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Interviewee: Bob Deibler (BD)

Interviewer: Barry Loveland (BL)

Videographer: Ashley Famularo (AF)

Date of Interview: Harrisburg, PA

Location of Interview: October 27, 2018

Transcriber: Julia Bray

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Abstract:

Bob Deibler discusses his experiences as a member of both the Pennsmen and the Satyr Men, as well as what it was like to be a gay teacher and the surprising lack of discrimination, he faced in his life due to his sexuality. He also talks of his long-time and now deceased Partner Ron Think, who he helped run a popular gift shop and LGBT meeting place, The Bare Wall Gallery.

BL: So my name is Barry Loveland, I'm here with Ashley Famularo, is that right? Who is our videographer and we're here on behalf of the LGBT center of central Pennsylvania history project and today's date is October 27, 2018 and we're here for an oral history interview with Robert Deibler. This interview is taking place at his home in Harrisburg and Bob do we have your permission to record the interview today?

BD: You certainly do.

BL: Okay, Great. We have a consent form for you to sign after the interview so you can take care of that later. Alright, so first if you could say and spell your first name so we can have your full name rather, so we have your spelling and pronunciations right.

BD: My real name is Robert, R-O-B-E-R-T, I prefer Bob, I hate Robert. Middle initial "L" for Lee, I was named after Robert E. Lee by the way. Last name Deibler, D, as in dog- E-I-B, as in baby-L-E-R.

BL: Okay, alright. So what is your date of birth and where were you born?

BD: I was born January 20, 1940 and I was born in a farm house in upper Paxton Township, in Dauphin County.

BL: So I'd like to start with your family of origin to talk a little bit about your family, if you had any siblings and so forth and then what life was like growing up in the household?

BD: Of course I had a mother and father, everyone does except Adam and Eve I guess, and I have two siblings, both younger, I'm the old one in the family. The brother next to me is now dead, the youngest brother is still alive, lives in Hamburg. I grew up—we—we had the greatest place in the world. We lived in the mountain. I mean literally lived in the mountain. And we

would get lost somewhere after breakfast, mom would- and this was in the summer of course, in the winter school ruined things, but in the summer we would be out in the mountain, we'd play we'd climb trees, we'd cut down trees and we weren't suppose to, we had really a great time growing up. The middle brother, Dave, and I never did get along. Of Course Dave—I was born in 1940 and Dave was born in 1943, in the middle of WWII, so Hitler was on our mind and when I wanted to get Dave mad, and make him cry, I would tell him he was adopted and that he was really Hitler's son. And he would come running into Mom and I would get hell as a matter of fact. Anyhow, we grew up, in a mountain, Dad always wanted to be a farmer, he never got his wish, he worked in a tool factory. My mom was a stay at home mom until Bill went to school and then she got a job in a sho—in a factory in Millersburg. She worked nights and I was the cook and I can still remember Dad liked Howdy Doody [a children's television show] we boys didn't like Howdy Doody and he's saw "Aren't ya gonna watch Howdy Doody tonight and I-I had an excuse "I'm cooking" but the two other ones had to. Anyhow, I was the first person in the family to go to college. Originally, I wanted to be a minister. Its taken me probably 50 years to figure out the reason. **[End of Tape 1]**

[Tape two start]

BD: I was in – okay and anyhow and then I decided I wanted to be a lawyer, but I couldn't afford to go to pre-law, I had to find a college that was cheap. There was nothing cheaper back then than state colleges. And I went to Bloomsburg. I majored in English and Social Studies. Actually, social studies was my major, English was my minor. Along about my junior year I realized "I don't really like Social Studies" but I was too far gone to change it so I took the bare minimum to keep me a major in social studies and then of course picked up all English and a lot of Drama credits and therefore, I graduated with two majors. The college didn't give it to me, but the state did. And then I taught school for 30 years in Millersburg. I taught English, started out in 9th grade and ended up I was doing only Seniors by the time I retired. I started doing musicals in Millersburg and I'm happy to say they're still doing them. We did them on a wing and a prayer and then of course I retired after teaching for 30 years and I was only 51. I moved to Harrisburg. I had lived in Millersburg and then Elizabethtown until then. Moved to Harrisburg. I met a man, Ron Think. Ron owned the gift show in Harrisburg, at 712 Green called the Bare Wall Gallery and he and I became partners. Not only in the shop, we became real partners. And of course, I continued there, we never lived together. I had my house, he had his house and I would spend probably four or five nights a week cooking dinner for him, staying with him until around 10'oclock 11'oclock then I would come home and he would do whatever and that worked out beautifully and then of course Ron came down with bladder cancer. He had his bladder removed and at that point he moved here with me, and I thought "this is gonna be pure hell" but it wasn't. It was a good time. And he came to call this house a home and the store was the store. Ron only lived about two years after he was diagnosed with bladder cancer. It metastasized and he then died of bone cancer. I ran the store then for six months. I hated doing the bookwork. I liked waiting on customers, but that's only part of it, besides I was getting on there and so I decided it was time to call it quits and I closed the store after six months and it was a debate whether I

wanted to sell this house and convert the store back into a home and I decided no this was more comfortable and so I sold everything. And that's where we find me now.

BL: Can we go back, and go a little more in depth into your school years? And what that was like and what kind of schools you went to.

BD: I stared out in a one room school for four years. And it was grades 1-8. I stayed there my first four years and I think we probably never had more than 30 kids all total. But we had one teacher and it was—in a way it was great because I was the—I'm not the smartest pea in the pod, put it that way— but I'm not the dumbest either and you know you get your work done and so you were bored and so you'd listen to what the bigger kids were doing and actually it benefited me because when I got to like sixth or seventh grade I knew what was going on because I had heard it all before. So that was kind of great, but we were country kids and then of course they decided to do away with one room schools. And we went to Lankerville and Lankerville wasn't prepared for the influx so they reopened an old school that had been there and fifth and sixth grade were in this—it was actually two rooms, fifth grade was in one room, sixth grade was in the other room and then we had to take a test to go to Millersburg for seventh grade. They didn't believe that we were smart enough, so we had to take a test and we were treated like country kids when we got with the city kids. And Millersburg has this reputation it thinks it the 'city' all the other towns up there, and the reason is Millersburg does look like a town, the rest have the street and that's about it. And we have a square and we really—years ago there was a sign when you came into Millersburg and it said “Small town perfection” which was the biggest laugh in the world. But you know I made friends and I had good years. I'll tell you I didn't know I was gay. I can tell you I used to watch this guy— he was older than I— and he would take his shirt off to make hay— oh man I thought he was the hottest thing—never knew why! Took me a long time to—guess I was a slow learner because I dated--

BL: What age was that about? That you?

BD: That I?

BL: First come to some realization?

BD: Oh that was probably about sixth grade, somewhere around there. And of course, I played football— hated it— I played tackle cause you didn't need to think, you just “number two hold open!” alright I can do that. I did that for two year cause I didn't want to be a sis and that's part of it. And—

BL: and you said you dated?

BD: I dated women, yeah. I was able to have sex with women, to be very honest. But it wasn't fulfilling and then of course I went—I graduated from high school, did okay. I liked to tell people I was number three in the class then they'd say “well how many were in the class? And I'd say “Thirty-nine.” They're not impressed with that at all. But we were the smallest class from

Millersburg in years in fact I don't think there ever been one since. It was a bad year for seed we decided or else they were all getting ready for WWII one or the other. Anyhow, I did okay in high school. I had friends, but I was different, I knew that. I figured, back then. I don't know whether I ever really questioned but I knew there was something different about me. And I didn't know anybody else like me. And then I went on to college and I didn't admit to myself that I was gay until I was a junior in college. Now that doesn't mean I hadn't had some gay experiences. My Favorite is—my favorite story—there was a bar, it was called the “Maria Saunta.” St. Mary for gods sake. And it was on the old road to Berwick, or if you're from Berwick you say “Ber-ick,” and I always looked older than my age and so I was able to get into bars without any problem and I was only seventeen going on eighteen back then. And we went to a bar, the Maria Saunta, and this older guy picked me up and took me home, we went to bed, I stayed overnight and he said, “and tomorrow morning, I have to get up early to do something, you just stay sleeping, I'll be back.” He made noise and so I got awake—and this was about six thirty about in the morning—and I opened my eyes and there he is in a black cassock. He was a priest for God's sake! I was sure lightning was gonna hit me right at that moment. It didn't. He saw I was awake and he said “didn't I tell you?” I said, “Noooo you didn't.” He said, “well stick around I'll be back in around an hour and a half.” I stuck around. But I still didn't admit to myself that I was gay. That came about my junior year and I—you know—I hung out at Bill Hesse's that was my favorite bar at the bottom of the hill, if you know Bloomsburg the college is up on the hill. And the main street of Bloomsburg goes right up to the college and there was Bill Hesse's bar, which by the way is still there, and I hung out at Hesse's. I was never old enough, but when they said, “Hey a raid's coming” I'd get lost. I was smart enough to do that.

BL: And this was, what about, what year about was this?

BD: That would have been about 1958-59

BL: Okay, and this was a straight bar? This was--

BD: No this was a gay bar. Definitely was gay.

BL: Really?

BD: Well it was mixed, but—

BL: Really?

BD: But we were tolerated no problem. It wasn't outrageous gay, but yeah

BL: That's very interesting

BD: I'd say it was about half and half

BL: Cause the first I've heard of that bar.

BD: No, yeah. Well anyhow I met this guy, we had been talking for a long time, Moe. He was from Baltimore and he was a vet and he was there on the GI bill. And we were at Hesses and I had an old Studebaker [type of car], I think the Studebaker was 1949 and I don't know why I—we went for a ride. I think he knew why, but I didn't, and we drove over the back road to Catawissa. I had to pee and so I got out and what I remember, there was snow on the ground, stood in the car light. Maybe I, unconsciously, was leading him on, I don't know, but he came out and he held it for me, and we did whatever. And I went home and then it struck me “Hey Bob you're gay” I didn't go to class the next day. I was doing my “Oh woe is me” bit. I guess the “Oh woe is me” lasted about eight hours because by about four or five O'clock I thought, “Hey you enjoyed it, it isn't your first time, you know who you are, admit it and get over it.” And I did and I never looked back. I have never apologized for being gay and I am lucky because I have never had out and out discrimination. It's never happened to me and then I became a teacher in little old Millersburg for God's sakes, the middle of the Bible belt. And parents who were very good church goers. Now I will say I was fortunate. The denomination was the United Church of Christ, which most people say, “Yeah That's a little bit better than a philosophy and that's about it.” Thank god. So, there was no—I—I'd never had this guilt trip put on me but while teaching at Millersburg I found a boyfriend and he moved in- biggest mistake of my life- wrong one, but okay. Lasted eight years and we lived together. I took him to teacher things. So everybody knew, but nobody said anything and I certainly was not discriminated against. For example I was president of the Educational Association in Millersburg, I led the first Strike in Dauphin County. That, I guess, I shouldn't be proud of, but dammit I am. And it got to the point that I became—okay don't worry about it Bob—and I talked—I talked to the principal. I said, “Have you ever gotten complaints about me?” He said, “Well why would we?” “Okay.” I always felt good because I, you know you check the boy's room, you had to, to make sure no one was smoking in there. I never saw “Deibler sucks dick.” I did see other people's names there who I knew damn well did not. He didn't do anything as a matter of fact. But no, I did, one of the things that I'm proud of, little Millersburg I went to the guidance counselor and I said, this was maybe four, five years before I retired. I said, “You know my story.” I said now, “If you get a kid, I don't want to talk to a girl, well I won't—that wouldn't work with me, but I said a guy who comes into you and says ‘hey I think I'm gay what do I do?’ I said send him to me. I guess maybe there were maybe five, six kids who I talked to. And two of them definitely are the other ones I'm not sure what happened to, but two of them I remained pretty good friends with, actually.

BL: What years did you teach? What, from what?

BD: I started in 1961 and I retired in 1991. All at the same school.

BL: And you mentioned you didn't have any particular issues with around being gay or teaching?

BD: Not at all.

BL: There weren't any gay youth groups that developed during that time?

BD: Not in Millersburg, no.

BL: Not in Millersburg, okay.

BD: Its like Millersburg didn't have any gay people, just like they didn't have any drugs.

BL: Alright, so did you have any other relationships after the first eight-year relationship? Other than with Ron, anything in between?

BD: Not relationships. Lot of one-night stands.

BL: Did you, did you go out to the bars during that period.

BD: Oh Yeah. When I discovered bars, Holy shit. That was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Yeah I remember I went through the Dandelion Tree—I think it started out as the Clock Bar and then it became the Dandelion Tree I think. And then, there was another one in there that I can't figure out—

BL: Apple and the French Men

BD: [pointing] Right, and then it became the Rose Rouge and that's when it ceased being a gay bar.

BL: After, after-right

BD: Right

BL: Yeah did you go when it was the Clock Bar?

BD: Yes.

BL: Okay. Tell me more about the clock bar than you can recall.

BD: Well I remember it was all hush hush. And it wasn't necessarily a gay bar but it became known to gays that that's where you went. The neatest thing about it was it was all clocks. And there were like what it was in Singapore and they kept the clocks up to date! They were kind of neat. And it was kind of a neat time because you felt you were doing something you shouldn't be doing. And you know once in a while the police would come in. And they would be in uniform and they would sit at the bar, I think they had a coke, but it was just to keep an eye on us. I know why they were there, there was no question, but here in Harrisburg they didn't really harass us. Now you know they did—they did try entrapment, I mean anyone who did State Street was in

danger of being arrested by— A side story: Ron and I both had CB, well not CB, but the radios, and police radios bandwidth on it. And Ron would listen at night and one night he's listening and these two cops are down on State Street and they are trying to lure gays. And this is about 11 thirty going on midnight and Ron hears this one guy talk to the other cop. That one cop that said, "Nothing's happening let's go home." He said "now wait! I've got this guy, its his third trip around," and for those young people don't know you could go zipping around State Street and around State Street and if you were hard up that's what you did. And eventually you finally found somebody. But anyhow this guy's going around and Ron hears the one cop tell the other cop, "Hey I think I've got him, give him—give us—let's do twenty more minutes. I know I've got him coming." Ron put his clothing on, and of course the Bare Wall wasn't that far from State Street. He bee lined it, he caught the guy making one of the turns and he stopped. He went over to the car and he said, "Get your ass out of here or you're gonna be arrested, those are two cops that you're working on." Course that's illegal, but Ron did it and that was kind of neat. That was, that was the way things were here in Harrisburg.

BL: Do you remember what year, what year you would have first gone into the Clock Bar?

BD: It would have been probably—well let's see I started teaching in '61, probably about '63, '64.

BL: Okay.

BD: At first, I was too scared to go. And I was scared, I remember the first night I went in. But and then I went, you know the Neptune's always been there. I remember when JC was the bouncer. JC's now older than I, well I didn't know it, but he's older than I am. Big guy back then. He's still not bad, for an old fart. But yeah.

BL: And, so did you—were you aware about the time, when the clock bar was closed, that was raided and closed?

BD: I was aware, I wasn't there, thank heaven. [**BL:** Yes.] Cause you know I would have lost my job, there is no question if my name had appeared in the newspapers. I have some friends that that happened. I guess if your as old as I am you know that, City Island used to be a great cruising spot. And I have a friend who was an art teacher who was caught out there, his name appeared in the newspaper, he lost his job. Thank got he was a neat artist and he didn't need it, so you know, you had—you had to watch.

BL: Tell me about other bars you went to, you mentioned the Neptune?

BD: The Neptune, yep. The best thing about the Neptune, for a gay man, they had the mirror above the bar. You could check crotches all the way down the bar. [Laughter] We were sorry when that disappeared. And the Neptune always needed fixing. The Men's room there was a hole in from of the urinal where you could look down into the basement. And it was there for years.

You just kinda of straddled it and that was it. Or if you were uppity you went to the ladies room, which no one—there weren't many ladies there, in fact the ladies were all men dressed as ladies. So it didn't matter. And you know? I had some good times. But that was it, then there was the Pegasus. That was over on Forester Street, were Lamual French owned it. And he wanted it to have a baby grand piano, but he only had a spinet. So he had a plywood baby grand piano top made and it looked like a baby grand, but it sure as heck wasn't. And I remember—yeah I remember one night we were there and there was an upstairs, it was never really too skuzzy up there, but somethings went on. And one night it suddenly, the cops come in, and then they go upstairs and they thought they had found a dead man upstairs. Well turned out he was just very, very drunk. But that kind of put the end to the evening. And then there was the sad time, can't remember the name of the guy. Two guys, great guys and that was when I was with my friend Jeff, and we were there talking with them and they left before us and their car was parked on the opposite side of Forester street and they were drunk and he, the one guy got killed, he got hit by a car, right out front there. So I have some not nice memories about the Pegasus, but I had fun. And then there was the Strawberry, when it was down on market square. Sunday afternoons were great times because of the Strawberry, and one of the things that brought you in, the strawberry had rooms that they rented out upstairs and the railroad would put up overnight railroaders up there.

BL: Your microphone...

BD: oh, and some of them, of course, knew that they could get a good blowjob if they wanted it. So it would be kind of fun, Sunday afternoons. And it was somewhat a mixed crowd, but it was primarily gay. And nobody was really out at, you know, at you know four O'clock Sunday afternoon, you're really not out looking for a—a hookup and so it was really comradery, and I remember, Lamuel French was as bald as a billiards ball, but he wore a toupee all the time. My friend Jeff was going very bald. They went into the men's room together, I don't know what they were going to do I didn't care really, but he came back and Jeff is wearing Lamuel's rug, and Lamuel. The only time I ever saw him bald. But that was a character, and it turns out that were I live now here at 1620, Lamuel lived at 1624 at one point. The story is, from one of my neighbors, one afternoon Lamuel was outside and he said, "Oh I think I'll go in and wallpaper the dining room." Okay. In less than two hours he was back out and said, "It's done!" My friend said "You're finished?" "Yeah come on in a look at it!" and he had stapled the wallpaper to the wall and if you didn't turn up the lights it looked good. But you know that was—that was part of being gay in Harrisburg. And people, you went different places, you visited. I remember, I got into the leather scene. I never took it seriously I always took leather as macho drag. And it smelled good I liked the smell of leather. And I remember the first time I was being introduced to it. I was other in Marysville with some people I knew and I was in the basement cause they had a rec room in the basement. And I was in the basement and there was these, I don't know three or four leather guys and the host and the friend I had went with went up stairs to do something, I'm stuck with these three guys and they're all wearing leather from top to bottom and I'm thinking, I'm thinking maybe I'm in the wrong place. One of them looks to the other and says "hey I found a good recipe for a chocolate cake." I'm thinking "I can live with these guys!"

so you know and I'm still kind of in the leather scene, but at this point, who wants to go to the bother. But we—we have a club. And we get together probably about four times a year.

BL: This is the Pennsmen?

BD: No, got rid of the Pennsmen.

BL: Okay.

BD: I was—I was very active in the Pennsmen at one point, but no this is the Satyr Men, not it's the Satyr, not it's the Sa-t-y-r men, and I, I have a friend, straight friend, cousin, and we talk. He lives in bar harbor and this was a couple years ago I said something about well “the satyr men are coming, its Christmas, were having our Christmas party, six of them stay here.” And he didn't say anything. And went on for half a year and I'm—I'd talk to him say “well how's your club?” “Oh, the clubs okay” and he said “I, its bothered, what are you doing in a Jewish club?” I said “Steve it's not Seider, its Sa-“ “OOOOHhh!” But—we're now—and the Satyr men are now getting to be old farts. And we do—we just sit around now and we tell stories, some of them lies, some of them are just based on truth, but we kinda of embellish them a little bit. About when we were young and what we did. In fact, we just had our anniversary two weeks ago, here in Harrisburg.

BL: How many years?

BD: I think this was twenty-seven? But the Satyr Men is the Anti-leather club.

BL: Okay?

BD: You know leather club had all these rules and regulations. We don't have a meeting. We have a get together and once a year you have to elect officers to stay in our tax bracket. And so we do that at our anniversary. And then we used to do a bar night in—well we still do a bar night in Harrisburg, which I hate, but I'm too old to stay up that late if you want to know the truth. It's okay in my house when I can take a nap when I feel like it, but when you have to play and be friendly in a bar, forget it. But anyhow, we did that, just Friday night two weeks ago, we did that. But then we get together and we have dinner, Christmas party is coming up on the second, the second Saturday in December. We'd have it the first one, that is on the first this year, so we decided we would move it to the eighth. And we do that, one of our—one of our club members allows us to come to his house and we have Ronny, who cooked at the William Penn Club for years, and Ronny is our chef. And Ronny makes terrific meals. Of course then it then takes you a week then to get over them, but they're wonderful and we used to drink a lot, but one we've gotten older and two you don't drive drunk the way you used to drive. Thank god. But yeah, I'm still in that.

BL: And did you start with them right at the beginning? When they first formed?

BD: No, I was not one of the original members. I think I—I think the club was about three years old when I became a member. I was a—I was very active in the Pennsmen and I, in fact I was president for several years and then the Pennsmen when a direction I was just not interested in going. And rather than being an inactive member, I just resigned. But I'd already been a member of the Satyr Men.

BL: Were you an original member of the Pennsmen, or were you?

BD: No, I wasn't an original member there either.

BL: Okay.

BD: But I probably became a Pennsmen it, probably was the late 60s, I became a Pennsmen.

BL: Okay because the Pennsmen I think was 70s, late 70s. Wasn't it that they formed?

BD: Wait, then it couldn't...

BL: '77?

BD: have been the 60s.

BL: Yeah I think '77 was the date I have as the date that they formed.

BD: You might be, that might be right... You might be right there. And it could have been, I, could have been a decade later, I'm talking about.

BL: Yeah.

BD: But it wasn't they weren't very old when I joined, but I can't tell you how old they were.

BL: Yeah, so what, what do you remember about the Pens Men while you were kind of active in that?

BD: Well in the Pennsmen—our big—the Pennsmen had no purpose, other than a club to get together, and that's really why all those clubs formed. It was before—It was before the days of the internet and you needed a place where you can meet people. Now there were the bars, but then the clubs it was more chummy with the club feel. And most clubs would have their own bar, by having their own bar doesn't mean that they owned it or anything, it was just that the bar allowed them to have meetings there. And for example, the Neptune became the bar for the Pennsmen. And they had no purpose, so there was a few of us, decided, "look we gotta have this club do something." And then of course the Aids crisis hit. And it hit everybody. Remind me to tell you a story about that, but anyhow we decided to have bar nights and the money from the bar

nights all went to AIDS—and basically it was to help people who had AIDS with finances. Now we, we never set the world on fire, but we did it. And then older people would remember Wesley, who lived the corner of North and Second street and Wesley was a drag queen, but Wesley was the best looking Drag Queen you ever saw. When Wesley went out there were gloves up to the elbows, there were rings and bracelets. And Wesley couldn't keep after his sidewalk there were weeds growing and I remember I got the Pens Men together and we cleaned his sidewalk. Wesley did not want us to do it for free and he didn't have any money, and I mean he had a—he had a small income, but not a lot of money. He wanted to give us frozen food, I remember, we had a fight. “No! We're not hungry! Keep it! We're just doing this because we like you.” My favorite story about Wesley—the steam people were putting a new steam line and it went up North street, and they were working outside. Well Wesley, when he was around the house, would dress like a woman, and Wesley sometimes did not finish dressing. And this day—and Wesley of course always had a cocker spaniel, and it was always named Dennis and I think this was Dennis Three. And Wesley would walk Dennis, nobody was looking, he'd take the poop and throw it out in the middle of the street, but Wesley is walking down with Dennis and that day he was wearing pantyhose, and an apron and that was it. Well these guys, big tough guys are digging ditch, you know, and Wesley who walks by with Dennis and they look and they see this little rear end, sticking out that is also sagging half way to his knee. And the looks of their faces were the greatest thing in the—they didn't—they didn't yell anything, but the looks were like “I don't believe I'm seeing what I'm seeing.” And of course, Wesley never knew. One of my, one of my early years, when I was, but this was when it was the Dandelion Tree because Larry and his friend, what the hell was his name—he's now dead. Larry's still around, but anyhow, Larry and his friend were run—running the bar and I was there and it must have been closing time and Larry comes up to me and he says “Would you take Wesley home?” he said “I know you go up second street” I said “Uhh” and he says, “Well look, just take him up. You know where he lives. Walk him into the house.” And well—he's shit-faced is the word I got. But walk him in. Well I took Wesley home. Wesley wanted to pay me, you know, in a fashion that I didn't want to be paid. But that was my first experience. But somewhere here in this house. Wesley and Ron were good friends. And Ron said, “Wesley were you really a big deal down in New Orleans? Wesley says, “I can prove it.” Somewhere here in—it's in there somewhere—is a newspaper clipping that Wesley gave to Ron, that ran in whatever the New Orleans Newspaper is and a big picture of Wesley because she was appearing at some big club in New Orleans. So Wesley was quite the person in his day. Was sorry to see that kind—those kinds of characters don't exist anymore and of course I never understood drag queens. Because most drag queens—I know—I know that a lot of, well not a lot, but there's a good number of straight men who find it something or other dressing up like a woman, but in the gay community most drag queens are gay. And I've never understood, alright you're gay, you're looking for a man, but you dress as a woman. There's something wrong with that picture somehow. Never quite understood that, somehow, but there are gay men who are really- that turns them on, I guess. I don't know. My favorite story is the Pennsmen, we would have a meeting in the restaurant that was connected to Neptune, I forget what was-

BL: Paper Moon?

BD: Paper Moon, right. And Sunday after—Sunday they were not open they were open for breakfast and brunch and then they closed. So. we would have a meeting at 4 o'clock. Well they were, the drag queens were having some kind of show that night, and Glenda came over and said, "Do you guys mind if I get dressed over here while you're having your meeting?" Now I had never seen a drag queen get dressed. Well Glenda, those of you who knew Glenda, knew that he was rather robust and he put on this old t-shirt and then proceeded to duct tape around his belly real tight and push all the fat up. He got a really nice cleavage, no shit! But nobody at that meeting had any idea what went on because we were all kind of watching. You know, I've enjoyed being gay! I really have! Straights don't know what they're missing.

BL: I'm trying to think, what else do you remember from the Pennsmen in terms of what activities they did and that sort of thing?

BD: Well our big activity was the run. Which was always held over Presidents day in February. And we were about the only club that did it in the wintertime. Cause there was always the danger you get snowed in in Harrisburg. But you know that would be a three-day affair. And when I was president, you know, there was a lot of responsibility, because we would have it, well we had it at the Radisson quite often. Before that we had the run down at what became Holiday Inn at the river. One or two years we had it at the crown plaza which was – bleh—it just didn't work. But the Radisson, of course was perfect. And we owned the title, Mr. Harrisburg. And as part of our run at the Banquet on Saturday night we would have the Mr. Harrisburg contest. The only time I ever did drag. Chris Green and I were MCs and you have to fill in time and so we decided we would do sisters from White Christmas. I, who was, it was Rosemary Clooney and Gwen Vernon was the other girl. Well now we didn't really do drag. I have some old material and we kind of rolled up our pants' legs, and that's not easy when you're wearing Chaps by the way, and rolled up your pants legs and we kinda of draped that on us. And we got Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse Bows on our heads and we got fans, borrowed them from the community theater. As a matter of fact, Bob Feldman found them and I think stole them, I'm not sure. We took them back though. But any how we did sisters. And we were pretty damn good. Somewhere here I have a video of it. But we were so good, it got to the end and you're waiting for the judges to decided whose gonna be Mr. Harrisburg and you're trying to fill in and we hear from the audience, "Do sister's again!" and I think I was on the mic and I said "We can't! They're not ready, its not ready for the sound. From the back I hear, "Yes it is!" so we got to do an encore. And that was, and we did do some fun things, at that—

BL: And did, and did the runs include other groups from other areas or?

BD: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Everybody, there's a blanket organization called the AAMC, American Something Motorcycle Club. By the way, hardly any even owns a motorcycle. You just dress like you own a motorcycle. And anyhow, you send out invitations to all the other clubs and of course they pay, and generally I remember back then it—it was a pretty good deal, because we got a good deal from the hotel. You would get a hotel room, and admission to all the activities

you had. And it was like under two hundred bucks. It was a good deal. And we drank an awful lot. Because a club would throw a cocktail party. Now the home club always sponsored the big cocktail party which was right before the banquet on Saturday night. And we also supplied eye openers in the morning which were bloody mary's or mimosas. But then the other clubs would throw a—one of the fun things—there's a thing known as the Tiffle Tea. Now the Tiffle—I don't know where the word comes from—but that is the partner of the president of the host club. If like the first lady's tea, well when I was president I said "I'm not doing that, that is so queer" meaning queer. Anyhow, Ron decided he would pretend he was really disturbed, that he could not be the first lady. Of course, he wouldn't have closed the store to come anyhow, so I ordered him—cause he did come to the banquet—and I think Robert it was Robert, I don't remember his last name, had a flower shop down town in Harrisburg. I went down to Robert and I said, can you make a corsage? He said, "Well of course I can make a corsage!" I said, "I want a wrist or something, and I want it BIG!" I said, "If you put gladiolas in it will be fine with me." Well, he made this big thing. Well, I had, before dinner, I was announcing, cause you always had parade of colors. Where all the clubs—every club has its own insignia. And they would present them—it's really quite impressive if you're into it. And the parade of colors was over and we're ready to sit down to eat and I had the corsage delivered to Ron, thinking he's be embarrassed. He sat there all night with his arm up like this. And of course the Bare Wall was open Sunday morning and of course we'd closed down. You'd have breakfast, brunch and then the clubs would break up and they'd go home. And I came over right away to the Bare Wall. There's Ron, sitting behind the desk, wearing this now droopy looking corsage, telling all the people who came in, who are by the way straight, "I'm the first lady, I want you to know." Probably Ron was the most—how do I want to put it...He did not hide who he was, from anyone. And of course I didn't broadcast it, I did find out later I was known as the "grumpy one" and he was known as the "happy one." That happened because after the store was close, and Ron was gone now, six years. But after the store was closed, Bob Culdron lives across the street and Bob was out cleaning his yard or something and some guy came around and he mustn't have shopped very often, but he went up to the door and the door's locked, course it's not the Bare Wall any more. So, he walked over to Bob and said, "What happened to the Bare Wall?" and Bob said, "Well you know one of the partners died and the other one decided he did not want to run it." And the guy said, "Well which one died, was it the tall happy one or the short grumpy one?" So I know where I fit.

BL: Oh okay.

[Video Ends]

BL: Okay we're back.

BD: Okay, where were we?

BL: Good question. I think we were talking about the Pennsmen, and the runs and everything, yeah. Is there anything else you can think about from those times and those events?

BD: I think that pretty well covers the Pennsmen.

BL: Do you remember what sort of years, well you weren't sure about the year it started, but do you remember what year you kind of left at that point?

BD: Early 90s. I left, I know that, yeah.

BL: And um, lets go back to the Satyr men, when did you join that group or how did you find that group or...?

BD: Well it was a member of Satyr Men—to become a Satyr Men you start attending the events. And then you let it be known that you're interested. And then you have somebody who sponsors you. And then somebody does a straw vote, there's no such thing as a black bar or anything of the sort and if a majority of the people say "yeah he's okay" you're in. Its how you become a Saytr Men. And you don't pay any dues, we have no dues. I told you we don't have any meetings. We're from all over the eastern seaboard. Harrisburg had become somewhat of our home because the majority live in and around Harrisburg. But like, I had one guy from West Virginia staying here, two weeks ago, a couple from Hagerstown, and another couple from Lawrenceville, NJ. So, you know they're from all over. We're now having one who moved from Florida to Arkansas again. That's—why in the hell would you move to Arkansas. Anyhow, yeah, it—we're a group and we like each other and because we don't meet often, we're actually happy to see each other. Now my big job coming up is I run the Christmas Party. And again, we'll be having it over in Marysville. We rent—Marysville—this guy, he's got a garage, but in the garage he's built a stage. Now they do park their car in there, when were not having anything, but then they clean it up and we rent tables and chairs and Ronny cooks and we eat and then we have a gift exchange. Now the gift exchange is supposed to be anything for ten dollars or less, but it is usually something that was given the year before or seven years before and its now wrapped up again. We had this lazy susan, most god ugly thing you've ever seen, that I think was in everybody's house at one point, but one of the Satyr Men got a new friend who likes it. It is never to be seen again and we're so happy because it's like "oh god it's that thing again." But we enjoy just bullshitting is the word. Now we used to, until a couple years ago, well several years ago, we would—we—there was a camp—oh why can't I think of the name? It's hell when you get old. Well the latest one and I'll remember, but the latest one—we have these two members one, the older member of the pair owned a company that put in sewer lines and water lines, big bucks. And he and his husband I guess now cause I know their married, they bought this land outside of Clearfield, like 100 acres in the mountain. It's called Bear's Den. It has a nicer bar than most bars are, better stocked too I might add. It has bedrooms that—there would be like thirty of us and we all had bedrooms. They have streetlights that come on at night because they're way in the mountain, they have a generator that would damn near fill this room and if the electricity goes out it kicks in within ten seconds. And everything works! Cause it, we were there we had a bad thunderstorm one night and it went out so they figured okay it went out no big deal, and we went to bed at midnight or later and—you could hear the generator running, it's not that loud but you can hear it. And the generators running. We get up in the morning the generators

still running and Glen says “I guess I better call the power company. Maybe there is something wrong.” Well it was only their transformer that was out. We didn’t know it. Everything worked fine. We had, I guess we had our anniversary up there for probably four or five years. Oh! Valinore. That was the name of the camp out—out beyond Allentown. And Valinore was built by a man when the AIDS crisis—he was a Doctor and he was from New York City and he decided that they needed a place for AIDS patients because there was no hope in the beginning you know, it was a death sentence, which I wish the young kids realized its still a death sentence. But anyhow, it was—he would be the doctor in charge of – [phone ringing in background] oh shut up- whatever, and I know its gonna ring three times [Phone rings] and then we’ll be fine because it will be picked up downstairs [phone rings] Now its good. Any how it was where AIDS patients could come in the fresh air. He would regulate their medications and they would eventually die. Well let’s face it the new drugs have made that AIDS is not like it used to be. Its still—medicines wear out, you know that. But anyhow, for a long—and he got older, but we would go out there and it had at one point there were these chicken pens that had been turned into bunk houses. Every time I went there, even though I slept in a sleeping bag, sprayed the bed that I laid on with all kinds of horrible things, I came home with crabs. I swear that place was infested. And it was always on my chest, thank god. But you went through the ritual when you got home, got rid of them, then went ahead. But we went out there I guess about eight, ten years and we would always have a project. Like one year we built a fence, one year we put in electricity, we always had a job that we did on Saturdays. But that was when we were young and now, we don’t have you people taking over because young people, you know, if they’re looking to get hooked up, they go on the internet. And you don’t need to go through all the rigmarole And so, the clubs are dying as a matter of fact. Just like gay bars are not doing the business they used to. And it’s because—it’s— their need is not there anymore. It’s kind of sad in a way. Because that created a comradery and it was kind of a feeling of us against the them, there is no question that that was part of it. But its kind of sad to see that disappear. Oh! One of the stories that I did want to—I’m here because of one woman. Otherwise I’d be dead, I’d have had AIDS, there is no question. But when AIDS was making its first appearance, I had this friend—actually I was with Jeff—and it was Jeff’s friend. She worked in the labs in Geisinger. And I remember it was a Sunday afternoon, we were doing dishes, cause they would come down and—she and her husband, they were married. They would come down to Jeff and me’s and spend the weekend, they loved going to gay bars, so we’d take them to gay bars. Anyhow, we’re doing dishes and she says, “Bob, there is just something I want to tell you. I don’t know what yours and Jeff’s life is like.” But she said, “Just be careful, there is something going around with basically gay men,” and she said, “They’re dying and we don’t know why they’re dying,” she said, “So if you’re out and you’re doing what I think you’re doing, wear something.” And from that point on I was extremely careful. And I credit her, I mean she’s the one. Cause I had my share of flings boy! Used to love to go to Baltimore. That was a Sunday afternoon trip.

BL: What did you do there?

BD: Went to, I forget the bar that I—it wasn't the Hippo, I didn't like the Hippo. There was of course later on the Eagle, but didn't, when I was with Jeff that wasn't a part of my life. But I remember we'd go on a Sunday afternoon and I remember it was darker than blue shit in that place. And we used to have some wild times. And also in Washington. I remember the Eagle in Washington. Walked into the men's room and there was three bottles of what looked like they could be beer turned out to be piss. With a note "whoever wants it." "Oh that!" Forget it. And I—I had a friend in New York so I would go to New York pretty often. It was just a friend. It was a place to stay. My first, maybe my second, but it was a trip there, and this guy had lived in New York a while and he became—he was a Bartender. And he was now living in Harrisburg. But he would go back and have lots of friends. So it had to be one of the first times I went over, because we went to the friend's house and then we went out barhopping. And it was the first time I went to the Mine Shaft. Well that was like "oh my gosh." I went downstairs. And they said "We'll see ya!" and they got tired of waiting for me and they left and didn't tell me. I didn't know the address of this place. I knew pretty much where it was so at like five in the morning I'm walking the streets, I knew it was in the Village, I'm walking the streets and I knew I would recognize it when I saw it. I saw it. Well the outside door was locked. And I didn't know, sure there was a phone there but I honestly did not know the number of the apartment. So thank god somebody else had had a good night and he was going into his apartment he said "What's wrong?" I said, "I don't know..." I told him the story. He said "Aw come on up, come on." We'll eat something and have some coffee. It was the first time I'd ever been in the apartment—like New York had the apartment in the kitchen was the bathtub. And you put a lid over it and it became a table. That was his apartment. It was so neat. And he had a fire escape big enough for two people and we sat on the fire escape and I think we drank bloody mary's. I don't remember. But we sat on the fire escape and had a great time and he became a friend then by the way. He said, "Now", he said "If you're really wanna find," he said "if you really want- now you're in side you can walk through and if you know the place," I said "I think it was on the fourth floor." So he went 'Yep I found the apartment number.' Well I raised holy hell. "What do you mean you let me—"

[end of video 3]

[video 4 start]

BL: Uh lets see... Well, why don't we go back to went you met Ron Think.

BD: I met Ron Think in 1985. I know that for exact. Because I had taken a sabbatical, 1984-85. I went to Savannah. Now the ex, Jeff, had gone to Savannah. And I knew, I thought, I—let me put it this way. I thought I had a free place to stay. Jeff was never good with money. Turned out I paid the rent, but anyhow it was a place to stay. And I spent a year in Savannah. Now I—the school was told that I was going to Savannah to trace Sherman's March from Atlanta to Savannah. Now see Savannah wasn't burned. They were smart. They met Sherman out before he got there. Gave him the keys to the city, and said, "You have the best house- Whatever!" and he didn't burn it. I had a great time in Savannah, by the way. It was great. But I came back, I had

rented my house to a lady for a year. And of course I came home, cause I got a job teaching summer school in Millersburg and I—you know you were on half salary, so I needed the money. So I came home early, I had to stay with my parents which—that was horrible but anyhow. I came home and I wanted to buy a music box for my niece, cause I had a music box that she loved. And I—I asked somebody, “Well where do I go?” they said, “Well try the Bare-wall Gallery.” So, I went, and this was in 1985, it was June, and I went on a Saturday afternoon, and Ron was sitting on the stoop, in a chair doing needlepoint. And I went in and yes he had some music boxes, but none that I wanted, but we started talking. And I guess we talked until he closed the store, and on Saturdays it would be at five o’clock. And I went home to my mom and dad’s house. Well I must have given him my phone number, I don’t remember, because he called me, at my mom and dad’s house. Now he swore he didn’t say this, but I know he did. He asked me if I was wanted by the police. I said “no?” Well we made a date, I think it was the following Wednesday, and as I would kid him—and I never left up—and we just became a thing. But as I told you, we never, we never lived together, but then, I guess, I didn’t move down here until 1990. So for that five year period. I know that I would come down Wednesday after school and I would stay at Ron’s, I think for maybe the first two weeks we slept together when I did that. And then one morning he said, “for gods sake, sleep somewhere else you snore, and I can hit you and you still snore.” So I would sleep in the back room. But anyhow, I would stay Wednesday and then Thursday morning I would go back right to school from here. And then I would come down here on Friday night and stay over until Monday morning. And that went until I came down here and then I decided that I was gonna retire because Mellow, the Mellow bill went through Conwell legislature that you got—after 30 years you could have full retirement, rather than 35, so “I’m taking this.” And so I told them at the beginning of the year that I would be retiring at the end. And then I decided, might take a while to sell my house in Elizabethville. So I better put it on the market early. Well a good friend of ours was Jackie Kurby and Jackie was a realtor. And I said, “Jackie I know you don’t do upper Dauphin County but if you want it, I’ll give you the house, because it might take a long time.” She said, “Well yeah I’ll take it.” It sold in three weeks. And I had sixty days to get out. And then that’s how I got this house, because Jackie was showing me houses and I can remember it was a Saturday afternoon. When I started working with Ron, Ron would disappear upstairs and I’d be left, and I, you know that was fine, I like waiting on customers. He did all the book work. So anyhow, I was sitting out on the stoop, waiting for someone to come in and Jackie comes down and pulls in front. She gets out of the car, she said, “I just saw the house you’re gonna buy.” And I said, “What do you mean?” she said, “I saw it. You’re gonna buy it.” And she said, “I’m pissed.” Well Judy who owned this house had called her cause she wanted to buy another house and she wanted to sell this one. And so they had come through the house and Jackie said, “Oh yeah I can sell this.” And she said—“before I left I said to Judy, ‘now is there anyone you want to exempt from the contract anybody you think may want to buy it that you looked at—’” “I can’t think of anybody...Oh!” she said, “Wait Bob Diebler down at the Bare-Wall, I know he’s looking for a house” and Jackie came right down to me, she said “I know you’re gonna buy it.” And she said, “I could have ripped her tits off.” And I did! I called Judy, next day I came up here, Ron came with me. Went through the house and I said, “Yep! I’ll pick it.” And about the middle of the week Judy called me, she said “Did we set a price?” I said, “I don’t think so” she said, “Well how much did you get for your

house?" I—I don't know I think I gotten \$82k or something like that. She said, "Add \$1000 and that's what you get." And that's how I got the house. And it was kind of funny, the day I moved into the house, she, Judy—Judy is like a steel magnolia, really I mean on the outside she looks like 'oh I can do anything' but boy, she can. And of course I had to be out of my house on a Friday, and Judy couldn't move into her house until Monday. But we both used the same moving company. Judy got on the phone and she said, "Now I know this is gonna happen, now not many people move on weekends you can let Bob's stuff on the truck and not pay anything, he doesn't need to pay anything and I'll move out and you'll can move it in." And that—I remember that Monday, cause it was a Monday, her truck was loading, my truck was at the end of the block. And when her truck pulled out, my truck pulled in and I—her mother said, "I don't have time to clean!" I said "hell its only gonna get dirty anyhow! Don't worry about it!" And that's—and Ron and I then we continued our relationship and then of course I moved down here. It wasn't all roses and glory. I mean we had a period where I think I fucked up more than anybody else, but—we were going to call it quits. I must say, he's the one that came around. But that was the only time, and you know... you become like an old married couple. And you are an old married couple. I wished we could have been married. I would have need to have paid, what was it, 15% when he died because I'm not a relative. But yeah. And I liked—I liked working at the Bare Wall. I really did. I especially enjoyed it around the holidays. From now on because we were very, very busy. And I became the wrapper. I have wrapped more packages than you could—and Christmas eve day, we would be open as long as we had customers. Now sometimes we got out of there by three O'clock, and we had some people who would be at the door, when we opened and they would spend like four hours there the day before Christmas. And I would wrap all their gifts. They would buy all their gifts from us, and they would say, "Now put so and so's name on that one." And that's- and they'd take them and under the Christmas tree and they were all set. My neighbor used to buy a lot of stuff cause she said, 'Oh I can let it there whenever you get it wrapped bring it home and give it to me' you know? And I enjoyed that. It was fun. One of my first years it was funny. You know in the back room we had the dirty cards. And I was—it was the candle light house tour, cause we were always open, even if we weren't on the tour, there certain people who came every year, some bought, some just wanted to say hello. And I'm in the backroom wrapping a gift and these two old couples, I mean they were probably my age, now but back the they seemed like, you know, one step in the grave the other on a banana peel. And they were extremely well dressed. And they're looking at these cards. And I'm thinking "uh-oh." The older lady touched me on the shoulder. Kinda tapped me. And I thought "oh she's gonna give me hell I know she is. She said, "You know what, Ben Franklin didn't know everything when he said all men are created equal." I mean those are the kind of customers we had, they were great! And then we had the closet, because that there all the boxes were kept, and it was kind of in a hallway. It was where it shouldn't have been, but I'd need to go in for a box and I'd say, "Let me into the closet." And someone was sure to say "You've been out too long Bob, they know!" And I have good memories of that place. And of course, Ron left it up to me in the will. I didn't inherit everything. His sister, thank god, inherited, and of course our godson. There's no question—that's another story I have to tell ya. But anyhow, my mind just went 'pbbllt' where was I?

BL: Going into the closet?

BD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was beyond that but anyhow. Lets talk about the godson. The Batisties [sp?], lived around the corner on Briggs street. They actually had lived behind me, but then they bought a house on Brigs. When they moved there, they were just him and her, young couple. Well they had a son, JJ. And that's his name, its J-J. Doesn't stand for anything, its JJ. And anyhow, they would come over, like on a Saturday night cause you know their wings were really clipped with a kid, they can't go out bar hopping or whatever, cause they didn't trust a baby sitter. But they would come around the corner to us and bring the baby monitor with them and JJ had a habit, he would talk in his sleep. Now he didn't really talk, but he'd make noise. And Ron was just- "Are you sure he's okay?" One time, Garrick said, "Ron, come on, we're gonna go over, he's sleeping." But anyhow, they and I would drink, Ron did not drink at all. So we'd kill a bottle of wine. We didn't get drunk, but we were happy. And so I guess JJ was about two years, maybe two going on three when they decided they'd have him baptized. And they came over and they said, "Would the two of you be godfathers to JJ?" I of course immediately said, "Well yeah!" Ron said, "Well now wait" so he thought about, yep, yep. So they were members of Market Square Presbyterian. And of course he was baptized during a service, the only time Ron had been in a church. I mean we were waiting for the roof to crack. But we went, and of course we had to stand up and promise. Ron goes up to the preacher who he didn't know from Adam and he says to him "You know, I never thought I'd though I'd stand in front of a preacher and say, 'I do'." Thank god, Markus Squares a pretty liberal church and JJ was so cute because you know, he's walking! And you know how the preacher usually holds the baby and introduces him to the congregation well he took JJ's hand and led him up front. JJ let go of his hand walks down the aisle and there was a lady sitting in a little bit, he went in and crawled up beside her and sat beside her. JJ's now 11. But we had some great times with them. And they would—they would—the kids went to preschool, well it was babysitting at the labor and industry building. Cause both of them worked for, they worked when Rendell was Governor. Sara, mother, was Rendell's appointment secretary. And Eric was the Legislature liaison person. So they had an in and their kids went over there, which was by the way very good, but they would get out of work until five. And we were open until six. And between five and six you know the Harvey Taylor bridge is pure hell. So they would pick up the kids, come to the Bare Wall, Ron and I would baby sit and they'd take nap or be on their cell phones. Cause Ron would look at me and say, "I'm not sure that their coming to visit or just get someone to sit with the kids until the traffic clears." But we had a great time with them, they really were. And Ron hated kids, until he came along. And there, that kid could do no wrong. One—only and—only one thing ever got chipped. And that he blamed on Eric the dad. It was your fault. And Ron loved to take them Halloweening. Cause you know Camp Hill. And they lived on Country Club Drive, so it was kind of a nice area. But that whole area behind it, everybody decorated like mad for Halloween. And we would go Halloweening. I remember, JJ was maybe five, something like that, Ron and he would walk together, and Eric said, "JJ you know you're supposed to collect candy?" Ron said, "Come on JJ, we'll collect candy, make dad happy." And so Ron would talk to all these people and after about three or four people, JJ looked at Ron and said "Okay that should keep dad happy." And no more. But you know, they—things have changed. Ron died. I still have—

when Ron had his bladder removed, Eric and the kids made him a big card, it was a big sheet of oak tag, and I still have it over in what had been Ron's bedroom. And it said, "Bye-Bye Bladder!" But, and then of course Ron came up here when he—when he had his bladder removed because they, they put a hole, really, he had to have a bag attached. And they said, of you can change it yourself—no you can't—you can't see through plastic for goodness sake. And it was no big deal we changed the bag once a week, and Ron had no problems. But then he got sick and...I don't blame anybody, but after the bladder operation he was told, we got everything, you don't need to see an Oncologist. There is nothing there and of course the Pet Scan came out negative too. But that was like in April, and then I think he had an appointment in June. And that's went they discovered that indeed they had not, and it had metastasized in the bone and there was just nothing they could do. And so he only lasted then—he lasted from then whatever, June or July, until September. And was gone. I miss him. Always will. But I remember the fun times. And he had one heck of a fun—Ron was character. And he would always say to me, you know I could have been in MENSA and I'd say, 'well why aren't you?' "Well they want dues." And I thought well maybe then, I knew he was smart, but of course I'm cleaning out when, after he died, sure enough, there's his invitation to join MENSA, but it cost something like \$170 to begin with and then you pay a yearly due. So he was right, he didn't lie. But he was the smartest man I ever knew. He really was. He would—he would do logic problems for fun. And you know, Betty has a sister who's half her age and then it would say, well how old is John? And I'd say, "Well she- yess!" "And now Bob!" And he'd try to explain it and it's say "Pbbt! Forget it"

BL: Do you recall what year Ron opened the Bare Wall?

BD: Let me think...I should be able to...he died in '12, deduct 40 years from 2012...

BL: '72.

BD: That's right! Right after the flood. Because we had pieces in the Bare Wall that came from Shell's Seed thing which was down on Cameron street. And they never reopened. And we had upstairs was one, downstairs was the other. And it was a seed cabinet. The drawers were metal, now the wood was—the fronts was wood, but they were metal drawers. They story was, when Ron got it, they had not cleaned them out and there was corn which had sprouted in some of the drawers—that they had been filled with water. And one of them had been upstairs, the bigger one was upstairs in one of his rooms and it had 40 million draws I mean that was the hardest thing to clean out because it had been since '72 I think and stuff had been put in, when a draw got filled he used another draw is what it amounted to. But I gave that—the one downstairs I gave to Mark, but the one, the bigger one upstairs I have to Eric and Joanne who lived two doors down. I still don't understand how those two people got that damn big thing down the steps. Because the steps were hard, but they did it. And its in their house now.

BL: Well I know that the Bare Wall, because it was—it was such a local landmark for the gay community. It almost served as kind of a gathering place for people [BD: Oh yeah!] people would always come there and stop in just to look around, things like that so yeah.

BD: We had people who whenever they came to town would stop in to see us. And it was kind of neat and Historic Harrisburg began in the backroom of the Bare Wall.

BL: Oh Really? I didn't know that.

BD: I was, a group had tried to save the States theater, and Ron was involved with it. And of course they were unable to do that and then these same people decided, "Okay, we need an organization which will work to preserve what is good." And so they met in the back room and that's when it was put together and Ron always told the story about the first Candle light tour and that soon after—they needed a way to make some money. That's what it amounted to. And this one guy, Frank Pines as a matter of fact who is still alive. Frank was one of the group, and Frank said, "Why don't we have a tour. A house tour?" and all the rest said, "Oh that's bullshit!" Frank said, "Now look, I'll do everything." Well that was different if he was gonna do everything, sure. And of course it was a big success. And of course all of them took credit for it. "Oh yeah! We, we thought it was a good idea..."

BL: That's great. Lets see... Let me just look at my list again and see... in terms of your religious affiliation you'd mentioned I think at one point UCC or...

BD: I grew up with the UCC.

BL: Right.

BD: but the UCC is, I don't know if you know anything about that denomination, but it is very autonomous. And the church that I went to got a preacher who was very fundamental. The church disassociated themselves with the UCC and they became, I think now they're called the Community Church. My brother was very active with them, by the way. I got chucked out. I was told I got chucked out because I didn't pay my dues, but I had the check to prove that I did. I think I got chucked because I was gay. That would probably be the only discrimination I ever felt. And then for a long time I said to hell with it. And then when Ron was sick, Pastor Rick, can't think of his last name, from Harris Street Methodist, which you know is just up the street from here. He—I guess he came to the Bare wall to buy a gift or something, and he and Ron started talking and he and Ron developed quite a friendship. And I can remember Pastor Rick saying to me, one day, when Ron pretty sick at that point, he said, "Do you think Ron would allow me to say a prayer?" and I said, "You know him. He's upstairs, he's in his right mind. Ask him!" Cause Ron did not believe in God. So Rick and he became really good friends. They really did. And that's what brought me back to church. When Ron died. I just wanted to go back up here. And they were wonderful people. And then of course that church closed. And I said to a couple friends, 'well I want to go to a UCC.' And Salem of course is a UCC church. And so we went down to Salem, it's the oldest church in Harrisburg. And they're great people. Now of course we jokingly—I think there's like five or six of us Methodist and I—I said, you know, "Anybody who wants a church closed let us know, we'll come!" But they had a young minister

when I went down their first, Pastor Ryan, he's left. In fact they don't have anybody right now, but I decided I wanted to join again. And I didn't know he was leaving, and I don't think he knew at the time. But yeah we made arrangements and I, no problem, and he said, "Now I want to see you after church." I remember we sat down and he said, "Okay, one question, you believe in Jesus Christ?" And he said, "I assume?" and I said, "Yeah" and he said, "Okay you're in." he said, "You've been though the rigamarrow, you know." And now I've become pretty active. And I have lots of doubts, when it comes to religion. I think organized religion has done more harm than it's done good. I really do. I mean I look at all the wars, I look at all the discriminations, etc... And it's not the religion. I keep saying religion'd be great without the Christians. I've gotten very involved because they're not judgmental for one thing. Another thing, their preachers tend to preach no longer than 15 minutes at the most. In fact they sent a survey around, well what we looking for in a pastor? My first thing was 'preaching no longer than 10 minutes.' And I—you know they need someone to fill the Pulpit, and I like to hear myself talk, as you can tell. I've done it. I'm doing it on the 11th. Everybody's invited. I guess it's about the fourth time I've done it. Saves them some money. They don't need to pay me a stipend. And I enjoy it, I really do.

BL: And you were not involved in the military?

BD: No.

BL: Okay. Are there any other, say LGBT organizations, affiliations or other things that you have been involved with over the years in the community?

BD: No, I haven't, I really haven't. I was, I don't know how to put it. I helped raise money back in the AIDS Crisis days. I became involved there. But I was just a peon. I—you know, I knew some people with money, heads of organizations. And I got them some money to help pay.

BL: Any other just general civic involvement with any organizations that we haven't touched on yet?

BD: Well I'm pretty active with Historic Harrisburg.

BL: Okay, yeah.

BD: Otherwise, no. I'm really am not.

BL: What—what's your involvement with Historic Harrisburg, have you been, like?

BD: I volunteer. I'm a little annoyed with them right now They decided—you know the Bank building, that they were given?

BL: Yes.

BD: It was actually two banks in there at one time. And there are two walk-in safes, and they're pretty big, actually. So they decided that one of the safes would be made into a library, named after David Hoffman. And the other would be the Bare Wall Gallery. And so we had this wonderful little meeting, and big announcement, you know big deal. And then I was part of the committee to get the one safe ready for the Bare Wall Gallery. We had two meetings and we never had another one since. So I'm a little annoyed, so I haven't done a damn thing for them this year, except pay my dues. But I'll get 'em back to them. Because I can't, I can't hold a grudge for long enough. I forget.

BL: Were there any particular, important events or turning points in your life that you want to highlight or—?

BD: Well certainly when I realized I was gay. That was the biggest thing. And I'm proud of myself that I got over it real quick. I mean I—I was enjoying the self-pity. And then I thought, but the other feels so much better. And you know, I dated girls because you were suppose to date girls. Even in college. That was when—and meeting Ron was probably the biggest thing that ever happened to me. I was really a shy person. Now it doesn't sound like I was, but Ron gave me the ability to mix with people. And part of it was the fact that I was at the Bare Wall—you know, as a school teacher, you run the thing and its easier to be the head honcho, then it is to be a follower. It really is. But Ron, and the store, gave me a different outlook on life. And you know I'm a pretty happy person. Well that doesn't mean I'm always happy, I can be the biggest grump you've ever seen. As they knew at the Bare Wall. My favorite story, oh this shouldn't be on tape. My favorite story at the Bare Wall was, I was in the back room and it had to be close to holiday time, but we had put—Ron would suddenly decided in the middle of the season that we were changing the whole store around. And we had moved those horribly big shelves into the back room, I remember that, but anyhow, I was down on my knees scrubbing the bottom shelf, cause they got really dirty, and of course we had the card racks. And there was this man there, looking at cards, and I turned around and there's his dick hanging out! I look up at him and I said, "Get the hell out of here, we don't do that in here!" and I literally chased him out of the store. And somebody said, "Well how big was it?" I said, "I don't have any idea." But I—and that annoyed me! It pissed me off. Damn it why did he expect me to do? Pat it?

BL: Can you think of anything else that you wanted to ask?

Ashley Famularo: This is going way back to the beginning of the interview and I remember you'd said that you majored in Social Studies, but then taught English classes, so when you did start teaching, forgive me if you said this, did you teach English then?

BD: Yes, I had my choice. See I graduated from Millersburg. And I needed a job. Now I had a job in Plainfield, NJ. But I wasn't sure I wanted to go to Plainfield, NJ. Had it been closer to New York City, yes, but no, not Plainfield. So I turned that down. And then I didn't have a job. And so I came home and somebody said, "you know Millersburg needs teachers?" So I called the superintendent, and I know it was a Saturday afternoon. And I had an interview, and there

were two jobs open. One was English, but it was seniors, and the other was Social Studies—no it was, wrong way. It was senior social studies and it was 9th grade English. Well I decided being a young new teacher, I would do better with ninth graders than with seniors, because I mean shit, they were only four years younger than I was. And so I said I'd take the English job and that's how I got the English job. And then I stayed in English there was no way I was doing anything else. Then of course, Mr., he was Mr. Shelly, his last words to be were, now remember, we do not date our seniors. And I wanted to say, "Don't worry, I won't date any," he said "senior girls," I said, "Don't worry I won't." And I didn't date any senior boys either by the way. I never liked boys. I had always like men older than me. I can't say that anymore because they're all dead. It's one of the things about getting old folks.

BL: Anything else you can think of?

AF: You had mentioned to remind you about an AIDS Story, was that of the sister?

BD: That was the one, yeah. That was it. Where I was saved. And I do, I have thanked her so often.

BL: I think that's all I have. Do you have anything else you wanted to add?

BD: No, I'm just glad I could add some not so revelation-y, that's not a word. They certainly aren't revelations what I had to hand you. But I enjoyed talking.

BL: Well, I think a lot of what you had enhanced our information because, we didn't have a lot of stories about the Pennsmen, and I didn't know about the Satyrmn and of course we didn't really have any of the story of the Bare Wall.

BD: Right.

BL: Well one thing we didn't really talk about was, more about Richard Schlegel. Do you have anything that you can share about your remembrances of him?

BL: My favorite story about him he lived like a pauper. So that he could accumulate a million bucks. But he would always tell—this I got through Jim Bren, next door. He talked about nothing, but he wanted to go to Greece. And he—he would talk to me, he would call me on the phone. And I said, "Well for gods sakes, spend some of your money!" "Oh no, no" I said, "Spend some of your money." And Jim told him the same thing. So he made arrangements to go to Greece. And he was going for ten days. And I think Jim had taken him to the airport. And Jim of course who could see the light because they lived, you know, like, here. Houses next to each other. And of course Jim was to keep an eye on the house. And he noticed a different light on one night. So he goes "What's going on over there?" So he went over. There is Richard. After only four days. He said, "What are you doing home?" he said, "Couldn't understand a damn fool, they speak Greek!" And Jim says, "What'd you think they speak?" but Richard liked young men.

And oh, he would pick up some strange looking things. But he was—he was a character. And he was—you would have said yes, he's effeminate, but he had more balls than most people. I mean when he was fired as a civilian with the army, he took it right to the Supreme Court. Course they threw it out, but he took it, I've got the record of everything. Then when he was working for the state, he was working for PennDOT [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation] and some old lady saw some drag queens leaving his apartment, reported him, he got fired again. And then he decided he could make money by running clothes out through huge businesses that were going out of business. And so that's what he was doing and that's where he made most of his money. And when he—and he just put things off. Like when we were settling his estate. And he had, well first of all he had four different banks where he had safety deposit boxes, where most of the banks were very nice about getting what was in the box out. We had two where we had to sit around a table, and they had a stenographer, one fountain pen, I have those lists too. But we went to this one bank to close a checking account and of course we had the papers, and the tellers say, "Well you can't close that account" I said, "Well why?" "Well that's in his mother's name." I said, "Well he's been using—" "Yeah we knew that." So we had to reopen her estate, and close it, and get appointed executors, close her estate, transfer it to his estate so we could close it out. I mean that was Richard. He just said, "Well what the heck?" And like, I know at family reunions people did discriminate against him, they really did. And I don't know whether they knew he was gay—it was that he was different. I'm a little ashamed of myself that I didn't stand up for him, but he was a pain in the ass. He really was. And why he liked me, I don't know.

BL: Did he know that you were gay?

BD: Oh yeah. Oh definitely. Yeah.

BL: What was the earliest that you knew him, or, you know...

BD: I was probably...it would have been after my Grandma died, which was in the late 50s because I know that we started a family reunion after her funeral. That's the only reason I know that. And that's when I could have first come in contact, cause they lived in Lewisburg. And now my mother and her mother and his mother rather they were somewhat close, cause they were first cousins, I know that he and his mother got along well, but he and his father didn't because he was gay. And I think he had come out to his parents, I'm pretty sure he did. But I would get these long letters from him and most of the time he would be talking about his damn will. And I remember when he was setting up—cause he wanted to set up a trust while he was still living, it never happened, but he wanted to. And he had gone to some Ben Dunlap who worked for a firm down—in downtown Harrisburg. And Richard had called and told me he had this appointment Ben, would I go with him? And I did. Well Ben had some great ideas for him, but Richard said, "well how much will this cost me?" And Ben of course quoted him his price, and he said, "Oh okay that's too much." And so he never set up anything for himself. Now he did in the will tell he wanted it done. And he—he told it like it was for the most part. I'm glad I knew him. He would have never've been my best friend, rest assured, and I'm glad he did what he did. I wish he had been a little more liberal in his direction of where it shall be used. Cause I don't know

whether he heard—or you told him—the Gay Men’s Chorus—I got an email from—I don’t remember who it was. And I said no, our money is already gone for this year, in fact were a little over what we need. But the nice thing is you can carry it over for the next year. But anyhow, I said, “I can probably stretch it a point and call it education.” But I said, “I do have to stretch a point for the Gay Men’s Chorus.” Since they don’t even—do they even call themselves the Gay Men’s Chorus? Or was it

BL: They do now

BD: Do they now? For the longest time it was just the Men’s course

BL: right, right,

BD: Which I thought was strange, but they did have a couple non-gay people. I do understand it. And I, you know I enjoy them, and if you have some money go another year, yeah. But of course we’re—we—we have been giving equality Pennsylvania \$20,000 a year. We are now, we have signed the contract with Penn State for another I think for another, I think that’s \$10,000, and we’re doing 10 with you people

BL: 10 a year, okay.

BD: so you know

BL: Yeah.

BD: But I’ll go through Richard’s stuff, if I find anything that I think you might be interesting in, cause I don’t know what to do with it.

BL: Pretty much all of it I would say. We would be interested

BD: I’ve purged a lot of it.

BL: We at least want to see if, you know, if you think, err on the side of we probably want more of it than you think not so

BD: Well, I think, I guess we sent nineteen boxes to Cornell,

BL: Yeah they were a lot of material.

BD: But that was heavily into his publishing days.

BL: Right

BD: When he published those magazines. And you know he was involved with the big names. And then there's the, there a book here...I purged books and then I forget that I no longer have the books. Well won't do it now.

BL: We'll do it afterwards. But

BD: which has decided now to pop off here...damn thing

BL: Were you aware of his involvement with the...I can remember the name of the group now—the Janice Society in Philadelphia? And then he started a chapter here in Harrisburg?

BD: I wasn't aware until after he died.

BL: Okay.

BD: And then I found all that—basically correspondence. But yeah.

BL: Yeah, cause the, from my research, so far, the chapter of the Janice society that he started in Harrisburg was the first gay organization created anywhere in Central PA.

BD: Yeah.

BL: So it's pretty significant.

BD: Yes, it is. And I will find it, I'm pretty sure I still have the book. Written by a—a Canadian. And I in fact, I had met him, because Richard showed him around. But he'd flew into Harrisburg, and Richard said, "Go see Bob Deibler at the Bare Wall" and I know we went for drinks and I think maybe we went for dinner. But—nice guy and he wrote this book and he gives Richard credit for a good many things in it. So I'm pretty sure I didn't throw that away. I'm pretty sure that's in there somewhere.

BL: Anything else that you can think of that—?

BD: No I think that pretty well covers. In fact, I talked a lot longer than I thought I would.
[Laughter]

BL: Well thank you so much for participating in our Oral History Project.

BD: Well thank you for having me.

BL: We appreciate it.

BD: I appreciated it. It was fun.

BL: Good. Great. Thank you.

[End of final video]