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**Interviewee: Don Haines**

Interviewer: Cathy McCormick

Date: November 24, 2015

Place: Columbia, Pennsylvania

Transcriber: Sarah F. Wakefield

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**Abstract:** Don Haines was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and grew up there. In this interview he discusses his experience in Lancaster County as a gay man. He also discusses his experience in Columbia, PA and the acceptance that he has from his family and friends in that area. Topics focus on his interaction and practice of religion, specifically Catholicism, his job as a worker for the commonwealth of PA, his activism in college and while living in Columbia, PA, and what still needs to be worked on for the rights of the LGBT community in PA, particularly when it comes to the political culture in PA.

**KM:** Alright, I am going to hit record and don't feel constrained just be yourself.

**DH:** Alright!

**KM:** So we are going to let this thing run for 15 seconds or so, so they have a nice little lead in.

**DH:** Sure, sure.

**KM:** So my name is Kathy McCormick and I am with the LGBT oral history project working through the LGBT Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and I am here with Don Haines of Columbia. So Don if you'd like to verbally give us permission to do this recording and also share this with the oral history project, that would be great.

**DH:** Certainly, I do give my permission.

**KM:** Okay, alright, so let's just take you back all the way to your early days with family and other things and if you could just share with us sort of, you know, your story, that would be great.

**DH:** Certainly, I'd be more than happy to. Well I am not sure really where - where to begin. I grew up in Lancaster county, a native of Lancaster County. I was actually born in the city of Lancaster and lived there until I was 12, and then I moved out to the suburbs and lived there for quite a while. Subsequently I moved here with my partner in Columbia, Pennsylvania in 2003 actually. So I've always lived in Lancaster County, and having grown up here I know a lot. I know the people and the culture and everything, and I actually have been quite at odds with a lot of the attitudes here [laughs], but I do see really a big change in the whole dynamics of Lancaster County now as opposed to years back when I first came out.

**KM:** Can you take us back to those early years?

**DH:** Well I would consider those early years when I came out which is about...I came out when I was 23, and right now I am 52, and that was in 1987, and this was during probably one of the worst times either to be out as a gay man or to come out as a gay man. It was very, very

oppressive I thought at that time and it was something that I just learned to just live with because I had to live with it. I didn't move, I couldn't afford to move at that time, and it's something I had to – had to deal with it and everything. I am a Roman Catholic and for many years I was estranged from the church, I mean that's Catholic, are there any other kind really? [Kathy laughs] But then since Pope Francis came back, came into the picture then I joined the church again and so now I am a practicing Roman Catholic again. But 1987 was – was quite a year to really come out; first of all, you had Ronald Ragan taking office and that whole religious right, Jerry Falwell, Moral Majority, all that coming into play, Jessie Helm, etc...combined with the national politics and the national attitude towards that time, plus with the AIDS crisis, plus living in an area, a very conservative area in Pennsylvania, was really quite oppressive in a way.

Now I was very, very fortunate that I had the love and support of my family when I came out. I was totally blessed and to this day am very grateful for that because not many have had that and there are some people to this day that are not out to their families, and to their friends, and to their coworkers. But it was really difficult, it was really difficult because if I would go out on a date with a man to even as basically as some sort of a restaurant, all eyes would be on us like we were landed from the planet Pluto, didn't know what to do, and the attitudes were such that, you know, they assumed that just because there was a man that was gay, he automatically had AIDS. So that even permeated in the way I interacted with people, etc., because I knew that they had that perception, which was obviously very, very wrong and very, very uneducated, but considering the mood of the times, that's the way it was. But I have seen tremendous strides moving forth. This whole gay marriage thing was something that I could never have conceived of and a lot of the younger generation having not experienced this, and thank God they haven't, many of them have not. Now, obviously there is still a lot of that out that that is very nasty towards gay and lesbian youth and gay peoples and lesbian peoples as well, bisexual, transgender, etc...but coming out as a gay man I just assumed that if I had a partner there would be absolutely no marriage. Our health benefits would not be the same, either he would be covered and I would be covered but we certainly could not be covered on each other's policy's. We had to show ourselves up with wills and property ownership and everything else to that, so we really had to seek a lot of legal protection from attorney's in order to write up these agreements, and who knows even if they would have held up in court at that time considering the way that country was moving and everything and I was just totally shocked. I couldn't even conceive it, that it was going to come to this point where it was accepted, where gay men were accepted, where lesbians were accepted, where bisexuals would be accepted, and now the transgenders, they are finally coming into being accepted, thank-god for that and everything.

But at that time you were basically invisible. You didn't come out at work. You came out to very, very few people. If you had the love and support of your family that's wonderful, but going back even if I would enter a gay bar or something like that it would nothing, it would be absolutely nothing to hear someone scream out at you, "FAGGOT, QUEER." You always had to be on your guard. You had to look at your surroundings and you always had to be very careful, and you had to very careful sexually. You just never knew, you just knew it was a hostile world out there and you just had to adapt to it. It was just terrible. You grow up in this.... you become of age as a man you grow up in some isolation there and when I was first seeking, when I first

accepted my sexuality through counseling and everything, when I was seeking social outlets, everything was so hidden, it was closed. You really couldn't get in anywhere until you really started going out to bars and started to really socialize and everything, there was no touchstone to go to. There was no gay and lesbian community centers. There was no outreach at all beyond the metropolitan community church. There was no, you had to find your way through that, and once you broke through that circle then you could go to other resources and other recourses. I was a part of a gay and lesbian group at Millersville University, where I graduated. Even that had controversy, even in Millersville at that time. Again Lancaster County and York County. It was just a whole other world and you lived in a whole other world and you traveled in two worlds. Those worlds would sometimes collide, and you would have to deal with those two worlds. Now it's just wonderful. You don't have that oppression anymore, at least in this area per say, and I never thought that I would be at this point in my life, seeing this, where there is hope. Where there is people with AIDS living longer and people with all these organizations and all this status, and to the point where I am not married to my partner but we are domestic partners and my partner is covered under my insurance! I never ever, ever, ever, ever thought that would happen. I mean this to me was as foreign as some alien coming off a planet somewhere, like the Twilight Zone figuring this out. And having worked for the state of Pennsylvania, I certainly did not expect that [laughs]!

**KM:** Is that still where you work? Can you talk a little bit about where you work?

**DH:** Well I just work for the commonwealth. I really can't go into specifics about the agency because they get, you know how it is, they get really funny about you talking. But I work for the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and I've been employed there for 20 years and commonwealth has always been very accepting. One of the reasons I geared towards commonwealth employment was because, number one they had a union that couldn't fire me, well they can but you know what I mean [laughs]. They have a union where you have that protection and also I was very impressed by Governor Shapp in the 1970s taking a very brave stance about including gay people and accepting gay people into state government work, which was really quite progressive. I always attributed Governor Shapp for bringing that in, it was just the Governor's directive. Subsequently, even before all these other issues came into play now of acceptance of gay people and everything, you had the sexual orientation, you were covered, I mean you had protection, where as with any other employer...you still don't in Pennsylvania which I think is just totally tragic. Some of these politicians really need to get on this, weather if they agree with the lifestyle or not, but we came this far and there's always hope whereas at one point I saw absolutely no hope. It really felt, it really felt like you really did not...you knew you just had absolutely no rights as a gay person, and you didn't. You really didn't because you had known recourse, of course the only thing you had was your own attorney that would make sure you would be protected or your partner would be protected. But really it's just it's not even considered that. Then when you have the supreme court justice Scalia I believe, still saying these things, it's bad enough to say it at any time but even in particular this time, and this is a man in the supreme court, it's a total disgrace, and people look up to that and people want their homophobic feelings validated. I think it's just an utter, utter tragedy that this still goes on. That there's still this attitude and that people still hold that attitude.

**KM:** In some ways similar to the civil rights movement, you can make a law but that doesn't mean that people are necessarily going to change.

**DH:** Well exactly. There are not going to change and in fact in a lot of ways its...to me in a lot of ways with issues that are going on, your back to the 1950s and 60s fighting these, and it's very sad. Gay people, lesbian people, they had...they didn't have anything, and I can't speak for lesbians but I can speak for the community as a whole. It took some brave people, gays and lesbians, to march in Philadelphia in the 1960s, that was very, very brave. And then Stonewall and then the 70s seemed to be a more relaxed period, I thought, for a lot of gay and lesbian people, but once the 80s came you brought Ronald Reagan in, there was absolutely...there was no way. I've just seen so many miracles happen and that's all I can say. Its miracles. It's just absolute miracles that, that where it's come and where it was. Having grown up catholic and everything my biggest beefs with the church, and are still, gay and lesbians being accepted, the women's role in the church, there are so many issues but even seeing that with the Pope is a miracle in and of itself. Really I'm hoping that the Catholic church will start changing some things, but yah know I'm just glad with the way things are moving and everything.

**KM:** Are you...you mentioned that you are a Roman Catholic. Are you a part of a church community now?

**DH:** Yes, I am. Yes.

**KM:** Are you out in that community?

**DH:** Not necessarily still. I mean I am, I'm out but not out. They know that I am gay. I can't say I declare it up and down and that does bother me, it does bother me that I can't totally be myself in there, but I can take what I can out of it and just ignore the rest or deal with the rest. It pretty much...I just view it as pretty much as women who might practice birth control [shrugs].

**KM:** Right. They aren't necessarily announcing that...

**DH:** They aren't necessarily announcing that and I don't want to compare myself to what anybody's struggles id but let's face, everybody in their catholic church as something or other that does not jive with church doctrine. To me it's like all religions, or anything like that, you just take what you can get out of it and don't really support the rest of it. So it still is an ongoing struggle, really with me to be frank. I...but I am blessed that I do have a very supportive type church that does not judge me on my sexuality. At least not inside the church, etc...and that's the way Columbia is I would say.

**KM:** I want to talk a little bit more...you mentioned before about Columbia as a unique community. Could you talk a little bit about that now?

**DH:** Well Columbia is a very unique type of a community. My father's side of the family has roots here, relatives here and I always considered as a smaller version of a Lancaster City. It has all the elements of a small version of a Lancaster City. It still has a larger population where you can pretty much disappear and do your own thing, or get out and be involved. So there are 10,313 residents, or something like that here. Columbia surprisingly, for a Lancaster County

town, is very gay and lesbian tolerant. When I moved in, not having grown up here, I wasn't sure. It's like any new place when a gay person or lesbian person goes in. They are not really quite sure what type of an environment that you are going into that is not a metropolitan type area, or a large city, large metropolitan area. Particularly when you go into, not even necessarily a suburb or township, but when you go into a small town, you just never know what it is going to be like. It's been totally 100% accepting. I mean it's just like you're not like the token gay, in other words like you could be [laughs], the token lesbian...you're not the token person. You're just a part of things, that's just you. You happen to be gay, you happen to have a male partner. That's just you. Equally treated in all ways. Your partner goes with you to functions. I decided through my best friend to just become more involved with this and in Columbia, that's where I first met him, through an activity and everything, through volunteering pursuits, he encouraged me to volunteer. I had, was appointed to the Columbia Borough Planning Commission. I was chair of Columbia Borough Planning Commission. I was appointed zoning officer at Columbia Planning Commission, which I am currently a zoning officer. I served on the Columbia Historic Market House Trust. I serve as chairs for various tour organizations and events or things like that and not once was my sexuality or my partnership with my partner David was that ever, ever considered. And there was not controversy, there was not "Oh we've got a gay guy on there!" it was nothing like...and that would have been okay too, but there was no controversy. "Well here he is, he has the qualifications, let's do it. Let's put him on."

To me it was nothing short of a miracle, because when David and I came here to settle, and David is from Cumberland County, when I came here to settle and we came here, we just thought we would just slip into a normal small town life. Just hone in on our friends that we had and let it go, let it be. But just being a part of everything and being able to make a community better and not having one's sexuality get in the way of that, and being actually appointed to positions of power, i.e. when I say power where you can determine the fate of your own community without all these politics getting in the way, without your sexuality in the politics getting in the way, is nothing short of a miracle. I would have never...oh my god try this in Quarryville, Halifax [laughs and shrugs] yah know what I mean??? I mean it's really, it's really something. Columbia always had a liberal attitude I think because it's a historic town. It has the river and the trains, it had industry, people coming back. We had a red light district and people have had gay relatives, and I have too, from this area. It was just accepted. It was totally, totally 100% accepted. It was never an issue, at least for me. Never! I can only count two occasions was anything done homophobicly and that was so minor it doesn't even bare going into discussion about it because it was not the norm. It certainly had nothing to do with anything related...one thing had nothing to do, related to, my sexuality but my sexuality was used to justify some sort of a criticism of decision I made when I was on the Market House Trust. And one was probably some out of town person or something. I don't know, but even then it wasn't that, yah know. I cannot say...I've always been comfortable here, comfortable being myself and so has David.

**KM:** Let me take you back to a comment you mentioned in about being a part of a community organization at Millersville University?

**DH:** Yes!

**KM:** Can you talk a little bit more about that activity...that period of activism in your life?

**DH:** Sure! What had happened was I had reached out to at the time F&M College, Franklin and Marshall and then Franklin and Marshall had some gays and lesbian students that were somewhat involved. I don't know if it was a recognized organization at that point or not, but somehow we got hooked up with gays and lesbians from that area and that college and then subsequently it was called...gosh I don't know if F&M had a college name but ours in Millersville was call *Veritas* and it was formed by a concerned student and he got together a number of people to form a support group of some sort. There were some...it really wasn't fully organized or chartered by the school, but it was a sense of support. What we did was we gave, at the time there was no online, no websites, you just stuck something on the bulletin board. We got phone numbers with people that wanted to volunteer. Anybody wanted to reach out and talk to us about their sexuality or wanted to get together for a meeting, it was more of a comfort space. I was newly, at that time, accepting of my sexuality and was looking for more social outlets and everything, so it was pretty nice. You got to know different people, I don't know if the group indeed survived, im sure there's one now in Millersville, but it was a good moment. It was a good moment in time because there were really no outlets. Lancaster...Lancaster did have, I think it was through the Metropolitan Community Church, they did have what we would call "the gay and lesbian helpline." I think Harrisburg had something similar, where people would call on a Sunday night and you would keep your phone open, volunteer phone people would have their phone. It was so weird. You would answer the phone and say, "Hello!" and somebody would just talk about their feelings, about yah know if a gay person or a lesbian person wanted to talk and we would talk to them. I volunteered a number of times for that help line. That also offered a good outlet for people. Everything was, I can't say cloaked in mystery or hiding, but it was not out there. It was there for a resource to take if you knew about it or something of that nature. And that at the time in Lancaster too, with Millersville and everything, that provided a great source of comradery, support, and we would take a trip down to Philadelphia or something like that, but it was a really, really nice unique period in time. I think a lot of that has sprung up as a result of a lot of radical groups that time surround by yah know for AIDS things like. Oh God what was that one...there was like a really radical group at that time that kind of inspired it. I don't even...I can't remember the name of it! Isn't that something.

**KM:** Its going back a ways.

**DH:** Yah! You know how they would always constantly...yah know Larry Kramer was involved with that, and it just trickled down into having a voice, having a voice, having a voice. So when I graduated, of course I was not a part of the group anymore, and things like that happen. It was a good time because you could discuss how you felt and you had a support group.

**KM:** Have you been involved in other LGBT organizations or movements?

**DH:** I really...I've been involved with a number of them over the years. I was...I stopped going to the catholic church at that time. I started to go to Vision of Hope, Metropolitan Community Church. They had church services on Chestnut Street, which was the Unitarian church for a while, and then they moved to another church, and then they finally have their own church now

here in Millville. So I was involved in that. We had what we called “Men’s Potluck Dinners.” I think Harrisburg had them or something, but we would always have a monthly potluck dinner where we would hold them in our houses. It would just be a good time for men to get together and the dynamics were so wonderful because it would be the gays and lesbians that would come and it would be [laughs] the lesbians would sit in the living room, yah know all sitting together, and the gays guys would be in the kitchen! [laughs] I mean it was just...yah know! And my parents, who were just the most wonderful people in the world said, “Well you can have it at our house.” 1989 and mom said, “Great! We’ll have it here!” and I was actually able to host one of the dinners there. My dad and mom had been nothing but accepting and very supportive all the way back. I am so, so blessed. My sisters have been too; I have two younger sisters.

But they would be hosted in people homes and so we would just go monthly and that would be sort of a social thing. Let’s see...I would support a lot of causes or go to activities, things like that. But I guess I was never really a part of anything long term. That I can remember. I probably was! I have been to a lot of different events and functions and everything. I never ever in my life imagined that there would be a pride parade in Lancaster. I never ever in my life imagined that.

**KM:** Have you been a part of the parade?

**DH:** No I have not. Now I did march in Philadelphia one year. I did get involved in somethings in Philadelphia for a little bit. But around the time when I was really starting to not get involved, was more when I was focusing more on my work and everything.

**KM:** Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we haven’t thought to ask or...?

**DH:** Well I do...number one I am very blessed. Number two I have a partner, we’ve been together for 14 years, and we’re still together, and we live here in Columbia. We are just like any other couple. Whether I say that back in my radical days as a good thing or a bad thing [laughs] at least we are accepted. We have really good and supportive friends, straight friends and gay friends. Really the only thing I don’t like is getting older I would say! [Laughs]

**KM:** [Laughing] None of us like that!

**DH:** I do like the idea that people are more comfortable, people are more accepting. In that, I’m a professional, I graduated from Millersville University with a BA in History. I’m a trained paralegal, but I do work for the state, in the state for another capacity. I do a lot of volunteer work, which I am really passionate about. It is really centered towards community development here in Columbia, etc...is there anything else you would like to ask or...?

**KM:** Well let’s look at our list here. [Looks through list] Okay, I pulled my microphone out of the holder. You’ve talked quite a bit about everything that is on this list. Let’s, maybe let’s ask this question. Obviously you have talked quite a bit about the changes that you have seen. What changes remain? What’s left to be done?

**DH:** What’s left to be done? You mean as far as the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered? Employment. Definitely employment. As far as government goes. I mean as far as the laws go.



Definitely non-discrimination of employment and I think a lot of that is totally, that fact that it is totally neglected is totally unjustified. I think a lot of that too is for employers in general, because they do like to...the private sector has been particularly cruel. I'm very...I'm a left leaning democrat in an area that is clearly not, at least the county wide. There's just absolutely no justification to keep that on the book, when you deny somebody the right to, when you deny somebody the right to not having to be fired, so to speak, because of one's sexual preferences.

**KM:** Have you actually have friends who have experienced that? Or have you seen that?

**DH:** I have not seen that, thank-god, but I would not be surprised...turn that phone off...

**KM:** I think its fine.

**DH:** Okay...I have not seen that but I would not be surprised because I think sometimes private sectors employees want that in there anyway because it would give them further ammunition to fire in case they need to fire them. Particularly these local and state-wide faith based organizations. There's just no justification for it. I think that the government should stay out of the church and the church should stay out of government, which is not always the case as far as the church influencing what the government does. I think churches have to really start coming around too and really be practicing, really be outreaching to the gay, lesbian, transgender community, and they have to start...stop preaching from the alter. They have absolutely stop that, because that just encourages it.

Private industry they may have...some of them probably do have the lip service, but really when it comes right down to it they aren't doing their fair share and making sure this happens. They are not doing their fair share. Whether you piss off a few stock holders or not that's not the issue, it's a matter of justice. Also housing and discrimination ordinances, there are other things too! There are still so many laws even though we have the right to marry, there are still so many laws on the book, on the books that still remain because we have politicians who are basically spineless, that do not want to do anything about it because they don't want upset that one voter or this other voter or that voter or whatever. I mean grow a back-bone and just do what's right. Whether you agree with the life style or not, that's not their issue, that shouldn't be their issue. It's the definitely the employment discrimination, also the housing, and also there are many equal opportunities that gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered do miss out on. I think frankly, it is easier to be, and a lot of it is if you're a man, if you're a white male obviously it is easier for gay men to an extent because there are still...there are women issues that are not being addressed and that I fight the catholic church tooth and nail about these things and being a woman is obviously is just...you...women, lesbians have that other disadvantage, not disadvantage but struggles I should say. There's just not one single reason why this should occur at this time and I just think it's the spineless politicians, and the only reason it came forth was because of court decisions. The courts are making the decision that they think is right and this county is not about discrimination, although it has much blood on its hands. It's that acceptance of more openly gay politicians, acceptance of, which I see, and I pay tribute to Brian Simms in Pennsylvania for taking that brace step and really running and actually doing something about it, opposed to some that do not.

Really I do think politicians should be outed if they are of these...if they do have an orientation that goes...and they preach against it. Normally I don't advocate outing people but if they directly go against gays and lesbians and they themselves are that, that is disgraceful and that should be outed. I am just...the political climate itself I am having a problem with, otherwise its great movement for gays and lesbians, bisexuals, trans...its great! Its moving in a really good course, but I just see so much being turned back and a lot of it is angry white men. Angry people in general I should say. Angry men, angry women, people that vote against their own interests, I cannot conceive of it. I mean if a women choses to have an abortion what business is that of mine as a white man, or a man in general to tell her that she has to carry a fetus to full term. That is none of my business, roman catholic or anything, it is none of my business. I am not going to tell a woman that she has to have a baby. And I am not going to tell a woman that she can't take birth control. I mean, and I'm not affected by this really, I'm a gay man. When I say I'm not affected meaning that I think more men should be looking at this as a women's rights issue, that's what I'm trying to say. I guarantee you that if men were to get pregnant there would be an abortion clinic on every corner. I'm convinced. I just don't understand why the politics are leaning so far right to the point of absolute ridiculousness. And then you have FOX news which is another story [Shows general frustration through grunting].

But there really is so much more to be done, particularly in very, very conservative areas like the city of Lancaster has an ordinance protecting gay and lesbians, but the county does not. The county does not and to me it's unacceptable. When you come in...as more and more people are moving into Lancaster County, more and more people from Metropolitan areas, because Lancaster County is an ideal location wise, you're going to see that change. But you're still going to have people that are going to have that problem with it. And you know what? That is their problem! They think what they want, they can preach what they want, they can do what they want, so far as that's their beliefs. But don't hamper our life with your beliefs. Too many people are in other people's business. Instead of worrying about whether gays should marry, they should worry about the inequity of the income. You should, they should worry about the minimum wage. Instead of writing a huge letter blasting gay people they should go to a soup kitchen and volunteer. Instead of worrying about what a woman does with her own body, they should be going and giving to the poor. And that's what I find infuriating. And its again my liberal politics, but on the other hand...on the other hand I can be very thankful because in a way I always thought that Lancaster was stuck in a 1950 mentality. As far as attitudes and everything, I think that 50s lasts to this day but I always thought if I were to stay in Lancaster county, which I did, I stayed in Lancaster county in 1957, my goal was to leave Lancaster like many other people. Right now I would always invasion at that time, if I were to stay in Lancaster I still be living a really repressed, closeted to a lot of people life style. That's no way to live. That's no way to live if you can't be yourself. If you private and you want to live that way, that's fine, no judgments, but to live in fear, there is no justification why you should live in fear and we are seeing this world wide now too as far as so many nations overseas. I'm really surprised that Lancaster County came to the times to a degree and it still has a lot of growth to do.

**KM:** Excellent.

**DH:** Sure.

**KM:** Alright thank-you very much.

**DH:** Thank-you!

**KM:** One of the things that I did forget to say at the beginning of the recoding is that today is November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015. So that is on the record now. So thank-you very much for your participation in this project.

**DH:** I enjoyed it very much! And I wish every success with it.

**KM:** Thank-you.