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**Interviewee: Jerre Freiberg**

Interviewer: Mary Merriman

Date: December 3, 2014

Place: Lancaster, PA

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**Abstract**

Jerre Freiberg was raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His family has close ties to the Lutheran Church, and he has remained affiliated with the church throughout his life. Jerre attended Elizabethtown College for two years before leaving to join the Navy. He remained in the Navy for 22 years, retiring in 1986. After retiring from the Navy, Jerre continued to work as Lancaster County's budget analyst, and later as the Director of Administrative Services for the Lancaster Guidance Center. Jerre was diagnosed as HIV positive in 1992, and he subsequently became involved in several Lancaster area HIV/AIDS groups and organizations. In this interview, Jerre discusses his naval career —and being in a same-sex relationship during his years in service. He details his experiences as being HIV positive in Lancaster, including his own work advocating for other HIV positive persons, such as being the director of the Betty Finney House which assisted low-income persons with HIV with housing needs. Jerre elaborates on some of his relationships, both before and after his HIV diagnosis. Jerre goes on to discuss changes he has seen since the early days of the AIDS crisis, and some of the challenges those who are currently HIV positive still face, particularly issues concerning senior citizens. He concludes with a reflection on changes within the LGBT community throughout his life — such as same sex marriage legalization and equality efforts.

**MM:** Okay, so we're gonna start this oral history interview and my name is Mary Merriman and I'm one of the interviews for the Oral History Project, and I'm interviewing Jerre today and gonna ask him to just introduce himself, tell me where you live and then perhaps talk about your family. Did you grow up in this area? Who were your parents? If you can give me their names that way that helps to look at this a historical background.

**JF:** Mmm Hmm.

**MM:** So just give me your name and address and who your parents were.

**JF:** Yeah. I'm — I'm Jerre Freiberg. I live here in Lancaster. I've — I've lived in Lancaster my whole life all but the period of time that I was in Navy. I — I'm real fortunate I had — I'm an adopted child. My brother and sister and I are all adopted and we had all separate biological parents, but mom and dad you know, got the three of us together and we — you know I had a wonderful upbringing. My mom was a school teacher, my dad was a banker. So — so we lived a pretty good life and — and my parents were — were the Lutheran Church and pretty religious. They were very strict on us. We — but back in the days when my brother and I were bad, we got

boar bristle spankings on our backs and today people would've been in all sorts of trouble doing stuff like that.

**MM:** Yeah, they would be.

**JF:** But I had a good upbringing, but it paid off in the end cause my brothers' retired FBI, my sister is retired from owning her own beauty shop, and I'm retired Navy so — so we all had a pretty nice family.

**MM:** Did you grow up here in Lancaster?

**JF:** We — we lived in down on South Prince Street, which wasn't a real nice area. Town was starting to change, so daddy bought — or built a home out in the country about 12 miles south of Lancaster. You know, bought some land off a farm down there, so — so we — we were raised in southern Lancaster County then. My brother and I worked farms and did bales of hay and stuff like that when we grew up.

**MM:** Okay Jerre, who were your parents?

**JF:** Estelle and Harold Freiberg.

**MM:** Okay, and where they also from Lancaster County originally?

**JF:** No. My father — right here in Hand Avenue in Lancaster, and mom was from — had nine brothers and sisters from a farm in Kansas.

**MM:** Uh-huh.

**JF:** And she ended up in Lancaster by going to — she and her sister were sort of rebels back in those days and they went to Midland, Nebraska to college and then went to the Baltimore — or the — the Lutheran Mother House in New York City and then went to Baltimore (Maryland) and then my aunt was placed in Argentina and mom was placed in Lancaster. At the Lutheran Church here and that's where mom and dad met.

**MM:** Okay, and what do you mean she was placed? What was she doing?

**JF:** When they go to the Baltimore Mother House, you know they — its finish them up and seeing their interests all and — and my aunt wanted to be a missionary out of the United States, so she went to Argentina for 45 years. And then mom was placed in Grace Lutheran Church here and Lancaster.

**MM:** Okay, so that's part of your connection to Grace Lutheran too.

**JF:** Yeah.

**MM:** That's interesting.

**JF:** My whole life I've been attached to that church.

**MM:** And how far did you go in school?

**JF:** Fourteen years. Two years up here at E-Town (Elizabethtown College), Elizabethtown (Pennsylvania).

**MM:** Okay, and are you still kind of connected with the Lutheran Church? Do you attend at all?

**JF:** Yeah, I'm pretty close to the minister over there so, yeah. We — If I don't like get to church in a couple weeks or something I know he'll be calling.

**MM:** Okay, alright.

**JF:** We're real close.

**MM:** Okay, and in terms of just thinking back — in terms of sexuality and that sort of thing — in your religious background, or your history background, was there ever any conversations around sexuality?

**JF:** No, in fact it's sort of sad. Back in those days you were brought up to — you know — get a good education, get a good job, get married and have kids. You know? And that's the way my parents were and — and I — I wasn't real — I guess I was really pretty young, cause I probably had these little farm boys at 13 years old if you know what I mean. And I didn't dare let mom and dad know anything like that. So — so we never, never discussed it, but I also a partner for 29 years and whenever we got home, the beds were all made for the two of us, so mom and dad were open-minded but, they never talked about it.

**MM:** So did they allow you to sleep in the same bed or were they separate?

**JF:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, they — they were very good to us.

**MM:** Isn't that funny how different people do that. I was remembering the days of everybody had two bedrooms, and you made up one for show as though the two were sleeping in separate rooms for a lot of families. So they were kind of — kind of accepting in a kind of a quiet way.

**JF:** Yeah and I — daddy was very — very staunch banker with the custom made suits and the perfect haircuts and mom was a high school teacher, and that's what I think she drilled into dad, "You let the kids be who they are," you know. Cause a high school teacher — mom was connected with all these kids all the time and we had foster kids come in, we had exchange students from Kenya, Africa — so they — we had a lot of different types of people that us kids grew up with in the house. So, you know, I look back on mom and dad and they were really a lot more open than I ever thought when I was a teenager, you know.

**MM:** How about — so what field were you studying in school that you went for two years?

**JF:** Business administration.

**MM:** So that was — and did you stop for your second year or —

**JF:** Well, the Army decided they were giving us time to go the Army.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** My brother was in the Navy and he started telling me horrible things about the Army, so — and I wasn't really happy in — in college, you know. I — when us kids grew up we traveled all the time. Mom and dad always traveling, so I always thought it'd be sort of fun to join the Navy so...I joined the Navy.

**MM:** So that's what you did. And how long were you in the Navy?

**JF:** Twenty-two years.

**MM:** Oh okay, so that was a long history. Were you out at that point? Or no?

**JF:** I ended up about just a few months after I joined the Navy — I ended up with my partner who was on — a sailor on another ship.

**MM:** Oh, okay.

**JF:** So we had a terrible time adjusting things there, but after eight years we tried to decide what to do. I liked the Navy a lot, he didn't care for it too much, and he wanted to go in real estate. So I thought— I stay in the Navy, he go in real estate. And you change real-estate offices all over the country so he got out of the Navy and stayed in real estate and I stayed in the navy, so. But it was horrible because back in those days you know — if they found out you'd be kicked out, so, I had to be a good boy for 22 years.

**MM:** Were you ever investigated at all while you were in the Navy?

**JF:** If so, I didn't know about it. I mean we — they'd have to be obvious that you know, two guys living together, buying houses together, always together, you know. Always together. But we never had any issues and no one ever questioned me, and I really had good jobs. I know when I went to work in the Pentagon I got the highest security clearances, so there was some investigating going on there which I'm surprised something didn't come up and —

**MM:** When did you retire?

**JF:** 1986.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** Yeah, I was fortunate there. I went as high as you can go in the military, so I'm well cared for, you know, as far as nice retirement and medical and all that, so. But I loved the Navy and the traveling, you know.

**MM:** What were you — what was your occupation?

**JF:** I was the yeoman in the Navy.

**MM:** Which did what?

**JF:** Huh?

**MM:** What did a yeoman do?

**JF:** Administrative work.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** But, I really ended up getting into was , um, I did congressional hearings to get money for the Navy. And — and I always — always was in some field of money management with the government while I was in the Navy. So it was sort-of fun.

**MM:** Okay, about — and then — current family? You said you're by yourself now?

**JF:** Yeah, my sister recently passed away, and mom and dad — daddy lived till he was 87 and mom lived till she was 94.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** Then my sister recently passed away, and she was 69. And I have a 75 year old brother living in Sarasota, Florida — he's retired from the FBI. He's — but I just have my brother now [sighs].

**MM:** *Let me stop one second here.* [Camera issues]

## **Clip 2:**

**MM:** *It's saying something about access.* Okay. How about partners?

**JF:** I had — really my first closest male friend ended up being my partner for 29 years.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** Now he passed away when he was 52. He a heart attack.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** But, you know, bad heart ran in the family so, he was under doctor's care, but it still happened, you know. And since then, I met a real nice Hispanic fella — and he was living with HIV and he had — some addiction problems, but he really got his life together and we were together four years. And then you know the HIV and the, you know — he had some serious illnesses from that and then he passed away. And I've been single now for a long time, you know. I have a good friend, you know, but — you know, I'm single. I don't like it. I don't like being single. But, when you get my age, I don't know, whatever comes along is nice. [laughs]

**MM:** Yeah, it hard to meet people too, as we're getting older.

**JF:** Mmm hmm.

**MM:** I was by the Tally-Ho the other night and — and I still can't figure out if that's open or not. The loft is open upstairs, but everything's always dark downstairs.

**JF:** I don't go down — I don't go to the Tally-Ho. You know, they're so clicky and all.

**MM:** Mmm hmm.

**JF:** I — the Sun— there's another — the Sundown [Lounge] or — I'd like to go up there for the music.

**MM:** And are they still open?

**JF:** Mmm Hmm. They're doing real well.

**MM:** Oh, okay. Didn't know that. Ah. Okay.

**JF:** They're doing—

**MM:** And is it still primarily women or is it both?

**JF:** Yeah, women, yeah.

**MM :** Okay, interesting. How about organizationally? What organizations have you worked with in —

**JF:** I — when I retired from the Navy, I guess it was all over my paperwork that, that I did government money. So, it was very easy to be hired for Lancaster County's budget analyst.

**MM:** Oh, okay.

**JF:** And, and I liked the job, but I hated the people that I worked for. Every department had insisted on getting the bulk of the money, and then me asking for all the justifications and things like that — and then weeding out the money was a horrible job. But, it was a good job, I got to know Lancaster County real quick after retiring from the Navy, you know, how they, you know — you were sort of — they were good for their own department, I'll put it that way. But I left there and went over — Director of Administrative Services for the Lancaster Guidance Center.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** And there I had like, 3,000 MHMR [Mental Health and Mental Retardation] clients.

**MM:** Mmm hmm.

**JF:** And 42 case managers, and I never worked case management in my life. So that was quite a challenge.

**MM:** Was that employed?

**JF:** Yeah, I was—

**MM:** That's a job?

**JF:** Yeah —

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** I was the director of Administrative Services over there. And that lasted for a couple years, and meanwhile I was diagnosed with HIV, so I got very involved in that and then it didn't take long till I had an HIV organization of my own. I was the director of the Betty Finney House Corporation, which addressed housing needs for people living with HIV and AIDS. Now I had that job for seven years and I really enjoyed that.

**MM:** Mmm hmm

**JF:** And then I retired from that in February of 2002, and I been sort-of on my own ever since, you know, so.

**MM:** So are you doing any — are you involved with any organizations at this point?

**JF:** No.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** No.

**MM:** I'm gonna kind-of jump over to the important events, and you mentioned a couple times, but I wanna do one thing. I wanna make sure this is recording right cause I'm getting a message that says access.

### **Clip Three**

**MM:** A little bit of problems with the equipment but it's okay. We're gonna talk a little bit about HIV/AIDS, because you mentioned it a couple times, and it sounds like it did become somewhat of a change in life — maybe one of the markers that changed in terms of involvement in things and changing your role into Betty Finney and all that. When were you diagnosed?

**JF:** In January the third of 1992.

**MM:** And why do you remember that date?

**JF:** Magic Johnson and I were diagnosed together. [laughing] And we are both doing real, real well, so.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah he is. I remember the prediction for him were — first off everybody, nobody wanted to touch him, “What if he's on the basketball court and he gets a cut?” “What are we gonna do?” and everybody was so crazy at that point in time. And of course, you know, how did he contact it, and then starting into personal life. So it really was quite, quite sensational at that point in time. Now, HIV was -- first cases were in 1981, I think, was the first CDR [Continuing Disability Review] report we see of new (\_\_\_???) creating. So '92, ten years into — into the thing — had you been working at all in the field of HIV at that point?

**JF:** No.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** I was like everyone else in those days. Ya heard about it, but ya know, ya hope it just stays out in California or wherever.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** Now I lived in New Orleans [Louisiana] twelve years and I— which is — a funny thing — it's a pretty open lifestyle down there, and I did real well down there — I come back to Lancaster, a nice little Christian, quiet community and I got HIV. Now that blew my mind.

**MM:** Yeah. [laughing]



**JF:** Ya know what I mean?

**MM:** It doesn't make sense, does it — unless you think about it a little bit, it does make sense. And so, what was Lancaster like at that time for living with HIV? Any organizations or anything?

**JF:** There was really — I asked my doctor, ya know, is there a bunch of us that have this that I can maybe team up or meet someone living with it? And he says, “Not really, but you need to Hershey Medical Center for your treatment because you know I read the books upstairs,” and he took me up and— and these medical journals that had stuff on HIV you know, didn't impress me at all. You know what I mean cause there was — it wasn't clear, so they didn't know what they were talking about so — I did go up to Grace Lutheran Church here and Lancaster. He was the you know the infection—

**MM:** That was the Infection Control Clinic up there.

**JF:** Yeah, so — and he was a real nice guy, and then I realized there's a ton of people have this. More than I ever thought. You know, but Lancaster finally — I think, what 10 years later or something — they finally opened up a clinic. Well I think 12 years ago. They opened up and then I transferred down here, but —

**MM:** Okay, so the clinic was opened 12 years ago.

**JF:** Yeah, I think 2002.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** ' over... I think.

**MM:** And, was Lancaster AIDS Project around in 1992?

**JF:** Yeah, I met a guy. That's when I met Bob, you know.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** Word gets around a little bit about with some of us you know. And — and Bob and I became real good friends and we started going down to SACA [Spanish American Civic Association] they have a HIV support group down there. And there was a lot of — about 20-some people went to that group, so Bob and I really enjoyed that. [laughs]. So, he was in a wheelchair at that time —

**MM:** Was he?

**JF:** and it was — they were having their meetings at Crispus Attucks in the basement so we'd bounce him down in the wheelchair and you know that — it was actually fun. You know some people were a little bit upset when they first diagnosed, but Bob and I you know it was fun like sort of taking them under our wing and —

**MM:** Is this Bob Kingston?

**JF:** Mmm Hmm.

**MM:** Okay. I was — because I was pastoring an MCC in 87' — there wasn't a lot of activity and I was trying to remember when LAP actually started when the Lancaster AIDS Project actually began. So it had to have been somewhere in 87'-92' period, but I'm not sure. I'll see—

**JF:** Yeah, it was closer to 90'. Like 89'-90.

**MM:** Okay. May have been 90'. Yeah.

**JF:** It started back in the garage there at Bob's. There on Mulberry Street.

**MM:** Did it really?

**JF:** And then got a little office down there on Queen Street. And back in those days it was sad because we had the Lancaster AIDS Project, then we had the Gathering Place, and then we had SACA and everyone would try to figure out what we needed, and I sort of wish now when I look back on — they would have listened to us a little bit more, but they presented everything to us, so all of us — everyone had support groups, everyone was having clothing drives, food, you know. And it got very confusing; there was a lot of pressure on the agencies to hold onto people not let 'em go over, and they found out they were gay then Leeann got in with the Lancaster AIDS Project, and then SACA got mad, then Gathering Place starting preaching to us and [make scrunched face] you know what I mean, so there was a lot of friction back — in fact it was horrible. You know.

**MM:** Interesting. Leeann by the way, you'll see her on the 20<sup>th</sup> if you go to Central Market because David, her son, runs the — the — the Community Sing — the flash mob. I'll tell you about that later. I saw her last year, last couple years.

**JF:** Yeah, I — the only time I ever run into Leeann is up at hospice, you know.

**MM:** And I think Eagles Wings was another group that formed at that time. Nuestra didn't have anything, SACA had everything. But I think those were the primary groups at that time. Vision was in, Pink Triangle came in around 1990, so I kinda got involved in some of those, but the focus was a little bit different. How about, so in terms of care you were going to Hershey Medical Center, which is about 45 minutes away from here to get. When you came home did you have a local doctor too?

**JF:** No.

**MM:** Okay, so just the primary was up there at Hershey.

**JF:** And back in those days, it was really horrible 'cause you got so many pills and of course half of 'em wanted to fight the other half after they got in your body, so you were always sick. Lot of health, just feel like the Dickens, you know.

**MM:** I remember, I remember some of the — some people talking about the way the meds were acting and I wondered would this ever work, you know how do you get people to take medication though they're not taking medication today and it's not as hard at all.

**JF:** And some of the real rough pills, and you had to take 'em, but they'd give you nightmares. I never dreamed in my life let alone nightmare, but nightmares where you woke up and it was

obvious you weren't breathing for a while, you know you're gasping for air, oh they were horrible pills.

**MM:** What about — how did you pay for those things?

**JF:** Now see I'm lucky because —

**MM:** You had the military.

**JF:** The military covers it, all my medical. Everything.

**MM:** Okay, you didn't have any problems with that?

**JF:** No.

**MM:** But there were others — you did case management.

**JF:** Oh yes, it was terrible what people were going through, until they got the SPDA or whatever that — Special Pharmaceutical Drug Program [SPDP] —

**MM:** Oh, yeah the pharmaceutical program —

**JF:** thing set up. You know, but before that you know you almost had to steal medication, you know what I mean, to, you know, have access to 'em. I knew people waited till someone set a bottle down or went to visit them and actually stole— now that was sad, you know, but it would — there was a lot of desperate people back in those days you know.

**MM:** What about family support? How is your family doing then? Were your family still living at that point?

**JF:** The only person that ever knew I was infected was my sister. And it took me three months to tell her. And that was horrible, and, poor girl, she's so sensitive. She was — she just was a support all the way till she died. She was there every day for me. Wonderful.

**MM:** Did she live here in Lancaster also?

**JF:** Yeah, in fact I bought a house two houses from my house, so we lived basically lived together, you know what I mean. She did all the cooking and I took her to do her shopping and so we were real close, it was wonderful. And she never flinched about — the day that I told her she hugged me right off the bat. I thought, "Damn, that's what I need." You know, because back in those days, you know, you didn't touch people and you ran if they sneezed — cause you know. So it was wonderful. I have a wonderful sister.

**MM:** What about in terms of your church involvement. How were they with this? Or did you not tell them.

**JF:** I—I did go to Pastor Cal (?) even before Darla.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** You know tell him. And of course it was all new to him, you know, that church doesn't get HIV, they don't have it, you know, that's the way I felt, you know.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JF:** So it was new to him and — and he liked me coming to him, cause he said, “Now I can learn what this is about.” And big mouth me, he found out. [both laughing] And he was very supportive of and all the work that I’ve done in HIV, like having support groups and church and you know.

**MM:** I kind-of want to touch on that, but I wanna compare a little bit today; we are in 2014, how would you compare recovery with HIV today to 1992? How are you feeling physically, is it different than it was then?

**JF:** Back then, you died. And all your friends died, that was the worst, you know, you develop good friendships, but all of the sudden you watched that body just deteriorate and pass away. And then that took part of you, you know. So, I don’t know how many funerals I ever went to you know with this disease. Now, you know, with the medication, the only ones that get sick now are the ones that don’t take their pills, or abuse their body in some way, you know. But back then you died, now you live if you do what you’re told to do. Black and white, you know.

**MM:** I know one of the pastors in town that was significantly involved with Pete Greenfield and I saw Pete, oh a couple month ago, I saw him he’s living over near Calvary homes.

**JF:** Oh, is that where he is now?

**MM:** He’s across the street from Calvary Churches where he lives. And he’s doing well. Living with his wife, she’s also got some issues.

**JF:** Oh yeah. Yeah, I see him at the Giant [grocery store]. Yeah, I’ve —

**MM:** Churches were in and out of their involvement. It was a little bit hard to read.

**JF:** But I certainly liked Father [Reverend] Peter because he is very — whenever I had an issue with a client that was, you know, close to the church — but I knew the church wasn’t close to them, I’d tattle on ‘em. I’d go to Father Peter and he’d go after ‘em. You know, he was very supportive of — and we certainly had good times together. We had trips to New York, we went to shows and he had buses go down when Elizabeth Taylor was sort-of irritated that the AIDS situation — you know she come down and — and like quarter million of us would meet and go to the White House and you know, Father Pete was very active in HIV.

**MM:** Very passionate on that. So he made part of the bridges with the churches at times sounds like. And the church I think, because the church has this role in death, of helping to transition, but I’m curious about what happened in the community. How did the community cope with the number of losses that were going on? Cause there were a number here too in Lancaster at that time. Like Bob and John Johnson.

**JF:** You know, one thing sort-of sad — when I went to all these funerals, you know you look for the people, the people weren’t there. There were a select, very small group of family, but then you wondered, “Where’s the rest of the family?”

**MM:** Like friends and community and —

**JF:** Mhm. Now one of the things that, you know, I found very fascinating when a Hispanic fellow would pass away, they'd — sort of like the Amish— move all the furniture out of a room and — and have the funeral right in the home. The first Hispanic funeral I went to here in Lancaster, I noticed his house, and I went in — it was in July, it was hot, there was no air conditioning, they had a fan sitting on the floor, and a mosquito net over him. And so funerals were very strange for me, because maybe I live a protected life or something I don't know. But you know I didn't like at all the support. I went to St. Joe hospital to see a friend of mine, and she said he's on the second floor at the end room. Well I heard "end room" [uses air quotes] we went through all those issues you know, and I went there and someone came out with all these you know garbs on and I went walking in the room, well they grabbed me and hauled me out in the hall and started to dress me. Well, I knew sorta how to catch it and how not to catch it, but I went back in that room and I was there when the fella died and the family wouldn't even come in, you know. It — back in those days it was really a horrible you know situation, but I'm not gonna brag about it today, you know. I think it's more open minded, you know people, you know guys and girls talk about it now and if the — if the fella has it and the girl goes along with it they talk about how they're gonna live together and things work out. But it's — there's still stigma attached to it.

**MM:** There was this, anything that's just a little bit unknown and little bit threatening, get a little bit of stigma attached. And I think your right, I think it's gotten better today.

**JF:** The young kids are wonderful. You know as far as, like, where I live I live right at the high school and — and the parents that have kids over there they come by and knock on the door and come and sit down. And — and young teenage kids like looking out for you. Now, you didn't have that back in those days. They never — and they know what's going on in my house, you know I'm a gay person, I'm living with HIV and they're just my partners now, it's wonderful in that regard.

**MM:** Tell me just for history, Betty Finney House — how did that name happen?

**JF:** Yeah, she was a professor.

**MM:** Betty was?

**JF:** Yeah Betty, she was a professor at Millersville [University] and her son lived in New York City and he was diagnosed, so that brought Betty in, you know, to the world of HIV. And Betty is a very vocal woman, you know what I mean. She's passed away, but she didn't take any — any — she studied hard and she had a son in New York that had lots of friends with HIV so Betty really learned real quick what it's like to live with HIV, and then she came back and saw how horrible people were being shunned down here in Lancaster, so she and Father Pete, they put their foot down says, "Were gonna do something," you know.

So, you know, we figured out all the things that were being taking care of like I said everyone wanted to have a support group and this, that. So we figured out one thing that was missing, and it was housing to help these, you know, low income people or homeless people living with HIV, so we started. We put together a non-profit to address housing needs for the low income people, and then Betty was instrumental in helping put that together, so we had a meeting — try and

figure out what in the heck to call it. So we called it the Betty Finney House Corporation. So, but Betty was very — oh just wonderful with the — I had 72 clients and — and apartments all over the city, and, if anything I needed I called Betty and she'd be sittin' with that client. She was wonderful.

**MM:** She — there's also a Betty Finney memorial garden over up Eleventh Street I guess, Northwest — yeah.

**JF:** Eleventh Street, uh huh.

**MM:** A lot of people remember her and mention her off and on even on Facebook and saying we're missing Betty.

**JF:** Yeah, I — I really when it came you know — When I had the — When I was director of the Betty Finney House, you know, I had federal finding — which was pretty nice, but it was never enough. So we had to have — we had like — we found to be able to make good money an art auctions. Well, you know we had — like one time we had a hanger out the airport and — and we had live bands set up — well Betty got up there — you could hear a pin drop. And boy, checks flew. You know she was really wonderful to the HIV community.

**MM:** There were a lot of allies at that time. People with compassion that really did kind of rise up and see the inhumanity of what was going on, and some of the shows like *Philadelphia Story* were coming out to try and educate people. How — do you think— so today it's a lot more open, people are talking about it more though, and they're even talking about goals of eliminating HIV at least for a generation by -- 2030 I think is the national call or the World Health Organization call too, with some specific goals. Do you — do you get any contact with anybody in HIV communities at all today? Anybody involved?

**JF:** I — some of the support group people call once and a while.

**MM:** Okay.

**JF:** And, you know, I see 'em in the grocery stores —

**MM:** Yeah.

**JF:** You know they're — everyone wants, you know — the support groups, everything's sorta has stopped in Lancaster. But, there's definitely a need that we should be you know at least once a month getting together again, we really should. It's, you know, cause I really miss those people, you know I made friends that last 10, 20, 30 years you know, you never see them now, you know.

**MM:** Yeah, well and everybody's aging now so another whole new kind-of need I think that we'll have to talk about a little bit more.

**JF:** Yeah, right, right, right.

**MM:** Are there — is — in terms of this interview for the — for the archives at Dickinson — are there things that you would like to add or anything in particular — I kind of covered the list of things —

**JF:** The main thing is never let what I call a small thing get you down. You know what I mean? It was horrible when I was diagnosed — the doctor said, “Now, get your affairs in order and you’ll be dead in eight years.” I thought [makes an angry face]. I wanted to say somethin’ you know what I mean? Now, I went home and I told my partner that, and — and he was lucky — he was tested also and he was negative.

But you know, now that was hard, but you know, after you lived a couple years, and especially when you hit that eight year marker, and you’re the same as you were eight years ago — and just as active and busy, you know. So the main — some people, you know have a lot of friends that lay around all day. They’re getting thin from not eating, they don’t function anymore. And then I say, “What’s wrong?” And they say, “Oh well, I have AIDS.” Ah, screw that, you know, let’s go. Next thing they’re out running and stuff if — you gotta stay active, you know.

**MM:** Well, and again I think that’s the role of a support group, and I think one of the concerns that — that — that I heard addressed has been what’s happens we’re isolated and we’re alone and how well do we care for ourselves. So it’s another reason for the support group to —

**JF:** Now I — I found myself being depressed on being lonely, you know I have — I have a friend now which I’m very fortunate you know to have someone around you know. But, there for a long time, while I broke my leg and I had to sit for an entire summer or stay in bed, you know what I mean, now that drove me absolutely insane, you know. I forced the doctor to say you can drive. He said, “Drive slow because you can’t put any pressure on the break or gas pedal.” But I all but forced him to let me — let me go, you know what I mean. But a loneliness just eats you alive. I more trouble with loneliness that anything now. So, but like I said I’m fortunate I have a friend, so.

**MM:** Yeah, there is. I’m gonna, I’m gonna give you a brochure for the LGBT Center cause they’re starting some groups down here in Lancaster too that are going to be discussion groups and things like that I think can help to draw people together whether it’s about aging or health or whatever.

**JF:** Yeah I spent a lot of time [on] the internet looking for stuff — now Philadelphia has a lot going it seems, but up here —

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, Lancaster kinda, and Harrisburg LGBT Center physically is there.

**JF:** Right, right.

**MM:** So they’re gonna start trying to build some things here too and I think that will be good.

**JF:** Yeah, be good.

**MM:** And then I think the more the LGBT community comes together in the same way that you mentioned with HIV to kind of direct that a little bit would be good too.

**JF:** Right.

**MM:** Okay. Well I thank-you for your time on this. This has been wonderful, and like I said, not too many are including HIV to talk about in the — more often what’s happened is the world has

changed and we're talking about marriage and equality things and things like that which are just going, they're just kind-of flying around now and life is very different from when you grew up and I grew up too.

**JF:** My — if you want call a problem — my biggest problem now is since my sister died, you know I have some rental properties and you know — material things here on this earth that I gave in my will everything to my sister.

**MM:** Okay, now you've got to redo that.

**JF:** But, now she's not here so I'm having a terrible time sorting things out and then meanwhile I have a good friend that got himself in some trouble, and he's in jail. And, and, you know, he's — he wants to get married, you know, so that's a strange one for me cause, you know when I've been with someone for 29 years, but I — we never had that marriage situation and that's going everywhere now, so it's, you now, he's putting pressure on me and I don't —

**MM:** And that's a lot to think about now.

**JF:** I don't quite know how to handle that, but you know.

**MM:** Yeah.

**JF:** I'm pretty good about working issues out, so.

**MM:** Well, call if you need to talk it through a little bit, I can sit down.

**JF:** Yeah, and it's sort-of fun, it's sort of a challenge how you know. You know I can't be the only one in a situation like that, you know.

**MM:** We joke when — when Ruth and I were married, you know you do the whole wrap your arms around each other and drink your champagne glass and we couldn't do it, well we didn't grow up with this at all. [All laughing] Such a cultural difference to think about some of the ceremony and the rituals and all this — didn't do any of that, so.

**JF:** Yeah, back 29 years ago, you know, I don't think we even talked about a commitment to each other, you know, we were just partners, we didn't mess around, you know. And you go on living, you know. But now you meet someone and then there's a commitment, now are we gonna get married, you know that —

**MM:** And then there's all kinds of legal things, and yeah. A lot of things to be concerned with that's for sure.

**JF:** Mmm hmm. Right — right now we're just gonna go up and visit. [Laughing] Sort things out. But that's a nice, if that's the only problem in your life, that's a nice one.

**MM:** Yeah, it's a nice problem.

**JF:** You know what I mean?

**MM:** Yeah, I guess. Okay, well I thank you for the time spent and we'll kinda wrap this up here.



**JF:** Yeah, thank-you. I enjoyed that.

**MM:** I tried to keep it kinda together for ya so — alright let me turn this off. Thanks.