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Interviewee: Nancy Datres

Interviewer: Lonna Malmshemer

Date of Interview: August 27, 2014

Location of Interview: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Sara Tyberg

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Abstract:

Nancy Datres was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania in 1948 and first moved to Harrisburg to pursue computer science after becoming blacklisted by the Altoona Police Department when she was just 27 years old. Thereafter, Nancy moved through several careers, holding positions such as a community college professor, journalist, legal writer, and lawyer. In her interview, Nancy discusses the incredible impact of her sexuality on the course of her academic and professional lives, which required her to change schools and even careers whenever an environment became too unsafe for her to stay. She illustrates several examples of harassment and discrimination in her life, as well as the inefficiency of local law enforcement, educational institutions, and court systems to help alleviate these injustices. Additionally, Nancy remarks on her difficult financial situation and her 20-year relationship and engagement with another woman. Since her first interview with the LGBT History Project, Nancy has become at peace with her sexuality, saying that after everything she's been through, she does not care who knows she is gay.

[There are video problems. The video cuts in and out a few times; the beginning of the interview is not there.]

LM: I guess let's proceed, and if I find it at the end of the video that we don't have that first part, we'll do it again. How about that?

ND: That's fine.

LM: Okay, so we were talking about what it was like to be in a family with four siblings, and you said that you didn't really feel that that was the case in some ways, because you had older siblings that...

ND: Yes, two of them were—there was an eight-year gap between the first two children born and the last three of us. I don't know if my mother just [laughs] had enough of my dad and, you know, just would not be intimate with him or what the story is, but they were married more or less by the time I was five or six, and essentially I became a babysitter then, because one had—my brother—oldest brother had seven children. So, I became a babysitter, and that sort of... satisfied my interest in having any children of my own. [laughs]

LM: [laughs] Okay!

ND: That was enough! I like kids, but I didn't want any of my own. [laughs]

LM: Okay! Schooling!

ND: I went to Bellwood-Antis High School, graduated in 1966. Then I started—I wasn't planning on going to college. No one in our family had gone to college. No one in my parents—neither parents' families had gone to college. They came from a very low-income blue-collar background, both families—sides of my family... but, my shorthand teacher—because I was taking business courses to be a secretary in high school—she talked me and talked my dad into having me go to college, because she felt I should.

So, I went to Penn State Altoona campus for a year, and surprisingly, received the outstanding Freshman of the Year award for having the highest GPA [grade point average] which did surprise me, because I wasn't used to competing in a larger swimming pool, so to speak. [laughs] Bellwood-Antis was a very small school. 105, I think, in my graduating class. I had to stop after the first year at Penn State, though, because my father was hurt on the railroad, and there was no income coming in. So, I withdrew, and I got a job with Bell Telephone as a long-distance operator, and I worked there for about five years, and this was back when it was legal for Bell Telephone to hire only women. [emphasizes] Only women. You know, and that was perfectly legal. And, it was an okay job. I worked after the first year. I worked in the evening hours. You work, let's say, five to eleven, have a half-hour break, and you get paid for eight hours, even though you're only working five and a half. And, then... eventually, though, I ended up leaving Altoona for reasons based on discrimination and blacklisting—"outing" me of the Altoona Police force...

LM: We wanna step there and let's tell this whole story from the beginning.

ND: Okay. Well, after working at Bell Telephone, and I decided to resume my college goals. Then, I went to Mt. Aloysius College, and I was majoring in criminal justice, because that was supposed to be an up-and-coming field, especially for women, and this was early 1970s. I did very well, I graduated summa cum laude with a two-year degree in criminal justice, and at that time, the Altoona Police Department had an ad in the paper. They were hiring four police officers, and of course there were no women on it, but you had to take the civil service test—the local civil service test, and there were about 205 people applying, and when you would go to pick up the application, it was very obvious, you know, that they were not ready for any females, because they'd say, "Is this for your brother?" You know, when you would say to them, "No, it's for me," there'd always be this laughing and smirks—snide remarks to someone in the background about, "Oh, we have another one," you know? I would say there were probably maybe 15 women who applied out of the 204 applicants. And, I scored high up on the—very high, up on the test... and so I think they felt compelled to interview me. They did interview me. And, they did not offer me the job, though. And they didn't hire—they didn't offer the job to any women, period. And so, with the encouragement of some friends—and you have to realize that this is in the '70s, and women's rights movement is prime and really strong, and [gestures with her hands in conclusion] So, I filed a—I did file a gender-based complaint—on my gender, as a female—with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

Well, that turned out to be a huge regret, on my part. Because, through the Human Relations Commission's investigation, it was discovered that the Altoona Police bypassed veterans who had the extra points—male veterans, because these jobs had apparently had already been known,

who they were going to be given to. The civil service exam in other words was just going through the formalities. Essentially.

Well, that hit the newspaper and the media, and of course, the Altoona Police and the Mayor and everything needed someone to really come down on [makes striking motion with her hand], and if it hadn't been for me, none of this would have come out about the veterans. So, I was the bitch who caused all this trouble, and I say "bitch," because things became horrendous. I had gone to one city council meeting where I spoke up, and that was on tv. There were articles continually in the newspaper. But what the police did then, they created their own "dossier," they called it, on me, personally. And then they outed me publically. I would get death threats in the middle of the night, or even in the daytime walking down the street, you know. From people who were so angry that I was the one who caused the disclosure of these veterans being bypassed to hire other people. You know, and it was horrendous. I stayed in Altoona, I guess, for about a year. I wouldn't been—I couldn't get a job doing anything, I mean, cleaning toilets in a hotel. No one would hire me. No one. The blacklisting was just horrendous. And, they even said it to my face at one point—I went over to the Office of the Police and the Mayor, and asked—I was starting asking questions, and they said to me—I'll never forget, a police officer [leans back] he was like, high up—a lieutenant—and he leaned back in his chair with his legs spread wide open, you know, kind of that... my testicles are huge and you're this awful female, and he said—and I'll tell you right now, he said, "You can take that degree you have, and you can wipe your ass with it, because you'll never get a job in that field, and we'll make sure of it." And, they did.

LM: How old were you at this point?

ND: At this point, I was about 26. 25-26. And, so after a year of not being able to get a job, and relying on some help from my mother and sharing expenses with a roommate in a very modest apartment, and the harassment, the phone calls, the death threats, all that kind of stuff, I decided to move to Harrisburg, and I moved here with a gay male friend. And we came down here, and we... within a few years, I realized that the blacklisting did not stop at the criminal justice field.

LM: Now, hold just a minute.

ND: Okay.

LM: We wanna step back. You say you were outed. How could that happen, but let's—tell me your story of coming out to yourself, first.

ND: Well, coming out to myself happened when I met a woman at a bar, and I had gone there more or less out of curiosity. I mean, 'cause I myself dated men. I even got engaged five different times in my 20s up to about 25 or 26. But I think it was mostly peer pressure, because Bell Telephone, again, was all-female, and women would be coming in, showing off their engagement rings, and the older women would be teasing me. "Nancy, you know, when are we gonna see one of those on your hand," and so forth and so on.

You know, so—but I started realizing: even though I loved these different people I was engaged to, I didn't love them in that way, that romantic way, and I wasn't sexually excited about them.

You know, I cared about them. They were all nice guys. And so, then I went to a bar, 'cause I heard about this, I can't remember how I heard of it, because Altoona is really conservative—surprised there even was a bar... and I met a woman there, and she essentially—we dated for awhile—she essentially brought me out. And that—I was 27 then.

LM: And how did other people find this out?

ND: They...

LM: The police.

ND: The police did—they background—they would just—they would do—basically have people go out and find everything they could find on me, just as though—as probably the McCarthy era—how did they find out what people belonged to or whatever? I mean, you know, they didn't—they just went out and created this stuff, and by talking to people who knew me, and—didn't know me well—they voluntarily then gave them, “Oh yeah, she's in a relationship with so-and-so,” and whatever. And then that came out. Publically. In the newspaper and on the radio, you know, and... all was part of their continued defense of why they didn't hire me, you know.

LM: How was your mom responding to all of this?

ND: My mother... I don't think she grasped how harmful it was to me. I don't think she grasped how harmful—even though she herself had gone through a very rough time when she filed for divorce against my father, and she was raising the last three of us on her own and even her own family essentially cut her off. They wouldn't talk to her, they wouldn't help her out financially. She tried to support us on jobs—some factory jobs—like a shoe factory, chicken factory—

LM: What date are we talking about here?

ND: In there, we're talking about the—like '56, '57, '58, you know, and... it was horrible. My mother, I hate to say this, but it was so bad on her, she—she attempted suicide. And I remember [voice wavers] that very well, because... I was 10 years old, and she asked me to take this note to grandmother's and... meaning her mother, and I hadn't known. I didn't know what it was, but I could sense that something was terribly wrong.

We were living in this apartment, and it's just her and myself and my other younger—not younger than me, but the other brother and sister were still at home. Like I said, I knew something was wrong, and I just ran up to my grandmother's as fast as I could, and she lived about three miles away, and here she had turned on the gas in the stove and—but they did get there in time, and—but I—I just never could get over that. It's very hard for me to think about it. But I... digress here.

LM: I'm sorry for asking you.

ND: But even though she herself had gone through such a horrible period, I don't think she grasped at that stage in life, because now we're talking 20 years later, and my father had passed

away, so she no longer had that abusive situation that she was trying to escape from—domestic abuse.

I don't think she really understood the enormity of it, because she—she could have been anything had she—someone told her she should've gone to college. Because she was—like the number one honors student at school, and she had very high IQ. But because she, you know, became a homemaker, I don't think she was in that mindset of like, how damaging this was to me as a woman growing up in the 70s who was looking to be—support myself and not rely on marrying a man for support.

And I don't mean that in a negative way, I'm just saying I don't think—coming from the generation she did, she didn't comprehend this new wave of women's rights and women wanted to create their own careers, not just survive their jobs. So, I don't think she ever grasped how painful it was for me. You know, in a way that was very disappointing for me, and I felt hurt by it, but years later, I had to put it in perspective of what her mindset and what she grew up—and then I was at better able to accept that she just didn't understand it, because her circumstances were very different from mine. She didn't grow up with women marching and wanting careers of their own, you know, so... eventually, it was okay, but no, I don't believe she ever grasped the enormity of it. And even then after leaving Altoona and coming to Harrisburg, I applied to York College, because I wanted to get my Bachelor's degree in—

LM: Now what year would this be?

ND: This would be... 1976, 77. And York College accepted me and I went there to finish my Bachelor's degree and had some part-time jobs while I was doing that... security guard—I also worked part-time at a car dealer—I got through a friend in the service department, just to help with expenses in college, 'cause I had to borrow money for the college. And... then—so I got my Bachelor's degree in 1978 in criminal justice, and I still couldn't get a job anywhere in criminal justice.

I had gotten an interview to be a prison guard up in Muncy Prison, the all-women's prison, and I wasn't hired. I was never given any explanation, even though I took the civil service test for the state and was like, number three or four... I couldn't get anything out of them, you know, as to why.

So, I ended up working in a totally unrelated field, which was a consumer finance company. Making loans to people whose credit is not real good and therefore couldn't get loans through regular banks and unfortunately would be charged higher rates. I didn't like that, ethically, I didn't like it, but I had to have income. And I worked there for about four or five years, and I decided to—well, since my criminal justice degree was worthless—essentially, it was worthless... I decided to take computer classes at the community college in Harrisburg. And I took those part-time in the evening, and did very well in those, and got an associate degree from them. So, I have the bachelor's degree which was worthless [chuckles], job-wise, and now, because I know I can't, and I can't stand this consumer finance realm. Because I find it unethical to you know, charge people this interest and people who are behind on their 20 days—you call

them and try to get them to take out more loans, and I mean it's just—totally went against my ethics.

So, I did well and had a 4.0 in the computer courses. I understood it very well. I was even asked to teach the introductory course part-time at HACC [Harrisburg Area Community College]. Then the professor who headed up the computer department had also gotten me my first job in the computer field, which was with the City of Harrisburg as a computer programmer. And that was probably about—that was 1982, and... that leads into... more discrimination, then. And a requirement that I once again change my career. And this is how that came about.

Allow me to explain. This professor and—I'm probably pretty naïve, maybe I'm not now, but back then, I was, because I came from a very small town. I didn't think of anybody expecting anything if they got you a job, you know, and you did well in whatever. He was probably 50-something, a short, little bald guy and his wife—he was married—his wife lived way out in a remote area, didn't have a driver's license—he married her when he was 16, because she was pregnant, and he never let her finish high school, wouldn't get her a driver's license... but getting how does all of that relate to me here—he tried to hit on me, okay? Sexually. And he just wouldn't give up, he wouldn't take no for an answer. This went on for about a year, to the point where one Sunday in the summertime on a late Sunday morning, he actually came to where I was living at the time with my then-partner—female partner—and he came to the house, and walked through the yard and was calling out my name, “Nancy! Nancy!” Her parents also lived with us, which converted the house into like a duplex--each having their own side, but her parents lived there half the year and then would go to Florida in the wintertime.

So, there he is, and he's not even inebriated, and I'm not even there, because I had gone for a bike ride. I used to bike ride from up in Dauphin down to Shipoke quite often. So, her parents come out to try to speak to him, and their English is not great, because they were born in Finland. And, they try to explain to him that I wasn't there. He didn't seem to understand, so my partner came out. Well, apparently he put two to—two and two together. Okay? So, all of a sudden, he was saying things that I was one of those “damn lesbians,” “man-hating lesbians,” blah blah blah blah... I was no longer asked to teach up at HACC, after teaching there part time for three and a half years, and I couldn't do anything about that, because part-time is part-time, I mean, you have no rights, essentially. It's, you know, you're like an adjunct.

Even though I had great student evaluations—students really gave me great evaluations, just no longer asked to teach, and I left the city of Harrisburg and—to take a job with a larger company, and—because there was really very little room to grow in Harrisburg—I got great experience there. But, I was given—I was offered the job, and so I turned in my resignation at the City of Harrisburg, and about three days before I was supposed to start, I was called and told that they had to withdraw their offer. And I was never really given a reason why. And so, I'm figuring this has to be because he has a lot of community connections—meaning the professor at HACC. He was the person that knew all the employers in the area, and would place the computer students at HACC—would find jobs for them. He had a lot of connections.

So, I didn't know what to do about that, because that was a private employer. So, then I went to a—oh, what are they called—an employment agency that—either you'll pay a fee or the

employer pays a fee, and they'll match you up. So, I went to one of them, thinking maybe I can get a job this way, and somehow get away from his blackmailing me—blacklisting me, because I'm a lesbian. And... I worked with them for awhile and here, there was a job—a computer job in the Treasury Department of the State, 'kay? Now why they weren't filling this job with civil service, I have no idea, and I didn't care at this point, 'cause I needed a job. I went to that interview—everything went fine, you know, again, I was verbally offered the job and had a start date, and again, about three or four days before the start day, the head hunter, for lack of a—whatever you call them when they work at an employment agency—called me and said he was sorry, the personnel guy from treasury said something came up in my background check, and they couldn't hire me. They had to withdraw.

Well, at this point, I'm pretty frustrated, and I find an attorney who will help me try to get to the bottom of this. And... he worked—he filed different things—filed complaints, and all sorts of things to try and get out what they—what they were trying to do, okay? And, through him doing that and forcing the issue, it came out that the whole Commonwealth of Pennsylvania employment—anywhere in the employment part of the state, as the employer—they had this dossier on me that the Altoona Police created, and it was like, "Do not hire her for anything." And again, though, there was nothing we could do about it, there was no cause of action in legal terms to bring. There really wasn't, especially since this job, again, went through an employment agency and not a civil service.

So—but at least I found out that that's how extensive the Altoona blacklisting was, that—that I couldn't even get a job with the state in any field, whether it was the criminal justice field or whether it was computer programming. So now I have two careers in two different cities where I'm blacklisted, okay? And the one is so broad-sweeping that—I can't get a job with the state of Pennsylvania.

So, once again, I find myself having to either reinvent myself or really have a long commute, so I opted for the long commute, and I did get a computer job in York. And, I worked in the computer field as a programmer analyst and a systems analyst for about a decade. And... from there, I really have switched around career-wise. I—the commute really wore on you, because it was over an hour long, because I was coming from middle Paxton Township, which is about ten miles north of Harrisburg, and then the employer was about ten miles after you got off of the exit from York. So, it was very tiring after several years of that.

So, I decided to go into journalism, and I took some journalism courses at Temple Harrisburg campus, and I worked with—in the newspaper field for about ten years—started at a small, weekly newspaper in Middletown and loved that experience. It was just meant for me. I mean, I just loved it. So, I did, and because it was a small paper, you did everything. You did the reporting, you did editing, you did page layout, and I love that, because I like variety. But eventually then, I went to a daily paper, and they were bought out, because now we're talking late 1990s—this is when a lot of papers were being gobbled up. Although newspapers weren't talking about their own...what was the word back then that was used for downsizing, or whatever it was called back in the late 1990s...a lot of newspapers didn't publish their own. But they would about private companies, but they were being gobbled up and being—and then a lot

of them would close up, and the one that I was at—I had only been there six months, and they were bought out, and they laid off, you know, the new hires. So...

LM: Oh, I thought you worked as a reporter for quite a while?

ND: Well, I did, because I also—

LM: Oh, you mean the last six months after they had got gobbled up?

ND: Yes, yes, yes. So then, I ended up... believe it or not, I ended up—this will be another surprise, because—keep in mind the blacklisting at the state of Pennsylvania—any Commonwealth job, any civil service job, I wouldn't have gotten. Once again, there's an ad in the paper, and it had a P.O. Box and it was for a communication specialist and blah blah blah. It was rather vague, and usually I wouldn't answer ads like that, because I want to know who it is running the ad, but I've just lost my job at the daily newspaper.

Yes, I'm still with my partner, and she's financially okay with me not having income for now, because she has a good job, but I still need to get a job, and so I do answer this, and it turns out it's the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Which is not civil service—they get to hire their own people. They don't go—each party gets to. And it was the Republican, and here I am, a Democrat, and I was offered the job, and I took it, and I switched parties. I didn't feel good about that, but again, I needed a job, and I worked there for about five years until that became too much of a—couldn't live with myself.

LM: What were you doing there?

ND: Each writer, although again, they come up with big names—communication specialist—essentially you were a writer and you were a media liaison. Meaning we would each be assigned about anywhere from 10 to 12 lawmakers, okay? And we would do all their newsletters, we would do all the press releases and compile press packets—like when they wanted to have a press conference to announce a new piece of legislation that were going to be introducing, we would do all that and write speeches for them, all that.

It was pretty nice, except for the last few years, when the dogma really started to come from way up, even outside of Pennsylvania to the point where we were essentially being told what to write. Just tailoring it a little bit, and it was like—it was just—it turned my stomach, because it was what can I say, it was just a lotta boiler plate stuff, and there was no longer any creative outlet in it.

Then of all things, a friend of mine said, “You need—you should go to law school, didn't you? You loved law.” Which, I ended up then, thinking, “Gosh, I've been pushed around as it was, I guess what's one more leap of faith?” Mine you, I'm about 50 now, all right? And... so I do, I had a small townhouse in the Midtown section of Harrisburg, and the bank and I owned it, and I put it up for sale, sold my car, sold a lot of furniture, went to—started out at Widener, for a year and a half—I found that environment way too restrictive and surprisingly, that would have been 2001. I had students in the evening classes, because I went in the evening, hoping to get some

part-time work during the day. So we're talking more of an adult student body. I mean, not too many were my age, but they were at least in their 20s, 30s. And, I start getting some classmates who are making comments about what they believe to be my sexual orientation, okay? And so that and the fact of it, it was such a restrictive environment as far as you had to take courses that they said—you were dictated what courses you were going to take for the first two years. You couldn't have electives. And you know, that was just so confining for me intellectually. I ended up transferring out to DePaul Law School in Chicago. Graduated from there 2006 cum laude and then worked in legal services for about five and a half years. That's...

LM: In Chicago?

ND: No, not in Chicago, I came back to—because I didn't have any family or friends out there. I just picked up and moved out there—got a studio apartment—didn't know anyone—sold my car, my house, went out there, and while it was scary in some ways, it's probably one of the most wonderful experiences I've ever had in my life, because I had never done anything like that before.

I mean, selling everything I had, going out to a city where I know no one—a big city—I had never been in a big city before. But I loved it, because I loved all the diversity and seeing people out in Chicago who are from different countries and wearing their countries' attire, not dressing like the homogenous people here in Central Pennsylvania where we all look alike and talk alike and think alike. If people could pound our minds into conforming to their beliefs...

So it was wonderful, I really loved it. Then, like I said, I worked in legal services for about five, five and a half years—that's providing civil, not criminal—civil services to people that cannot afford a private attorney. So it's a very low-paying job, but... and then I was kind of forced into retirement, because I had to take some family medical leave. And, I couldn't come back after the 12 weeks—I still wasn't ready to come back, and as you probably know, I mean by law, they only have to hold your job for 12 weeks, and so, I lost that job.

Now, I've just been—I've been drawing my social security retirement and going to operate a solo practice out of house. I'm in the process of—I already purchased the hardware—computer and everything, and I just to get that set up and create a website, and I have some clients now, just by word of mouth, but I really need to get that up and going, to supplement my retirement income from social security. So, that's where I'm at, I know it's been a lot of jig-jagging around, but what can I say? It's...

LM: Well, you've given us a good, long occupational and educational history along with how your identity has impacted all of that. Let's step back again and talk about how it might have impacted the rest of your life, your social life... your thinking about a lot of other things—your political life, that sort of thing.

ND: Well, it did very much impact my social life and my personal life, because after the professor at HACC had discovered I was living with a woman, up in Middle Paxton Township, and that got all around, all of a sudden... people who moved in, about two or three years after we

moved there. We bought a house in 1979, and it's right next to the river—my former partner and I—she doesn't mind my using her first name, Rita. We okay?

LM: Mhm.

ND: And, but then there's this married couple who bought a house maybe three years later that was about ten houses up the road from us, and they were very good friends with this professor, and all of a sudden, the wife and a female friend of hers who then moved in a year later to the house right next to them, who's now married... those two women decided to start harassing my partner and I. And this went on and on and on for about two and a half years. It was unrelenting.

In the summertime, my partner and I did a lot of bike riding, so we'd be coming down from Dauphin down on the main highway in the summertime, on our bikes going down from Front Street to Riverfront and on down to Shipoke. Those women would get in their cars—their car, the two of them would get in one of their cars. They would wait. They knew we liked to bike ride, and they would wait somewhere until we were out on that highway, and then they would get out on that highway and roll down their windows and scream, "Pussy eaters! Pussy eaters!" to the whole world, you know, I mean so anyone could hear and everyone. 'Cause it's summertime and a lot of people—it's not real hot weather, so they don't have their AC on, they had their windows down—a lot of convertibles. They would throw pictures on our porch of men with erections and say, "Why don't you try this?" They went so far as to put homemade signs about [makes large rectangle with hands] as big as this half of the table at each end of the road that we lived on—homemade signs that said, "Two lesbians at 12 River Road Night light security light, wonder why?" and the other end, the sign had said, "Open house—open lesbian house," you know, "Two lesbians 12 River Road." They would send mail to us, addressed—not our names, "Two lesbians" and it had our house name and the street, and it would be delivered to us.

Now, my partner went to the post office, which at that time was in Harrisburg—the main post office—and spoke to the head person, and took that mail into him and asked why would this ever be delivered like this? And he told her he—there was nothing he could do about it. It had a street address on it, it had a city, state, and zip code—they had to deliver it. He felt that it was awful, but he, you know, he—there was nothing he could do about it. One other time, when they would harass us by throwing stuff—they would key our cars. They would throw eggs against our garage, which was about 100 feet—it was an unattached garage 100 feet from the house.

They would throw eggs and do all sorts of malicious mischief type of stuff, and so the one time, we did call the state police on them, after—finding our car keyed for about the third time. And a state trooper came and talked to us, and his response was—because we told him about that specific thing, and we both saw them do it, so we were witnesses for them having done it. We actually saw them go by and key the car, and then we also told him about the other stuff, and he said, "Well, don't you kind of expect this when you're two women living together? Two people of the same gender?" and so there was nothing we could do about that, okay?

Eventually, we did file harassment charges ourselves at the district justice level, all right? And, we had an attorney, they came in with an attorney so defended them, and they lied and

everything else, but one of the charges did stick. One of the harassment charges did stick, but then they appealed it and took it down to the Dauphine County courthouse, and meanwhile, they and that professor had very good political connections down there, and all of a sudden, the thing just disappears. It is essentially whitewashed, you might as well say.

And, so we realized what we we're dealing with, and in fact, one of the women actually made that comment to us one day when they're harassing us. She said, "You don't know who you're dealing with, I have all sorts of connections." The other incident about the harassment I need to tell is the woman who moved in next to the woman who was married, who she herself had never been married—and these women I'd say were about 50, I think their early 50s at this time, whereas my partner and I were in our early 30s—and that woman...

I was down at my garage working on my car one time—I used to change my own oil back when you could do that and they didn't make things so awkward. And she came down, and this is an afternoon in the summertime, you know, by herself, and she gets out of her car, and I'm thinking, "Oh god, there's no witnesses gonna be around, it's just me and her." Her name—first name is Emily, and again, this is all public record. She challenges me to fight her right then and there, she said, "I'm gonna—I wanna whip your ass, come on! Get out from under that car right now, I wanna go one-on-one with you!" And I told her, I said, "Emily, get in your car and leave." You know? "Get in your car and leave. You will not come out the better of any physical fighting you might want to get into with me. I'm a lot younger than you are."

And she did finally go, and she said, "This isn't the last of this." So, one day, I'm driving down Front Street on a work weekday to go to work, and Emily is behind me in her car, and I thought, "Oh my god," you know, "Now what's she up to?" So—and they didn't know exactly where I worked, and I didn't want them to know. So, I pulled into another place, a business on Front Street—that used to be called the USF&G Building up in a 3200 block. I pulled in there in their parking lot, and it was pretty empty, because it was early morning. I mean, there would be people coming in, but Emily followed me in there, and so she's—her car is maybe 100-200 feet away from mine. I stopped my car. She stopped hers. She got in her glove compartment, she got out a handgun and pointed it at me. [makes motion with her hand] I mean, she's sitting in her car, and she pointed it at me. And I'm—I'm scared, like is this person that crazy that she's going to shoot me? Because one or both of them at some time had said, "We'll blow your heads off," you know, during some of them escapades. And... at that moment, someone came in who was going to work at USFG, and they saw it, and Emily took off—put the gun back and took off.

I filed charges against that, because I had a witness, and that was at the magistrate level—district justice level. Low and behold... in the meantime, while we're waiting for the hearing to be—date to be set, we had to—we ended up hiring an attorney to file a civil lawsuit against them, because at this point, I mean after about two and a half years of unrelenting harassment, I am having to get my doctor to prescribe medication for me, because I am a nervous wreck. And I—there are days I miss work, because I'm just too—I mean, it was horrible. It was like living in a hell. It was awful, it was like torture. And, so there was a civil suit filed, and—we're still waiting for the hearing date for this incident where she pointed the gun at me, and we have a witness. Well, the hearing date kept getting postponed and postponed. It was like a year after the incident.

Finally there was a hearing date, and we contacted the witness, hoping she'd still—well, she said, “Oh, I will never forget that day. Yes, I'll be there.” So, we were very lucky.

So, we went to the magistrate—it was up on North 6th Street, Division Street, and Emily's car was already there—and her attorney's car. And, we go in with our attorney and our witness, and we're expecting the hearing to take place. Well, the district justice comes out, finally, and where he sits, and he says, “It's my understanding that there's a civil case been filed involving this entire situation. Is that correct?” and I said, “Yes, yes there has.” And I said, “But that has nothing to do with this, this is a criminal case.” He says, “Well, I am saying it does have something to do with that. It's a civil case, it's filed, it covers all this, so we're not going to entertain any criminal charges here.” I don't know if those were his exact words, but he said we're not having a hearing, we're not having a case. Let the civil case handle it. So, again, she used her connections to get [shaking head] you know? There's no way, those are two separate things. One—just because you file a civil case does not mean you can't criminal charges against somebody, and she should've been charged. I mean, pointing a gun at me like that, oh my god. But... so it affected our lives terribly, I mean medically...

LM: What happened with the civil case?

ND: The civil case, they responded, their attorney responded and of course denied, deny, deny, everything, everything... but what did happen was the harassment stopped, okay? We never went to trial, but the harassment stopped. And, so it cost us about 5,000 dollars in attorney fees, and plus, like I said, the effect it had on my health, and they did know where my partner worked, and they had sent mail to her place of employment. And she had a high-up position, so any mail that comes in there is opened by administrative staff. They had sent a big manila folder with pictures of women that were nude laying on the beach and one had long red hair, which I had long red hair at the time, and other stuff all about lesbians that they cut out of different things and just shoved all this stuff in there.

And then on this one picture, they wrote, “Does this remind you of your lesbian lover, Nancy? The one who's laying on the beach with long red hair.” And meanwhile this was opened by my partner's secretary, and my partner wasn't out at work. Well, fortunately, my partner very well respected and very well liked where she was at work, and they said, “Don't worry about this, it's horrible this is happening—this happened. But if anything else comes, for you, that is suspicious like that, we're going to bring it directly to you, you know, and not worry about it.” But, had they—they had the ability to cause her to lose their—that job she had. They would've, but apparently they didn't have that high-up connections. But that's the extent they went to. They just tried to totally destroy our personal life. We talk about not being able to enjoy the peace and quiet of living in your house, you know, because every time you come out, someone might be going by—one of them—and scream something at you, you know? “Hey lesbian!” or “Hey, you pussy eater!” or whatever, you know, it was just horrendous. It was just a horrendous ordeal. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. Well, maybe I'd wish it on those two. [laughs] So they'd know what it felt like, but—

LM: So, you were probably pretty happy to sell your house after that?

ND: Well, actually my partner—my partner and I, we were together for 20 years in 1998 then, we amicably—on a very friendly basis, I decided that the relationship wasn't working for either of us too well, and I decided to move out and get an apartment of my own, and she kept the house. And she still lives there, and this woman—one of the women, now and then, harasses her—not anything more about the gay issue, because it turns out, her son is gay, and he passed away.

It was never confirmed, but there was always a question of whether he passed—whether he might have had AIDS or not. And I don't mean that in any critical way, I'm just saying, I think she then became very hesitant to harass people based on sexual orientation, because here, she lost a son... who was openly gay and lived on that street where she lived with his male partner. So, so my partner still has that house and still lives there, and in a way, I kind of respect that and admire her, because it's like saying, you know what? You did all that shit to us, and Nancy's not living here, but that's for different reasons, but you know, you did not force me out of here. You did not force me out of here. Kind of like, what's Maya Angelou say? "And still I stand." No matter what you put me through, and still I stand. And I visit my partner a lot. We are very close friends. We've been friends now ever since, for what, 16 years and we were together for 20 years, so we're very good friends.

LM: Looking back now overall at that, did you have awareness of or engagement with LGBT organizations or groups in the area?

ND: No, I really didn't, because I really wasn't aware of—because this harassment, now that I'm talking about that happened where we lived, up in Middle Paxton Township, in Dauphin, took place between... I'd say 1984 and up to about half of 1986, and neither one of us were aware of any organizations, you know, 'cause we weren't ourselves out. Out out.

I mean, like, I wasn't out at any of my places of employment, she wasn't—I mean we didn't go to the extent of pretending we were straight. We didn't put pictures of people we claimed were our husbands or boyfriends—we didn't do that, but we never—we let people think what they think. We never confirmed or denied. So, we weren't aware of anything. There was one bar we used to go to, but I never remember anything being on the bulletin board at the entrance of—inside the bar, they had, you know, a cork bulletin board where people could put stuff. I never remember noticing anything about different organizations.

LM: You showed me a picture of your getting married. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

ND: Yes. We—we met in 1977, and we met at that bar that was on Front Street. It was called D Gem (?). It's now... it's been called several different things since—it's—the building's still there, but it's now some—with a big deck on it, it used to be Morgan's Place and now it's Big Woody's or something like that.

And, we very much fell in love, and so, we decided we wanted to—she lived in an apartment in Mechanicsburg at that time, and he decided we wanted to live the rest of our lives together. And we wanted some recognition of that. So, we somehow found out about the Metropolitan Community Church, and we found out that the one in Baltimore [Maryland] would perform a

ceremony. You had to go and meet with that person, you had to—and we did, we met with the minister and you had to show different things, that you’ve been together for X amount of time. I think it was for at least a year, and things that show that your relationship was more. And then so—and then we had to wait, I think it was two or three months and then come back, and then he would perform the ceremony, ‘cause he wanted to make sure. And our friends—we had just a small little congregation—this is of the people that she was renting from, ‘cause she was gay herself, so there were about eight of us, including myself and my partner. We went in my partner’s car—she had a little, bright yellow Toyota Celica, and I say this, because it will make sense why I’m saying it. So, we’re driving down 83, down to Baltimore to go through this ceremony of a civil union, which incidentally, the certificate itself, surprisingly, says “Holy union,” which we never realized ‘til we got it out to donate it to this project.

But so we’re going down 83 in the summertime—nice sunny day, and then Shirl, who was the landlord and about five other people, they’re coming in their—Shirl’s car to come down too, to you know... and while we’re in there and having the ceremony, here they had tied cans to the car—to Rita’s car, and wrote “Just married!” on you know, the windshield. Just like you would do for a straight couple, and it was fun! I mean, nobody seemed to be bothered by it—as we drove back to Mechanicsburg from Baltimore, you know, it was very obvious we were two women, and nobody like, gave us the finger or anything. So, that was a pleasant experience. And, we had—Shirl had gotten us a small wedding cake, and we had a little reception, and it was a very, very good time. It was—

LM: This was what year?

ND: This was 1978. May 27, 1978 was the date.

LM: This was the same time you’re living out at the...?

ND: No, we’re not living there yet. It’s a year later, after our ceremony, we went looking for a house then.

LM: Ah, I gotcha.

ND: And then we, it was a year later we moved into the house that we bought up in Middle Paxton Township right next to the river.

So, that was a good thing. And because I do feel the need to point out something that was positive during that two and a half years of horrendous harassment by those women. This place where we lived, River Road—when we moved there, in 1979, mostly had like older people living there. White, homogenous couples. Christian couples. You know, who you could tell were very basic, go to church on Sunday, whatever. And despite these two women harassing us and telling and screaming and telling and making sure every neighbor along that road knew that we were lesbians, people on that road—several of them stood up for us in the sense that we were welcomed over to their house when they picnics and summer holidays with their children and their grandchildren. Another older couple, their son was giving them a special anniversary for their 50th anniversary and it was out at one of the fancy places, out 22—can’t remember the

name of it, but it's fancy and expensive, so he limited their guests to you can invite 25 people. Now, they only knew us for five years or so, but we were among the 25 people they invited. And so that was a very positive thing amidst all that ugliness—that the neighbors stood up for us. And one neighbor one time even came out of her house and shouted at those two, “Why don't you leave those girls alone, you bitches!?” [laughs] You know. So, I mean, I did want to note that—because we were all very surprised—I mean, we—my partner and I were surprised pleasantly, because again, these were people were going to church on Sunday who were very—who you would think would've been horrified to be told that “hey, there are two lesbians living here on the road.” And they just didn't care.

LM: Good. What have I missed?

ND: I don't think...

LM: Oh, what changes have you seen?

ND: Oh my gosh, well, wow, as you can imagine, I never ever imagined to see things...I never imagine that in my lifetime, I would still be alive and gay marriage would be enacted. Okay? And especially in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania of all states? Even when the Supreme Court struck now that part of DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] last year or two years ago as states started doing things, I figured, Pennsylvania will be the last. I'll be dead and gone. I won't know, because they'll dig their heels in. But they weren't. I think they were, what? The 16th state? So, the changes are tremendous for me to—after all I went through? To see now that this type of progress is absolutely mind-boggling and wonderful. I'm so glad to see it. You know, so glad to see that, you know, the progress that's being made and that people are being treated same as anyone else.

LM: What have we've missed?

ND: I don't think we've missed anything, really. I'm very happy about this project. I think this is an important project. I think because it's easy—and I'm sure—this is probably true of all civil rights movements, probably with minorities—African-Americans, the women's rights, and now the gay rights, because once you do make so much progress and there is a lot of acceptance, it's easier for the next generation to forget what all happened to previous people. What all a lot—people lost in that? I—I mean, my switching—having to switch careers and start over at entry-level salaries and have period of unemployment, needless to say, adversely impacting my social security retirement greatly. The financial harm was tremendous. One thing I do want to add, if I can put in here, my second partner—this is before I moved to Harrisburg. She had a young daughter who was three-four years old. She was a single mother. Her aunt and uncle who lived down here in Cumberland County on the west shore, when they found out that she was having a lesbian relationship with another woman, they filed for custody. So this was the children's great-aunt and uncle. And this would have been 1973, 74, and you know, back then, that—custody was given to them, and the partner I had back then, she was given visitation. Supervised visitation. And, those are the things I guessed that I—another reason why I think this project is so important is, because people have lost their homes, lost their jobs, people have lost children in custody matters, and we've made all this wonderful progress, but I think it's important to preserve, you

know, what a lot of people had to go through for us to here where we are today... a lot of battle scars, but we survived.

LM: I'm just ask that question one more time. Anything else?

ND: I think that pretty much covers it, and now, I'm—despite all I've been through, I'm at peace with things now. I say, “Hey, what I went through was ugly.” I wouldn't wish it on anybody, but I'm at peace, and I just want to enjoy whatever amount of time I have left on this earth and not—and now, I don't care who knows I'm gay. I put the rainbow sticker on my car—whatever, I don't care now. I'm really at peace.

LM: I mean, you're associated with the project.

ND: Yes! Absolutely I'm a volunteer in this program, yes. So, I'm really at peace.

LM: Excellent. Okay.