily, and I will syntax this so I, you know, if something a little bit deserves recognition. And so that difference, but that’s where came from. There was a whole big — big group there that represented at that particular conference, I recall, they were very strong and really very much behind—may have made a word or originated the idea of the march... I’m not sure, but they came to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] and then we—we had this great conference—great (____???), great (____???) with the— Friends for (____???)

I: And Lisa White was representing all the transsexuals—the transgender peoples.

JB: Yeah.

I: At that time, she was a very active in the Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] area and with the caucus.

JB: Yes, yes, right.

I: She brought us around to talk to the—be able to take in a lot of transgender issues and what they were up against.

JB: Yes.

LM: This is for the next interview.

I: Okay, gotcha.

LM: I think you’re getting tired Joe.

JB: Probably.

I: Yeah, and you’re getting very red. I’m worried about you.

[Video ends]